CONTESTED SUCCESSIONS

The Transmission of Imperial Power in Tacitus’ Histories and Annals

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The Roman politician, orator and historian Cornelius Tacitus, living around the turn of the first century AD, had a life-long fascination for what he called ‘the old greed for power, long ingrained in mankind’: *vetus ac iam pridem insita mortalibus potentiae cupido* (Hist. 2.38.1). His diverse oeuvre, composed over the course of several decades, constitutes an incisive exploration of the effects of this desire for supreme power on mankind. Tacitus combines psychological insight and political experience with a magnificent, razor-sharp style, as well as an extraordinary talent for uncovering true motives, characters and moods, and capturing these in words. His writings offer arguably the most perceptive and penetrating analyses of imperial power and the political system of the Principate in extant classical literature. They provide eloquent testimony to the violent struggles for supremacy, the corruptive force of absolute power, the inevitable domination of Roman citizens by their princeps, as well as the reactions – ranging from adulatory to defiant – of those subject to the emperor’s authority. These elements are intensified and become particularly evident when it comes to the transmission of imperial power. In Tacitus’ representation, the imperial succession is surrounded with contestation, intrigue and debates about the nature of and requirements for the emperorship: what makes a man *capax imperii* – capable of being emperor – who decides about that, and how should imperial power be transmitted from one emperor to the next? It is Tacitus’ depiction of these questions, struggles and discussions that this thesis sets out to investigate.

Imperial succession has often been recognized as a central theme in Tacitus’ historical works, and various scholars have contributed observations on the topic. Yet these thoughts usually figure as asides in studies on different subjects, rather than exploring Tacitus’ description of the transmission of imperial power as a whole. And whereas several modern accounts treat the historical dimension of the succession in the first century AD, no systematic analysis has so far been produced of the literary depiction of this process in our main historical sources for this period, *Tacitus’ Histories* and *Annals*.¹ This thesis aims to fill this void, and to examine Tacitus’ representation of imperial succession in these two historical works, both writ-

¹ Historical studies on imperial succession in the first century AD are, for example, Kornemann 1930; Béranger 1939; Hammond 1956; Timpe 1962; Pabst 1997. Timpe includes a brief survey of Tacitus’ view on imperial succession in his general introduction (1962, 15-26). Whitton 2007 studies the *Agricola* and *Histories* as reactions on Trajan’s accession, but he does not examine Tacitus’ depiction of earlier successions as a topic on its own, and does not include the *Annals* in his investigation.
ten in the early second century AD and narrating the events of the first century of the Principate. It analyses Tacitus’ depiction of the transmission of imperial power in order to investigate how he describes and comments upon this process, and to investigate what this may tell us about his views on imperial succession, and – by implication – on the individual emperors he describes and the political system of the Principate at large. My focus, then, is on the particular textual representation of certain historical events by Tacitus, and what these may reveal about the author’s attitudes, rather than on these events in themselves. Therefore, Tacitus’ writings are analysed as literary works, but within their historical context, with attention to the circumstances of composition, and in relation to the other ancient sources, textual and material, on the period he is describing.

THE TRANSMISSION OF IMPERIAL POWER: THE PROBLEM OF IMPERIAL SUCCESSION

Imperial succession during the period of the Roman Empire was not as straightforward a process as the phrase might suggest – on the contrary, it was fraught with problems and paradoxes. For, even if modern historians speak in ostensibly clear-cut terms about it, ‘the emperorship’ was not an official position in the first century AD, nor was there (initially) a distinct concept or command constituting what we now term ‘imperial power’. Even the Principate as such was not presented by the early emperors as a new and well-defined institution; instead, it was cast as a restoration of the – previously collapsed, but still admired – Republic. The Early Roman Empire, then, presents us with a remarkable paradox: an autocratic system where the emperor wields supreme power, coupled with the absence of any constitutional foundation for his position, or official language to describe it.\(^2\) The development of this particular political system which present-day scholars call the Principate, as well as the creation of (what we see as) ‘the emperorship’ out of a particular combination of powers and privileges, can be traced back to Octavian, the later emperor Augustus.

After having definitively ended the late-republican civil wars with his victory at Actium in 31 BC, Augustus was effectively sole ruler over the Roman state, and in 23 BC, the Senate granted him *tribunicia potestas* – the power of the tribunes of the plebs, e.g. to summon the Senate, introduce legislation and veto senatorial decrees

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– and imperium proconsulare maius, an imperium superior to regular proconsular power. What was then an ad hoc collection of powers, became, over the course of the first century of the Principate, an institutionalized combination which we now define with the broad term ‘imperial power’. These powers were voted by the Senate and were often annually renewed, and could even be denoted as perpetuus. The emperor was referred to as princeps – from the republican term princeps senatus, a leading man in the Senate – and governed the state officially only on the basis of these combined powers, and in collaboration with the other political bodies, the Senate and the popular assemblies. Imperial power, then, was cast in republican terms and powers, to be bestowed by the Senate and people on each individual princeps on the basis of merit. Augustus and Tiberius indeed obtained these powers step by step at different times in their career. But their successors Caligula, Claudius and Nero received them en bloc at the moment of their accession, and the issue of the Lex de Imperio Vespasiani seems to be a further move towards a more integral view of the emperorship, as a position with a distinct set of powers.

In practice, however, imperial power meant sole and near-absolute power over all of Rome’s citizens and subjects – a power exercised through the emperor’s personal auctoritas, on the basis of general consensus, with a strong military backing, and supported by his control over vast resources, both human and material. It may not have been necessarily problematic for the Romans to play along with the tale of

3 Crook 1996, 85-87.
4 The literature on Augustus and the establishment of the Principate is immense and ever-expanding; see, among many others, Timpe 1962; Kienast 1982; the papers in Raafalb/Toher 1990; Crook 1996; Galinsky 1996; Dettenhofer 2000; Cotton/Yakobson 2002; Gruen 2005; Eder 2005; Levick 2010; Hurlet/Mineo 2009; Börm/Havener 2012. On Augustus presenting the new situation as a restored or continued Republic: Syme 1939, 313-330; Eder 1990 and 2005; Galinsky 1996, 42-79; several essays in Hurlet/Mineo 2009; Sion-Jenkis 2000 on its reception in imperial literature.
5 In addition, emperors could hold the functions of pontifex maximus or censor, would bear the title of Augustus, and would usually be offered other honorary titles such as that of pater patriae.
6 On the Lex de Imperio Vespasiani, see Brunt 1977 and the articles in Colognesi/Tassi Scandone 2009.
7 See Galinsky 1996, 10-41 on auctoritas (defined as a ‘supraconstitutional terminology’ indicating ‘a higher kind of moral leadership’ [12]), with Rowe 2013 arguing against auctoritas being ‘a principal concept’ of Augustus’ reign; Wallace-Hadrill 1982 on civilitas as a way for emperors to negotiate their status between citizen and king; Flaig 1992 on Akzeptanz (esp. 174-207); Pabst 1997 on consensus and dignitas; on the military underpinnings of imperial power; Hammond 1956, 63-67; Flaig 1992. Much has been written on the definition of the emperorship; see, for different interpretations, Hopkins 1978, 197-242; Wallace-Hadrill 1982; Millar 1992; Veyne 2005, 15-78.
a restored Republic governed by a ‘first among equals’ (*primus inter pares*), even if, by the time of Tiberius, it will have been clear to all that the emperor was little less than a monarch. Tacitus, in any case, does not seem to bother with constitutional formalities: he considers ‘imperial power’ as a unified and absolute power, the emperorship as a position, and the Principate as an hereditary monarchy. It was the consequence of this formal non-existence of the emperorship, however, which posed the real problem for the Principate: the absence of an official system of succession. Since imperial power as such did not exist, there was no formal method of passing it on after the death of its holder: no system of election, appointment or inheritance, no body or institution that had the authority to decide on its transmission, no set of requirements for selecting a new *princeps*. As Griffin pointedly observes, ‘the chief problem presented by the method of succession was that there was no method to speak of’.\(^8\) The emperorship was defined as a set of powers, but offices could not be inherited under Roman law, and this particular combination of powers could not be bestowed by popular vote.\(^11\) In practice, imperial succession turned out to be essentially dynastic: throughout the first two centuries of the Principate – the few cases of usurpation excepted – all emperors were related to their predecessors. But the emperor was formally a *princeps* and not a king – indeed, most emperors tried to steer very clear from any regal connotations – and therefore this *de facto* hereditary principle was not recognized *de jure*, with the result that the question of the succession remained legally unregulated.\(^12\)

Emperors could, and often did, try to circumvent these problems by taking matters into their own hands. They publicly indicated their wishes with regard to the succession, tried to obtain acceptance and popularity for their intended successor(s), and provided them with the powers and resources needed to assume control at the moment of their own decease.\(^13\) For instance, by requesting senatorial grants of *imperium* and *tribunica potestas* for his preferred candidate during his own


\(^9\) Tacitus refers to the emperorship and imperial power with inclusive terms such as *dominatio*, *regnum*, *summa*, *principatus*, *summum fastigium*, *imperium*.

\(^10\) Griffin 1984, 189.

\(^11\) Mommsen 1878, 744-745.

\(^12\) Griffin 1984, 189-196 summarizes the problem and paradoxes; see also Eder 2005.

\(^13\) On emperors’ promotion and preparation of their successors, see Hurlet 1997; Rowe 2002.
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lifetime, an emperor could make sure that after his death, this man would be in possession of powers superior to anyone else’s. If an emperor’s desired successor was also his son – either by blood or through adoption – he would inherit his father’s patrimony, making him surpass any other individual in the state in terms of material and immaterial resources. The combination of these factors effectively made a man emperor – this is how Tiberius and Nero came to power.\textsuperscript{14} Over time, adoption and the bequest of \textit{tribunicia potestas} came to be used to designate imperial successors; other possible methods were the conferral of political privileges (such as permission to stand for office before the legally stipulated time) and the title \textit{princeps iuventutis}, as well as the advertisement of future successors on coinage and in monuments.\textsuperscript{15}

When an emperor had taken no such precautionary measures, the question of the succession remained open at his death, and this could lead to any outcome, from merely the accession of a man without much experience in politics (such as Claudius) to a full-blown civil war over supreme power (such as erupted after Nero’s death). But even if the intended line of succession had been made perfectly clear by the previous emperor, there was no guarantee of a smooth or peaceful succession. There was always the risk that the heir apparent would not be content to await the emperor’s natural death, or that the man who succeeded was not approved of by some parts of the population; and there was the problem that a new emperor did not necessarily inherit his predecessor’s personal authority – all of this could, and did, lead to frequent challenges to emperors’ positions. The absence of any clear official method and criteria for transmitting supreme power naturally gave rise, then, to near-continuous discussion and numerous conflicting views on what this power entailed, what it required of its holder, who was authorised to decide about its allocation, and what role kinship played in the selection of a successor – questions which find ample expression in Tacitus’ narratives of the early Principate. It also, unsurprisingly, led to fierce struggles for power both within the imperial household and outside it, to (perceived) conspiracies against the emperor, and to the large-scale elimination of potential rivals by particular emperors.\textsuperscript{16} Phrases like ‘the imperial succession’ or ‘the transmission of imperial power’, then, are oversim-

\textsuperscript{14} Cf. Griffin 1984, 190.
\textsuperscript{15} On the use of \textit{tribunicia potestas} for designating successors see Ann. 3.56.1 and Lacey 1996, 154-168; on the title \textit{princeps iuventutis} see Horster 2011; on the advertisement of successors in various media see Mlasowsky 1996; Claes 2013, 134-185; Hekster forthcoming.
plifications of what was in reality a very messy and contested process.

THE ‘DYNASTIC PRINCIPLE’: KINSHIP AND THE IMPERIAL SUCCESSION

What is clear, both from what we can reconstruct of historical reality and from what the literary representations of this period tell us, is that kinship played an important role in the transmission of imperial power in the first two centuries AD. Despite the absence of a legal basis, succession was in practice hereditary: imperial power usually passed to male relatives, whose family connection to the emperor was often further strengthened through marriage and/or adoption. It is debatable whether or not Augustus conceived of the Principate as a dynastic system right from the start – but that is not my concern here. What matters is that the Principate had, in practice, strong dynastic tendencies: the imperial succession generally proceeded along family lines; the imperial family gradually became a state institution under the name of domus Augusta; male members of the imperial household were granted offices, powers and privileges; and emperors advertised their ancestors and other members of their family in a variety of media. By the time of Tiberius’ reign, the Principate and imperial succession were represented in dynastic terms in official documents.

As touched upon briefly above, the hereditary aspect of succession was partly a practical matter: several of the instruments for governing the state and acquiring popular favour – private property, slaves, the loyalty of freedmen and others who owed favours to the emperor, and generally the control over the domus Caesarum – were inherited by testament, and this may be part of the reason why emperors

17 Some scholars oppose this claim by pointing to the reigns of the adoptive emperors in the second century AD, but Geer 1936 and Hekster 2001 justly draw attention to the fact that these adoptions only strengthened pre-existing family links. In the first three centuries of the Principate, there were no sons of emperors that did not succeed their fathers; Hekster forthcoming. Flagi’s claim (1992, esp. 174-207 and 1997) that there was no dynastic principle at work in the Principate is convincingly countered by Hekster 2001; see also Béranger 1939 and Hurlet 1997, 425-538 on the de facto dynastic nature of the Principate.
18 The question is discussed in, among others, Béranger 1939; Syme 1939, 419-439; Instinsky 1966; Sea- ger 1972; Bowersock 1984; Wiedemann 1989; Corbier 1994b and 1995; Crook 1996; Rowe 1997 and 2002; Hurlet 1997; Levick 1999a (esp. chapters 2 to 4); Severy 2003, 158-212; Gruen 2005; Horster 2011; Pettinger 2012; Osgood 2013; Seager 2013.
19 E.g. Rose 1997; Hurlet 1997 (esp. 415-502); Rowe 2002; Severy 2003; Claes 2013; Hekster forthcoming.
20 See below, section 2.1.2.
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tended to adopt their successor as sons, even if they were already related to them in other ways. The *patria potestas* over the members of the imperial *domus* and control over its possessions gave an emperor’s heir ‘greater material resources than were available to any other Roman, either in a private capacity or as a magistrate’. The vast imperial patrimony enabled a successor to placate the military, Senate and people with donatives, distributions of land and other gifts. The allegiance and services of the emperor’s *clientela* – including a large part of the senatorial and equestrian orders – were essential for maintaining the Empire; and the emperor was heir to a portion of the imperial freedmen’s possessions, which could be sizeable. Even without any official powers or personal authority, just being the head of the imperial household could endow a man with enough power and esteem to be regarded as the next emperor – as was the case with Claudius’ succession. In addition to strengthening the position of his successor, adoption could also benefit the ruling emperor: as adoption of a man *sui iuris* involved the surrendering of his *patria potestas* and of his possessions to his adoptive father, it could be an effective way to control a potentially threatening person and secure his loyalty through filial piety.

It was not merely such practical considerations, however, that produced what may be termed ‘the dynastic (or hereditary) principle’ in the succession. The transmission of imperial power along family lines, in fact, appealed to traditional Roman ideas about the role of kinship and ancestry in politics, and it satisfied what appears to be a widely shared preference for dynastic continuity, on the part of both the emperors themselves and other Romans. This latter inclination is partly attributable

21 Wiedemann 1989, 6-8; Lindsay 2009, 171. Corbier 1991a, 181 and Osgood 2011, 38 and 319 n.30 – incorrectly, in my view – argue against the importance of private law in the transmission of imperial possessions. All children, biological and adoptive, were entitled to an equal share of the inheritance (some circumstances excepted): Crook 1984, 119; Lindsay 2009, 97-122; Champlin 1991 on wills. On Roman adoption practices in general see Kunst 2005; Lindsay 2009; on imperial adoptions: Prévost 1949.
22 Wiedemann 1996a, 202.
23 The differences between the *aerarium*, the *patrimonium Caesaris* and the *fiscus* are discussed in various articles by Millar and Brunt: Millar 1963; Brunt 1966; Brunt 1990; Millar 1992, 133-202.
27 Hekster *forthcoming* examines the role of kinship for the emperorship in the first three centuries AD.
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to the specific historical circumstances which brought about the establishment of the Principate: the long, destructive civil wars at the end of the Republic will have increased the appeal of hereditary succession as a potentially more peaceful way to transmit supreme power. However, already before the final decades of the Republic, dynastic tendencies were present in politics, and kinship had a strong bearing on one’s chances of political and military success, despite the prohibition of the inheritance of offices. An illustrious name conferred social status, while property and clientela – important resources in the struggle for public offices – were transmitted by inheritance to biological or adoptive descendants; as a result, a considerable share of the magistratures were held by a limited number of prominent families. In these respects, the Principate adhered quite closely to republican precedents, and the essentially dynastic nature of imperial succession does not seem to have been considered problematic by many Romans.

But the Principate differed fundamentally from the Republic in two aspects in the context of the distribution of power: the method of transferring it, and the criteria employed to select its holders. While their ancestry certainly influenced their opportunities, the descendants of the distinguished republican families still had to compete for offices, which were allotted through public election, first and foremost on the basis of their merits. Imperial power, on the other hand, was transmitted through private appointment and inheritance, and primarily on the basis of birth. Moreover, it was not high birth in general, but a very specific kind of kinship that mattered in the selection of new emperors: membership of the ruling family. The absolute supremacy of just one domus regnatrix at the expense of all other prominent families denoted a significant break with the system of the Republic. The celebrated republican ancestry of several Junii Silani, Calpurnii Pisones, Aemilii Lepidi and Licinii Crassi was still so powerful as to be considered a threat (real or imagined) by various emperors; but their descent was not influential enough for them to actually wrest power from the hands of the Julii and the Claudii. The frequency


29 The Gaetulican conspiracy tried to replace Caligula with M. Aemilius Lepidus; M. Licinius Crassus Frugi was eliminated by Claudius and his son by Nero; the Pisonian conspiracy against Nero revolved around C.
and casualness with which the term ‘Julio-Claudian dynasty’ is commonly used for the first sequence of imperial reigns obscures the novelty of a system of government appropriated by one family, which also came to usurp the traditional avenues for senatorial self-display, such as the holding of triumphs.30

Membership of the imperial family, then, became a prime criterion for the selection of potential successors, but that far from resolved all the difficulties inherent in the transmission of imperial power. Many emperors adopted their intended successors as sons, but Roman inheritance law did not acknowledge a concept of primogeniture and accorded all children of an emperor an equal share in his legacy, with subsequent complications in the many cases in which there was more than one heir apparent.31 So, as the imperial family grew larger through natural reproduction and the incorporation of outsiders by marriage and adoption, questions arose about the value of different kinship connections within that family. Above all, a kin relation to Augustus, the first princeps, seems to have carried authority – often more so, remarkably, than a link to the ruling emperor.32 But there were other imperial ancestors as well which were considered a source of status and pride; for instance, the descendants of Germanicus, great-nephew of Augustus and adopted son of Tiberius, inherited his popularity and claimed a right to imperial power on the basis

Calpurnius Piso, and two further Pisones were executed under the Flavians; and several Junii Silani were eliminated by Nero. On republican nobles and the threat they posed to the Julio-Claudian emperors, see Griffin 1984, 193-196; see Syme 1986 on the great republican families at the beginning of the Principate.
30 Eck 1984. As Crook 1996, 83 remarks, ‘[w]e ought not to be puzzled at the paradox of a regime carefully founded on the ostensible principle of election to offices, all of whose successive rulers, including the high-minded Marcus Aurelius, thought in exclusively dynastic terms about the succession. Paradox it is, but not novel; on the contrary, rooted in the mentality of the governing class of the Republic, whose young hopefuls had in each generation to compete for the people’s votes to obtain office and so ‘stay in the club’, but felt themselves entitled by descent to be the competitors, and whose major families expected the highest honours for their sons. Augustus’ solution, then, was, mutatis mutandis, a traditional one: to see that his natural dynastic successors were placed in the appropriate positions of office. The one idiosyncrasy was his very strictly ‘genetic’ concept of the succession: it was the blood of his family that was to prevail over all.’
31 Wiedemann 1989, 6-8; on emperors’ tendency to appoint two successors, see Kornemann 1930; Hurlet 1997.
32 Cf. Lyasse 2008. See Saller 1994, chapter 4 and Corbier 1991a, 175 on the growing importance of the domus and cognatic kinship in contrast with the republican focus on the familia and agnatic kinship. Cf. Levick 1990, 44 on the problem: ‘once the simple criterion of direct blood descent in the male line was given up for lack of candidates, no single criterion applied, and candidates held cards that were of indeterminate value’; Griffin 1996a, 16-17 suggests that Vespasian tried to prevent such problems by limiting the growth of his family and by clearly indicating his preference for Titus as a successor.
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of that, even though Germanicus himself had never actually been emperor. In addition, there are indications that adoption may have been perceived as a less valid and genuine kind of kinship than consanguinity; and as not all Julio-Claudian emperors could claim a blood-tie to the founder of the Principate, this exposed them to challenges to their position by relatives that could. Moreover, as a consequence of the imperial family’s intermarriage with other noble gentes, there were many other individuals who did not really belong to the domus Augusta, but who could still trace their ancestry back to Augustus or his sister Octavia.

There was, then, no clear principle to determine the order of succession within the imperial family. Predictably, this resulted in frequent conflicts about who had the most legitimate claim to imperial power; the large-scale elimination of relatives by several emperors is evident testimony of the threat posed by individuals with comparable ancestry. In these struggles, actual capacity to govern the Roman Empire does not always appear to have won the day. It can hardly be denied that there were many other men better qualified – in terms of age and relevant political and military experience – for the emperorship than Caligula and Nero when they came to power. Likewise, Claudius’ ignorance of almost all the aspects of imperial administration – he had deliberately been kept away from public life by Augustus and Tiberius because of his (perceived) mental and physical impairments – was no impediment to his acclamation as emperor by the Praetorian Guard. The importance of dynastic considerations in the context of the imperial succession can, moreover, be deduced from the occasions when the hereditary principle failed: when emperors died without leaving behind any relatives. In several cases, the resulting power vacuum led to civil wars, rather than to the ordered appointment of a new emperor.

THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

The Histories and the Annals, in fact, came into being against a background of dif-

33 Cf. Osgood 2011, 31 on the accession of Claudius: ‘A secret of Empire was out: a Caesar could be made other than a Julius. And, it could be asked, if Claudius could have this name – or title – why not somebody else?’.
34 Wiedemann 1989, 6-8; see the stemma in the appendix.
36 Cf. Levick 1990, 43-44: ‘Since neither Gaius nor Claudius had anything besides blood to commend them, their accessions mark a further strengthening of the hereditary element in the Principate.’
37 See Suet. Cl. 2-6; also referred to in Ann. 6.46.3.
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Difficult and fiercely disputed successions, with all their destructive consequences. When he came to write his historical works, Tacitus had already witnessed two dynasties coming to a violent end, a series of civil wars nearly destroying the Empire, and various succession crises leading to the introduction of new methods of transmitting imperial power. The first century of the Principate had painfully revealed the importance of a peaceful transmission of imperial power to a competent successor – or, rather, the potentially disastrous consequences of the absence of a clear line of succession and the rule of an incapable or even oppressive princeps. And these issues – the constant risk of conflicts over the transmission of imperial power, and the damage caused by bad or inept emperors – were even more urgent for Tacitus and his audience. More than once in the historian’s lifetime, the consequences of the lack of a system of succession had seriously threatened the political stability of the state. Nero had no children, and had furthermore been quite successful in removing any potential rivals to his power by executing most of his remaining relatives, as well as several prominent equestrians and senators suspected of participating in the Pisonian conspiracy. As a result, his suicide in AD 68 left the Empire without a designated successor, which resulted in more than a year of civil wars, in which four competitors for the purple plunged the city and several provinces into chaos. Provincial legions acclaimed their generals as emperors, senators promoted their own favourites, and the city was rife with popular rumour about who would obtain power. The final victory of Vespasian and the following Flavian dynasty – which, with two mature sons and a tightly managed and publicly honoured imperial family, seemed relatively stable – abated insecurities over the imperial succession for a while.

But in 96 – little less than thirty years after the previous succession crisis – they returned in full force, when the last member of the Flavian house, Domitian, met with a violent end in a palace conspiracy, leaving behind no relatives who could potentially succeed him. The question of the succession was entirely open yet again, and the threat of renewed civil war loomed over the Empire. This time, however, a

39 Griffin 1984, 189-196; Wiedemann 1996a, 249-253.
40 On the Year of the Four Emperors, see Wellesley 1975 and 2000; Wiedemann 1996b; Morgan 2006.
41 See Griffin 1996a, 15-17 on Vespasian’s family policy and 53-54 on Titus and Domitian.
42 See Grainger 2003, 4-27 on the conspiracy.
43 Domitian had adopted two of his nephews, but they were not taken into account in the matter of the suc-
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catastrophe was only just prevented by the installation of the elderly senator Nerva as emperor. The latter in turn managed to appease (military) tensions through the adoption of the newly-appointed governor of Upper Germany, Trajan, some months later, in October 97. When Nerva died the following year, Trajan was the undisputed successor to his adoptive father, and his rule would mark the beginning of an age of relative internal peace. Nevertheless, the parallels between the situations of 68-69 and 96-98 must have been obvious to all, and were certainly noted by authors such as Pliny and Juvenal. Contemporaries must have been well aware that history might have taken a different course, and that insecurity over the allocation of power could end in armed conflict between citizens, as it had done after Caesar’s death, and once again after that of Nero. Having held several offices in Rome from Vespasian onwards,Tacitus had experienced these events at close quarters, and will have been alert to the problems inherent, and potential dangers involved, in the imperial succession. Nerva’s adoption of Trajan, and Trajan’s smooth succession to his adoptive father, forestalled violent struggles over imperial power. However, it did make certain questions with regard to the system of succession particularly urgent, for instance the criteria on the basis of which emperors should be selected, and the importance of kinship and dynastic continuity in the transmission of imperial power. The firmly

44 Grainger 2003, 1-44.
45 There was an alleged conspiracy around Calpurnius Piso Crassus Frugi Licinianus, nephew of the Piso who had been adopted by Galba in 69, probably some disgruntlement among the provincial legionary commanders, and a mutiny of the Praetorian Guard; Nerva may have been forced to adopt Trajan; see Grainger 2003, 68-100; Griffin 1996b, 94. The Guard may have tried to put one of Piso’s nephews on the throne even before that: Griffin 1996b, 91. Various coin types with the legend concordia exercituum, strongly resembling coins struck in 68-69, hint at Nerva’s attempts to win over the soldiers, probably trying to avoid Galba’s mistakes: Griffin 1996b, 90. On the adoption of Trajan, see Syme 1958, 10-18; Kienast 1968; Bennett 1997, 42-52; Berriman/Todd 2001; Eck 2002a; Grainger 2003, 67-102.
46 Plin. Pan. 8.1, 8.5; Juv. 4.38-9 (Domitian likened to Nero); Griffin 1996b, 85 notes that Nerva even chose Verginius Rufus, who was acclaimed emperor by his troops in 68, as his colleague in the consulship of 97. In any case, Nerva, like Galba, minted coins with slogans of libertas: Griffin 1996b, 86; Hammond 1963, 103; as the tables in Noreña 2011, appendices 3 and 4 show, the personification of Libertas appears remarkably often on Nerva’s coinage.
47 As Grainger 2003, xxvii observes, in the first three centuries of the Principate, the failure of dynasties had led to civil wars in all cases – except this time: ‘The years 96-98 thus stand out as a civil war which did not happen. But it was close.’ Cf. Griffin 1996b, 84; ‘there were fears that history might repeat itself as once again an extravagant young aesthete, who had produced no heir, was replaced by a childless patrician sexagenarian’.
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dynastic tendencies of the first hundred or so years of the Principate had effectively made the succession as regulated and predictable as could be in the circumstances. All of this changed when Galba’s acclamation, the first divergence from the pattern, opened up the spectrum of possible methods to gain power – and, with it, a broader discussion over methods and criteria for transferring it. The decades after Nero’s fall saw the introduction of several new ways of transmitting imperial power: acclamation by the provincial armies (Galba, Vitellius and Vespasian), armed usurpation (Otho), appointment by the Senate (Nerva), and extra-familial adoption (Trajan). Like Galba’s accession, Nerva’s adoption of Trajan in 97 was another decisive moment and potentially significant precedent in the history of imperial succession: this was the first time an emperor was succeeded by someone from outside his own family. All previous emperors – those in the civil wars of AD 69 excepted – had been related to their predecessors, even before their additional adoptions as sons, but Trajan had no kinship connection whatsoever to Nerva. He had been chosen on criteria other than kinship: probably for his connections with influential parties throughout the Empire, and presumably because he was the commander of the nearest large consular army.48 Although this may have been more of a necessity than a deliberate choice – Nerva had no family members who could succeed him – the procedure of extra-familial adoption and selection on the basis of merit was truly a novelty.49 The tradition of dynastic continuity, and with it the overriding importance of kinship in the transmission of power, seemed to have been broken. However, after his accession, Trajan started to exhibit what appears to be dynastic efforts, creating a public image for the *domus Augusta* and playing up his biological family. Instead of assuming Nerva’s *gentilicum* Cocceius, as was customary after an adoption, he retained his own name: Ulpius.50 He honoured his wife Plotina, sister Marciana and niece Matidia with the title Augusta and with deifications and advertisement on imperial coinage, he minted coins for his biological father alongside issues for his adoptive father Nerva, and he even had the elder Traianus deified, just like Nerva.51 He installed several relatives, such as his kinsman Hadrian and the latter’s brother-in-law, at important provincial commands, and married Hadri-

48 On the adoption of Trajan, see Bennett 1997, 42-52; Eck 2002a; Grainger 2003, 67-102.
50 Griffin 1996b, 99.
51 Griffin 1996b, 99-100, 108; Bennett 1997, 54-55, 209; Roche 2002 on the public image of Trajan’s family.
an to his grand-niece Vibia Sabina.\textsuperscript{52} In his \textit{Panegyricus}, Pliny mentioned several of Trajan’s blood-relatives, and even expressed the wish that Trajan would have a son of his own to succeed him.\textsuperscript{53} Even if Trajan’s himself had obtained power through an extra-familial adoption and without resort to kinship connections, ‘the dynastic principle seems to acquire a new emphasis’ during his reign.\textsuperscript{54} All of this must have raised questions, among the Empire’s senatorial elite, with regard to the role of kinship in imperial succession.

Moreover, the decades preceding Trajan’s adoption had already seen significant changes in the role and importance of kinship in society at large.\textsuperscript{55} By the time of the accession of Vespasian – himself of humble origins – many of the republican noble families had died out as a result of a failure to reproduce and several emperors’ fatal apprehension of their celebrated name.\textsuperscript{56} More than ever before, the senatorial and equestrian orders were filled with \textit{hominis novi} and men from provincial backgrounds, who lacked the distinguished ancestry of their republican and early imperial predecessors.\textsuperscript{57} Related to this was a shift in the perception of kinship, and in the importance of various kin groups, with the primacy of the agnatic \textit{familia} giving way to the broader cognatic \textit{domus}.\textsuperscript{58} During the Republic, the main kin group had been the agnatic \textit{familia}: all living relatives linked to each other by blood through the male line, or, broader, the whole agnatic lineage group, including (sometimes distant) ancestors.\textsuperscript{59} Under the Principate, on the other hand, envisaging kinship in terms of a broader group of cognatic relations became increasingly current, partly as a result of the growing political prominence of new men who could not boast illustrious ancestry, but also of the example set by Augustus and his family, who – out

\textsuperscript{52} Griffin 1996b, 102, 108, 128.
\textsuperscript{53} Plin. \textit{Pan.} 94.5; cf. Roche 2002, 43-51 on Pliny’s treatment of Trajan’s family in the \textit{Panegyricus}.
\textsuperscript{54} Syme 1958, 233.
\textsuperscript{55} On the Roman family in general, see Saller 1984; Rawson 1986; Rawson 1991; Bradley 1991; Dixon 1992; Rawson/Weaver 1997; Rawson 2011.
\textsuperscript{56} Flower 2006, 232.
\textsuperscript{57} On the diminished political importance of the old republican families, see Syme 1958, 566-597; Talbert 1984, 30-38; Corbier 1991a; Corbier 1991b, 67. However, see Alföldy 1976, 33-50 on the continuing advantage of distinguished ancestry.
\textsuperscript{58} Legally speaking, \textit{agnatio} is ‘the relationship between persons who are under the \textit{manus} or \textit{patria potestas} of the same \textit{pater familias} or would be if he were still alive’ (Manthe, \textit{NPO}, s.v. \textit{agnatio}; cf. \textit{Inst.} 1.156); \textit{cognatio} is broader consanguineous kinship. See Gardner 1998 on the legal concept of \textit{familia} and its relation to the reality of kinship ties.
\textsuperscript{59} Saller 1994, 76-79.
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of sheer necessity – traced descent through female lines. Consequently, the significance of long and celebrated agnatic (i.e. patrilineal) ancestry for a man’s social status diminished, while wealth, imperial patronage, and cultural, intellectual, moral and artistic qualities or achievements became increasingly relevant markers of social status. Trajan himself, indeed, came from a family which had only recently acquired political prominence. The role of kinship in general, and the significance of dynastic considerations in imperial succession in particular, then, will have been subject of popular debate during much of Tacitus’ lifetime.

Furthermore, Tacitus’ time drew attention to another issue with regard to the imperial succession, in addition to the role of kinship in this. The question of what makes a man suitable for the emperorship was made especially relevant by the experiences of the last years of Domitian’s reign, which had been marked by tyranny, executions, bad relations with the Senate, and strong imperial censure. After Domitian’s assassination, the Senate decreed a damnatio memoriae, and both Nerva and Trajan tried to distance themselves from their predecessor. In the literature of the age as well, Domitian’s reign is condemned as oppressive and contrasted with the newly gained freedom under Nerva and Trajan – Tacitus’ Agricola is a clear example. In sum, Tacitus was composing his works in a period in which the imperial succession was both highly relevant and often disputed. All of this must, at that time, have caused substantial debate about the best way to transmit imperial power, the importance of kinship in this, the importance of dynastic continuity, the qualities required of an emperor, the criteria for selecting a successor, and the role of the Senate in the succession as well as their attitude vis-à-vis the emperor. These

60 Saller 1994, chapter 4; Corbier 1991a, 175; Corbier 1995 on the importance of female links for male legitimacy in the imperial family; Flower 2006, 160-196 on public sanctions against the women of the Julio-Claudian family.
61 Saller 1994, 87-88, 95.
62 On Trajan’s family background: Syme 1958, 30, 42.
64 Griffin 1996b, 85-94, 96-99. The break with the past was not as clear-cut as it seems, however: Nerva in fact continued some of Domitian’s policies, took no action against those who had occupied high positions under the hated emperor, and although the Senate is said to have reacted with joy to the news of Domitian’s death, Nerva appears to have had some difficulties in securing the loyalty of the military and people for himself; Griffin 1996b, 87-94; Grainger 2003, 45-51.
65 E.g. Agr. 1-3, 5.3, 41.1, 44.5-45.2; see Sailor 2012 for a good introduction to the Agricola (cf. also Sailor 2008, 51-118); Wilson 2003 on the image of Domitian in post-Domitianic literature.
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are indeed issues that are addressed in Pliny’s *Panegyricus*, written around the turn of the century, and, as we will see, in Tacitus’ works as well.

TACITUS AND THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PRINCIPATE

The theme of imperial succession is strongly connected to what may be regarded as Tacitus’ main interest as an author: the Principate. All of Tacitus’ writings are deeply concerned with the nature and (often detrimental) effects of this political system – despite that system having been in place for more than a century by the time Tacitus was writing. Both the earlier monographs and his later historical works can be read as ongoing investigations into, and meditations on, a network of issues pertaining to this question: the value and meaning of the Principate as a political system, and its effects on the social and political relations in society; the nature and scope of imperial power; its ideal use and its actual abuse; the ways in which power is obtained, legitimized, transmitted, and lost; the qualities desirable in an emperor; and the implications of the wielding of this imperial power both for the emperor himself and for the state, the senators, and the citizens – e.g. the corruptive force of absolute power, the limited role of the Senate as a political body in a system of autocracy, and particularly the extent of senatorial freedom and ambition possible under such a political system. Within this inquiry into the meaning of the Principate, it is the issue of succession which occupies a crucial place, as it is precisely the process of the transmission of imperial power which is revealing about its true nature. It shows who decides about the succession, who is considered as qualifying for the emperorship and on which grounds, and how the transfer of power is executed, presented and perceived. It is certainly no coincidence that both of Tacitus’ two historical works open with imperial successions which signal a crucial change in the Principate, in which essential aspects of its nature are revealed. The *Histories* start at the moment when the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty and Galba’s acclamation as emperor by his provincial legions suddenly and violently expose the – previously relatively latent – absence of a system to transmit supreme power, and its potentially devastating consequences: the decisive role of the military, and the risk of civil conflicts over the emperorship. The *Annals* open with the very first imperial succession, when it becomes clear that the Principate is a permanent political system – i.e. capable of persisting independently of its founder, and not contingent upon Augustus’ individual qualities and situation –, and an autocratic and dynastic one at that. Both moments in the respective narratives are marked with the term *arcانum*, de-
noting something which has been in operation for some time, but has been carefully concealed until then.\(^6\) The imperial succession – or, more accurately, the questions and conflicts surrounding it – run as threads through the *Histories* and the *Annals*. Nevertheless, this issue, although highly relevant for our understanding of Tacitus’ view on the Principate, has never been systematically investigated until now.

This thesis builds on the assumption that Tacitus’ representation of these successes in his writings can be considered as expressions of his views on, in the first place, the process of the transmission of imperial power, and, second, on the individual emperors under discussion, as well as on the political system of the Principate in general. This approach, inevitably, has some problematical aspects to it. The first question is: exactly whose views are examined? Can we without any problems equate the narrator of the *Histories* and the *Annals*, whom we commonly term Cornelius Tacitus, with the orator and politician of the same name? Although most modern scholars do not appear to even question this, and in fact often refer to the historical Tacitus’ biography to clarify or illustrate certain points in the literary works, this ‘identification of narrative voice and historical actor’ is not at all straightforward.\(^6\) At some points in his writings, however, the narrator ‘Tacitus’ himself equates these by explicitly referring to his own political career, and in this thesis I will follow Sailor’s point of view, of being cautious of too easy identifications, but nevertheless treating the narrator of these historical works by and large as the actual person Cornelius Tacitus.\(^6\) Once this has been established, however, it is legitimate to ask to what extent it is at all possible or even relevant to recover Tacitus’ intentions from his text. Although questions about the feasibility and value of intentionalism are certainly justified, I will suppose that it is both possible and worthwhile to try to uncover what Tacitus wanted to convey with his text. Moreover, at some points, I intend to conjecture how his audience will have read his

\(^6\) *Hist.* 1.4.2; *Ann.* 1.6.3.

\(^6\) The phrase is Sailor’s; cf. Sailor 2008, 6-8. The difference is derived from the discipline of narratology, which distinguishes between the historical author of a work, who is a real person, and the narrator of a text, which is a function instead of an actual human: Bal 1997, 16-29; De Jong 2007, 8-9. On the use of narratological methods in this thesis, see further below in this introduction.

\(^6\) Sailor 2008, 8: ‘although I think we should abandon all pretense of knowing Tacitus, and treat the ‘Tacitus’ of the Tacitean corpus as, in the first instance, a textual effect, nonetheless, because this textual effect once had repercussions for the historical Tacitus, we can talk usefully about how his Books represent him before his readership.’
works. But if these are the aims, another potential difficulty arises: of how, in a very concrete way, to figure out Tacitus’ views from his narrative. Only very rarely does he express an opinion in his authorial voice; most of the standpoints in the text are focalized through characters in the narrative, while Tacitean points of view may be more indirectly suggested through the narration of events, or the confrontation the reader is supposed to make between different statements or representations. This obliqueness of expression is indeed a major characteristic of the literature of the Trajanic age, and Tacitus in particular is a master of suggestion and innuendo. Luce, although wondering whether perhaps Tacitus does not mean us to look for his opinions at all, but rather to judge the merits of the views and speakers presented, locates the solution in a very careful and contextualized study of the passages – an approach which I will adopt in this thesis.

Tacitus’ representation of the imperial succession, then, may be interpreted as an, albeit indirect and suggestive, expression of his views on imperial succession, on various emperors, and on the Principate in general. This political dimension of his works is, in fact, inherent in the particular background, nature and readership of Tacitus’ historiography. First and most basically, because Tacitus was writing about a political system in which both he himself and many of his readers were active participants; the description and interpretation of politics in Rome’s recent history will have held a special interest for author and audience. Second, because Tacitus’ account evaluated past behaviour with the purpose of providing models for present and future political conduct. Classical historiography had, in general, a strongly moral and didactic purpose: it distributed praise and blame on individuals and their actions. As such, it commemorated exceptional deeds and preserved their fame or infamy for posterity, and provided its readers with examples of conduct to

70 See, in general, Luce 2012; on reading (veiled) comment on contemporary politics into the texts of Tacitus: Syme 1958, 481-485, 517-519; Rutledge 1998; Whitton 2007; Sailor 2008; Rutledge 2009.
71 See Ahl 1984; Bartsch 1994 on doublespeak as an important characteristic of the literature between Nero and Hadrian; on Tacitean innuendo e.g. Ryberg 1942; Develin 1983; Sinclair 1991. See O’Gorman 2000 on the meaning of this ‘difficulty’ of reading and interpretation in Tacitus.
72 Cf. Luce 2012, 348: ‘Thus words and actions considered apart and divorced from their contexts are not what our attention should be chiefly directed to. What is crucial in Tacitus is how they are embodied in the situations of actual history: that is, who it is who speaks or acts, what sort of person he is, what kind of circumstances he finds himself in, what motives he has in speaking or acting as he does.’
73 Sailor 2008, 6-8.
imitate and avoid. This exemplary and commemorative function of the past and its representations connected historiography firmly to politics and gave Tacitus’ writings a contemporary relevance. After a regime of tyranny and censorship such as that of Domitian, moreover, historiography becomes particularly important, not just for unveiling the suppressed truth, but also for correcting undeserved reputations. Tacitus’ historiography could function as a way to commemorate the persons and deeds which had not been awarded the praise or censure they merited, according to the author; Tacitus’ own *Agricola* is a case in point, but a similar logic applies to the *Histories* and the *Annals*. Writing history and rehabilitating reputations may also, by consequence, serve as a means of self-presentation for Tacitus, to come to terms with or justify his participation in Domitian’s reign.

Tacitus’ own background is, in fact, highly relevant for our interpretation of his views on the Principate. Tacitus had enjoyed a successful career in oratory and politics under Domitian, culminating in a consulship in AD 97, but had also witnessed his father-in-law Agricola being marginalized – and so had both experienced imperial favour and witnessed imperial despotism. Many of his senatorial peers were in a similar situation. Most of the state’s most experienced and powerful officials under Nerva had risen to the higher ranks of politics under Domitian, and owing to the personal favour of the latter, who was now condemned as a tyrant. Several senators, including Nerva, Trajan and Tacitus, found themselves in the precarious position of being very much implicated in, and owing their own careers to, the reign that was being publicly denounced. Yet Tacitus was not among Domitian’s close friends, nor was he part of the other side of the political spectrum, the so-called

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76 Haynes 2006; Flower 2006, 235-270 on the ‘memory games’ played after the death of Domitian by those who had been participants in his reign (with 262-270 on the example of Pliny); Sailor 2008; cf. Nesselhauf 1952.

77 Born sometime between AD 55-58, probably in Gaul, Tacitus was praetor and *quindecimvir* in 88, probably legionary legate after that, suffect consul 97, and proconsul of Asia in 112 or 113; see Syme 1958, 59-74 and 611-624; Martin 1981, 26-38; Birley 2000 on his career and background.

78 Cf. Griffin 1996b, 86: ‘the difficulties presented by a Senate full of men with guilty consciences were to be more acute than those facing Galba’.
‘Stoic martyrs’, who had fiercely and visibly opposed Domitian’s reign and had gained wide popularity as a result.\textsuperscript{79} Tacitus seems to have belonged to the group of politicians who accepted the circumstances and tried to keep a low profile while exercising their senatorial duties.

His harsh criticism on imperial politics seems to sit uneasily with his own active and successful participation in it, as evidenced by his flourishing political career under the Flavians, Nerva and Domitian. Martin summarizes the problem aptly when he states that ‘[t]he career and writing of Tacitus thus present a paradox, unique in his time, that a man who had advanced without hindrance through all the stages of a senatorial career should write of the political system under which he himself had prospered in a way that starkly underlined how that system tended to bring out the worst in both princeps and Senate.’\textsuperscript{80} As a result of this paradox, scholars have taken widely diverging stances on the matter of Tacitus’ view of the Principate. There is no doubt that Tacitus is highly critical of several aspects of the Principate, such as the limits imposed on senatorial liberty and ambition, the resulting sycophancy, the dissimulation and secrecy, or the corrupting force of absolute power on the emperor. At the same time, he recognizes that a system of autocracy is the only possible solution to the problems and complexities which eventually brought down the Republic. Most modern scholars therefore believe that Tacitus considers the Principate a kind of ‘regrettable necessity’: combined with regret for the loss of senatorial liberty and disgust at the excesses of autocracy, his works exhibit a recognition that sole rule is the only solution possible for governing the vast Empire.\textsuperscript{81}

Far from denying that he had been advanced by Domitian – cf. his statement in \textit{Hist.} 1.1.3 – Tacitus uses this background to argue in favour of senators adopting a moderate stance towards the emperor, an attitude between servile adulation and truculent hostility.\textsuperscript{82} His own interest in the matter is clear from his statement, in the biography of his father-in-law Agricola, that ‘great men can live even under bad rulers’ (Agr. 42.4). However, some scholars reject this interpretation of pragmatic realism in favour of more radical readings of either criticism or tribute with regard

\textsuperscript{80} Martin 1981, 3; cf. Whitton 2007, 1-17.
\textsuperscript{81} The literature on Tacitus’ views on liberty and the possibility of its existence under the Principate is vast; cf., among others, Wirszubski 1950, 97; Syme 1958, 408-419; Percival 1980; Martin 1981, 234-235; Pelling 2012, 303-305; Benario 1991; Shotter 1991; Morford 1991; Oakley 2009a.
\textsuperscript{82} Cf. Martin 1981, 32-35; Oakley 2009a, 192-194.
to contemporary politics. For instance, Whitton interprets Tacitus’ *Agricola* and *Histories* as engaging in a positive way with Trajan’s accession, in a similar vein as the Younger Pliny; while Sailor detects a subtext of more radical condemnation of the system, much like the ‘Stoic martyrs’, in Tacitus’ writings, as opposed to his political success. The fact that his works can be – convincingly – interpreted both as endorsement of the Principate and as political dissidence is indicative of the complexity of Tacitus’ writings, as well as of the extent to which Tacitus himself may have grappled with the issue, and invites his readers to do the same.

**ANALYSING REPRESENTATIONS: METHODOLOGY**

As stated, my aim in this thesis is to analyse Tacitus’ textual representation of imperial succession in his historical works, with the intention of shedding more light on the historical question of the author’s views on the transmission of imperial power, the emperorship and particular *principes*, and the political system of the Principate. In doing so, I consider imperial succession as an essentially contested process and as a focus point for conflicting views, dispute and struggles. Consequently, I approach the topic by analysing Tacitus’ depiction of three cases of ‘contested succession’ in which different attitudes towards the transmission of imperial power come to the fore, due to the presence of two or more candidates for the succession, each with different qualifications and supporters of their own. The cases to be treated are the successions to Galba in the first fifty chapters of the *Histories* (Chapter 1); to Tiberius in *Annals* Books 1 to 6 (Chapter 2); and to Claudius in Book 12 of the same work (Chapter 3) – these are the successions which are the best documented in Tacitus’ writings, due to the loss of much of the Tacitean narratives of Caligula, Claudius, Nero, and practically all Flavian emperors. As I examine and interpret Tacitus’ histories as literary works, the sequence of the chapters reflects the compositional, rather than the historical order: even though Galba’s reign is chronologically later than those of the Julio-Claudian emperors Tiberius and Claudius, the *Histories* were written prior to the *Annals*, and are therefore treated first, to be able to trace developments in Tacitus’ thinking and writing.

For every case in this dissertation, my investigation has initially been guided by several basic questions with regard to succession: How is the transmission of power brought about? Who decides about the course of the succession? Who is

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83 Whitton 2007; Sailor 2008.
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perceived as a potential successor, by whom, and on the basis of which qualities and criteria? What role does kinship play in this? Does Tacitus seem to approve of these decisions, and if not, does he suggest alternatives? In drawing these observations together, interpreting them and writing the individual chapters, I have chosen to focus on different aspects of the process of the transmission of power for every case. Taking as a point of departure the aspect that is most striking about Tacitus’ representation of every succession – often the respect in which he differs most notably from other ancient sources – I examine why he chooses to depict that particular succession in that specific framework, and argue that Tacitus (often implicitly) comments upon, raises questions about, and invites reflection on, different aspects of the transmission of imperial power in his depictions of these successions. Tacitus’ Galban narrative is interpreted as programmatic, as opening up the discussion about the transmission of imperial power, drawing attention the different facets of the succession question, and putting forward several possible solutions to these. Two of these aspects are elaborated in my following chapters: I read Tacitus’ portrayal of the succession issue under Tiberius as raising questions about the criteria for selecting a future emperor, and how these relate to actual suitability for the emperorship. And finally, I approach the description of the matter of the succession during the reign of Claudius from the perspective of agency, investigating the parties that influence the course of the succession, and the methods they use to obtain imperial power for their candidate.

As said, I am concerned with the interpretation of Tacitus’ historical works as literary representations of a particular historical period, rather than with using his narrative as a source of historical ‘facts’, or with assessing his reliability as a historian – to put it briefly, the focus is on the particularly Tacitean ‘representation of reality’ rather than with ‘reality’ itself. For this, I assume that classical historiography is an essentially literary genre, and that consequently, meaning is equally conveyed through its ‘content’ (the bare historical facts) and through its ‘form’ (the way the history is told: its themes, structure, style).84 It is important here to remember that rhetoric was a central aspect of Roman education and politics, and that both Tacitus and his readers were trained and (often) practising orators, well versed in rhe-

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84 This kind of literary approach is often associated with Wiseman 1979 and Woodman 1988, although the importance of style in conveying meaning was recognized before, e.g. in Syme 1958, and Martin 1981 (whose chapter on style provides many good examples of the meaningful use of style).
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torical techniques. Rhetorical, narrative and generally literary techniques, then, did not just serve to embellish a historical narrative, but actively helped to shape the story and generate meaning. Moreover, I assume that ancient historians had considerably more liberty than their modern counterparts in constructing their histories within the constraints of ‘historical reality’ and the availability of sources. Although Tacitus was clearly bound to certain facts, common knowledge and the representation of events in the literary tradition – too large a deviation from common expectations would render his account implausible – he had more freedom to shape his narrative according to his own interpretations, for instance by omitting certain events and treating others at greater length than historical explanation may have demanded, arranging his material suggestively, inventing suitable speeches and filling in other blanks according to plausibility, or endowing his narrative with several layers of meaning through allusions and diction. Building on these two ideas, I regard Tacitus’ historical writings as texts that tell us stories about the past based on factual material and research, but with certain aims (such as exemplarity, literary pretensions, didacticism, and encouraging his readers to think about specific issues) and particular methods (a literary nature, a great deal of rhetorical elaboration) that necessitate a quite different analytical approach than we normally use for our contemporary historiography – one much more focused on literary techniques.

In composing his narrative and in manipulating his readers’ interpretations, Tacitus makes extensive use of a wide array of rhetorical and literary techniques. As a consequence, any attempt to analyse how he represents particular events and

86 On Tacitus’ style and rhetorical and literary techniques, see Sinclair 1991 for a good overview; further Ryberg 1942; Syme 1958, 340-363 + appendices 42-60; Walker 1960, 49-57; Miller 1977; Whitehead 1979; Martin 1981, 214-235; Develin 1983; Hellegouarc’h 1991; Sinclair 1995; Kirchner 2001; Oakley 2009b; Foubert 2010b.
88 Cf. Feldherr 2009b. See Lendon 2009, 43 and Pitcher 2009, viii and 90 for cautionary remarks against assuming too much literary freedom for the historian; I agree with Lendon’s proposal to view Roman historiography ‘not as free creation but as a constrained art – where the author practiced his creativity within a tight box of acknowledged fact, of the tradition upon which he drew, and of the audience’s expectations’ (2009, 43), but I would argue that the creativity allowed to the historian was rather larger than argued by Lendon. Cf. Martin 1981, 11: ‘it should not be assumed that, because the finished product is a work of art, it is not based on a solid foundation of fact.’
why must take these techniques into account, and use the right tools to investigate them. Therefore, my analysis of Tacitus’ depiction of the imperial succession in the Histories and the Annals will be twofold, paying attention both to the literary and the historical dimensions of his narrative. First, I compare Tacitus’ representation with that of other ancient sources – both textual and material – and of modern historical accounts, to examine where he diverges notably from these, through, for instance, his general interpretation, the omission or inclusion of particular events and details, the amount of attention paid to them (by being discussed at greater or shorter length), the transposition of events in time, or the way in which actors are characterized. In this way, it becomes possible to shed more light on what is particularly Tacitean in his narrative, and what is due to literary tradition and to the nature of his sources. The comparison, therefore, is not systematic, but is only employed to pinpoint and illustrate notable divergences. The sources which are used for comparison are, for instance, other literary accounts from various periods (such as Velleius Paterculus, Seneca the Younger, Suetonius, Plutarch, and Cassius Dio), coinage, inscriptions, statuary and monuments, as well as modern historical scholarship on particular events.

Second, and most importantly, Tacitus’ narrative is analysed as a literary text, through a careful and detailed reading and contextualization of his representation, using a combination of tools and methods from classical philology and literary studies. Rather than following one particular method of analysis, I employ a selection of tools designed to investigate the particularities of Tacitus’ writing and to answer the specific questions posed to and by his narrative. Attention is paid, for instance, to the structure of the text, comprising ‘not only the organization of the larger elements of composition such as Books and groups of Books, but also chapters and paragraphs, and even sentences, phrases, and individual words’. For example, juxtaposition of two characters or events may be significant, as well as the scale accorded to particular episodes, or the events with which Tacitus chooses to open and close his individual Books and narrative years. Another point of interest is diction, which is particularly relevant considering Tacitus’ careful, inventive and evocative use of language. The use of specific terminology may serve to conjure up

89 Definition from Martin 1990, 1501.
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particular images or connotations, or invite the reader to compare two situations.\textsuperscript{91} Employing language that belongs to a specific genre of literature may give the description a comic, tragic, or heroic flavour; and portraying a person with a certain word may recall another character described similarly.\textsuperscript{92} Allusion, intertextuality and other kinds of references, to a previous part of one’s own text or to some other (textual or material) representation can suggest similarities or differences, and encourage one to read a (description of a) certain character or event through another (depiction), to compare and contrast them. Although these techniques have mainly been studied in relation to classical poetry, recently scholars of ancient historiography have demonstrated that they can also be fruitfully applied to historical narrative.\textsuperscript{93}

Further analytical instruments are furnished by narratology, the discipline concerned with the way stories – including histories – are told by their authors.\textsuperscript{94} As this thesis is not concerned with a purely narratological analysis of Tacitus’ works, I employ only those aspects from narratology which can usefully serve to examine his text: the use of time, focalization, and characterization of the persons in the story.\textsuperscript{95} To start with the first: as Tacitus is writing annalistic history, the events in the text

\textsuperscript{91} For instance, describing an imperial reign with a term like \textit{regnum}, and the imperial household as a \textit{domus regnatrix}, likens the Principate to monarchy, while denoting the struggle for the succession with words normally reserved for civil war and violence – \textit{partes, discordia, distrahere, convellere} – emphasizes the (self-)destructive nature of the rivalry.

\textsuperscript{92} For instance, the word \textit{fecunditas} is almost exclusively applied to both Agrippinas in the \textit{Annals}, and the use of that term for the Younger Agrippina forcefully recalls and compares her with her mother the Elder.

\textsuperscript{93} E.g. the well-known echo of Sallust’s characterization of Catiline in ‘Tacitus’ portrayal of Sejanus at \textit{Ann. 4.1.3} (see Martin/Woodman 1989 \textit{ad loc.}), and the echoes of Livy’s and Sallust’s depiction of senatorial debates at \textit{Ann. 3.33-34} and 14.42-45 (Ginsburg 1993). Hinds 1998 is one of the basic works for poetry; Doula- mis 2011 is a collection of papers on intertextuality in ancient prose fiction. Studies on allusion and intertextuality in ancient historiography include Walker 1960, 71-77; Whitton 2007; O’Gorman 2009; Marincola 2010; Joseph 2012b; Pelling 2013; see Woodman 1979 on Tacitus’ ‘self-imitation’.

\textsuperscript{94} Established as a theoretical approach by Genette and further elaborated by Bal in the field of modern literary studies, it was first applied to ancient narrative texts by De Jong. See Genette 1980; Bal 1997; De Jong 1987; Grethlein/Rengakos 2009; and a series of co-edited volumes devoted to individual aspects of narratology, e.g. on narrators (published in 2004), time (2007), and space (2012). Bal 1997 and De Jong 2004 and 2007 provide excellent introductions to narratology, the last two both preceded by a useful glossary.

\textsuperscript{95} In employing these narratological tools, I will not adhere very strictly to narratological terminology. For instance, I do not clearly distinguish between fabula, story and text, and use the terms ‘figures’, ‘person’ and ‘character’ interchangeably.
are generally ordered in a chronological sequence, year by year. However, Tacitus repeatedly departs from the chronology to insert foreshadowings of future events, or flashbacks to previous ones; this happens, for instance, when Tacitus prefigures Nero’s later succession in his narration of AD 47. In other places, he interferes with the chronology of the narrative by the repetition of references to events, or even by deliberate displacement of them. The rhythm, or pace, of the narrative – the relation between the amount of time taken up by the actual events and the amount of time (usually expressed in the number of pages or chapters) occupied by the textual depiction of these events – is indicative of the author’s focus. Temporarily pausing the narrative – for instance, to describe a certain character or place – draws attention to the digression, while the omission of certain events may be significant in itself. Narrative delay occurs ‘when a narrator withholds crucial information, in order to release it later, to greater effect’. Since Tacitus’ text is a historical narrative, he is also able to play with time in other ways: the simple fact that both Tacitus and his audience were familiar with the course of events described in his histories greatly influences both his representation and their perception. They knew that Germanicus and Drusus would die before they could succeed to Tiberius; that it was the offspring of Germanicus that would continue the Julio-Claudian dynasty (and not in a very admirable manner); that the end of this dynasty would lead to civil war; that Galba’s adoption of Piso would prove a failure; and that the tradition of dynastic succession would eventually (even if only briefly) be broken by the adoption of Trajan. As a result, Tacitus can play with their hindsight and expectations by inserting foreshadowings, making characters replay the past, or speculating about what could have happened. As will become clear in the chapters, Tacitus has a special interest in counterfactual history and a particular attention to the role of chance in human affairs. His narrative may be seen to speculate on how, for instance, a person might owe his good reputation to his premature death (since

96 On Tacitus’ use of the annalistic format: Ginsburg 1981.  
97 Ann. 11.12.1; the narratological terms are prolepsis and analepsis respectively; see De Jong 2007, 3-8.  
98 Bal 1997, 111-112. For instance, Tacitus advances the birth of Tiberius’ grandsons by several years in Ann. 2.84.1.  
99 Bal 1997, 100-111. Although the chapter divisions in Tacitus’ works are not authentic, they nevertheless adhere logically to the content of the narrative.  
100 The latter phenomenon is called ellipsis; Bal 1997, 101; 104-105; 103.  
101 This is paralipsis; De Jong 2007, 6.
further deeds might have disproved it), or how, by contrast, actually fulfilling one’s destiny can deceive initial expectations. By bringing in alternatives, Tacitus further considers whether certain events or developments were inevitable, or could have turned out otherwise.

Another effective way of influencing the information presented and of subtly affecting the reader’s interpretations is the strategic use of focalization, the perspective from which events are presented in the story. For instance, when Tacitus, who does not hold the people in particularly high esteem, focalizes certain views through the vulgus, he may often be considered to disapprove of their observations. When the same events are recounted by different focalizers – various characters or groups, or the narrator and a character – the reader is able to compare their versions and draw conclusions about the perceptions and attitudes of the different focalizers. For example, by reporting the events leading up to Germanicus’ death twice, but by different focalizers, Tacitus indirectly shows how the truth was obscured by rumours and suspicions. But whereas the focalizer greatly influences the reader’s perceptions of the events, the focalizer may also be characterized by his perception of the events – this is in fact a device used frequently by Tacitus. Thus Otho and Agrippina the Younger are depicted as perceptive, because their views often accord with those of Tacitus the narrator; the discrepancy between the presentation of the situation by Galba in his speech, and by Tacitus in his narration, shows Galba as old-fashioned and sorely lacking insight and understanding of the realities of power; and the soldiers who complain about Galba’s discipline – described as laudata olim et militari fama celebrata by Tacitus himself – are implied to be slothful and corrupted. The presence or absence of character focalization also influences the reader’s impressions: he is likely to feel more sympathy for characters in the text about whose thoughts and feelings he gets more information.

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102 Bal 1997, 142-143.
103 Conversely, when Tacitus explicitly attributes particular views to prudentes, the reader can infer that he attaches more value to them.
104 Damon 1999 (on Ann. 2.43, 55, 57-58, 68-81 on the one hand, and 3.12, 13-14.2, 16.3-4 on the other).
105 Bal 1997, 150.
106 Hist. 1.5.2, discussed in Pitcher 2007, 109-110.
not recognize certain developments which are noticed by other focalizers. Indefinite focalization – the expression of utterances through an unnamed source – is often used to sketch public opinion, but can also be used as a form of innuendo. When writing of focalization, it is crucial to distinguish clearly between the speakers; the Tacitean Tiberius – the character of Tiberius as constructed by Tacitus in his text – does not necessarily coincide with the historical person of the emperor, much less with Tacitus as narrator. Therefore, when I speak of ‘Galba’ or any other person in the narrative, I always refer to the literary character constructed by Tacitus, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

This leads to the third narratological tool: the examination of the characterization of persons in the narrative. As an author, Tacitus takes a keen interest in his characters’ psychology and motivations. In general, Roman historians tended to see historical change as being brought about by individual actors, whose character and deeds were held up to moral scrutiny for exemplary and commemorative purposes. As such, the description, analysis and interpretation of their characters and motives forms an important part of the interpretation of (the causes of) past events in Roman historiography. This focus on individuals is especially prominent in imperial historiography, in which the narrative often revolves around the one individual who entirely determines the course of events: the emperor. In fact, historiography, as well as other kinds of literature, can be seen to become increasingly biographic under (or when writing about) the Principate. The attention to the characters

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108 Bal 1997, 114-131. Scholarly opinions on the ancient perception of character differ, in particular with regard to the degree of uniqueness and the possibility of character development; see especially Daitz 1960; Gill 1983 and 1990 on these issues. I will take a middle position in the debate, assuming a certain degree of individuality coupled with a tendency towards exemplarity; and some extent of inborn disposition, but with the possibility of change: cf. the views of Pelling 1990b (on ‘integrated characters’) and Pitcher 2007, 115-117 (on the possibility of character change); cf. Sinclair 1995 on generalization vs. individualization of characters in Tacitus.

109 Vasaly 2009, 245-247; Kraus/Woodman 1997, 32-33; Damon 2003, 7-10 on the importance of character in Tacitus’ explanation; Galtier 2011, 19-30 characterizes ancient historiography as ‘éthocentrique’ for this reason and notes the influence of Roman memoirs (commentarii) and laudationes funebres celebrating individual achievements.

110 See Woodman 1977, 28-56; Swain 1997; Pelling 1997; Vasaly 2009, 246; Kraus 2005. Tacitus’ two historical works are labelled vitae Caesarum by Jerome (in his Comm. Ad Zach. B iii.14), and indeed the overwhelming impact of the emperors on his narrative is discernible in the most general sense in the periodization of his two historical works (dealing with the Julio-Claudian and the Flavian dynasties, respectively), in the structuring of the Annals by imperial reigns, and in the beginnings and endings of Books and narrative years; cf.
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of individuals was further influenced, in the first centuries of the Principate, by the popularity of declamation and biography, two branches of literature in which character portrayal plays a central role. Tacitus in particular repeatedly aims to reveal a person’s real character and motives behind their outward appearance and claims, and uses several different techniques, both direct and indirect, to characterize actors in his narratives. Direct characterization takes the form of explicit comments by the author, the person himself, by the other actors in his narrative, or through indefinite focalization such as rumours – in this case, focalization is clearly of central importance to the reader’s perception of the value and trustworthiness of the portrayal. Authorial characterizations are often located at the introduction of the person into the narrative, or in an obituary notice. Indirect characterization, on the other hand, is conveyed through the narration of a person’s actions or words, or by the structure of the narrative (e.g. juxtaposition of two contrasting characters), the use of tense or the revealing or withholding of information. Actors are usually characterized by a combination of these two techniques, which can reinforce each other, but may sometimes also conflict with another, resulting in different images of the same actor. It is then up to the reader to weigh these portrayals against each other, notice the gap between them, and decide for himself. The combination of these analytical tools makes possible a thorough examination of all of the aspects of Tacitus’ texts.

Griffin 2009, 182-183; Ginsburg 1981.

111 On declamation, see Bonner 1949; Bloomer 1997; Van Mal-Maeder 2007. See Vasaly 2009, 245-246; Späth 2005 and Stadter 2007 on the relationship and differences between biography and history; Pelling 1990b on characterization in Greek biography; Russell 1990 on character in Greek rhetoric; Riggsby 2004 on character in (forensic) oratory.


113 Pitcher 2007, 106-107; Daitz 1960. As Sage 1990, 902-906 points out, imperial obituaries are often placed at significant moments in the text, marking changes in the situation or switches to a different topic.


115 Cf. Bal 1997, 131. This kind of discrepancy between direct and indirect characterization is particularly relevant to Tacitus’ portrayal of Germanicus and Tiberius; see section 2.3 on this, as well as Pelling 2012, 290-291; Ash 1999, 89.
EDITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS USED

The editions of Tacitus’ works used are the Teubner editions of Heubner 1978 (Histories) and 1983 (Annals). The translations of the Annals derive from Woodman 2004, sometimes slightly adapted. For the Histories, I have used the 1925 Loeb edition of Moore. The Latin text of Suetonius is that of Ihm 1933 (Teubner); the English translation is by Rolfe 1913-1914 (Loeb). The original Greek of Dio is by Boissevain 1955; the English translation is that of Cary 1925 (Loeb). For Plutarch’s Lives I have used the 1926 Loeb edition and quoted Perrin’s translation in that volume. For Pliny’s Panegyricus, the edition is that of Mynors 1964; the translation is that of Radice in the 1969 Loeb edition. As a rule, I refer to other ancient sources without quoting the text, unless the formulation is especially relevant.
At the beginning of January, AD 69, the childless emperor Servius Sulpicius Galba adopted the young and relatively unknown nobleman L. Calpurnius Piso Frugi Licinianus as his son and successor. Galba, who had obtained imperial power after Nero’s suicide only several months earlier, already faced severe criticism on his rule, expressed in the Germanic legions’ refusal to swear the customary oath to their emperor at the beginning of the new year. As an attempt to counter the growing discontent, the adoption failed miserably: within the course of a single week, both Galba and his newly adopted heir were brutally murdered, and one of Galba’s adherents, M. Salvius Otho, was proclaimed emperor instead. This was the end of the brief and rather unexceptional reign of Galba – but it was to be only the beginning of a year-long series of destructive civil wars, in which three other pretenders to the throne ransacked the Empire and burnt down parts of Rome in their fights over imperial power. The year 69 – aptly dubbed the ‘Year of the Four Emperors’ in modern scholarship – stands out as the first serious succession crisis the Principate had seen since its establishment a century earlier. The death of the last Julio-Claudian emperor put an end to what had been a de facto dynastic system of succession, and revealed, more alarmingly than ever, one of the ‘secrets’ of the Principate: the absence of an agreed-upon method of transmitting imperial power. The consequence was an open fight over the emperorship, in which anyone with resolve, money and military support could try to lay a claim to imperial power. As Syme

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116 Tacitus phrases it pointedly in 1.4.2: evolgato imperii arcano posse principem alibi quam Romae fieri, to be followed, in the next Book, by the related statement posse ab exercitu principem fieri (2.76.4). On the Year of the Four Emperors, see most recently Morgan 2006.
observed long ago, ‘[t]he Principate arose from usurpation. If one man seized the power, so might another. Birth or energy, chance or a horoscope would declare the ruler of the world.’\textsuperscript{117} The extent to which imperial power was dependent on military clout became clearer than ever before, as, for the first time since Octavian gained supremacy, multiple contenders fought one another over the emperorship.

The civil wars of 69 and the resulting rise of the Flavian dynasty are the subject of Tacitus’ first historical work the \textit{Histories}, written in the first decade of the second century AD, and dealing with the period between 69 and 96 in twelve or fourteen Books, of which about four and a half are extant today.\textsuperscript{118} Since the narrative opens at the start of 69, this leaves only the first 15 days of the year for the narration of Galba’s reign. A mere two weeks of imperial rule, no fighting yet, a futile adoption, and only a few deaths: these hardly seem noteworthy incidents when compared with the extensive warfare, killings and plundering in the months to follow, and the vicissitudes of the reigns of Vespasian, Titus and Domitian of the next decades. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. Tacitus devotes a surprisingly large amount of text – about half of the entire first Book – to the events of this fortnight, and dedicates particular attention to Galba’s adoption of Piso, which receives eight whole chapters, including the longest speech in \textit{oratio recta} in the whole work, pronounced by the emperor himself.\textsuperscript{119} Furthermore, the adoption of Piso, although it comes to naught, elicits the most explicit and elaborate discussion of imperial succession in any of Tacitus’ works. In his speech accompanying the adoption, the Tacitean Galba pinpoints the dynastic nature of the Julio-Claudian succession, reviews its disadvantages, and proposes a new way to transmit imperial power: by selection on the basis of merit, rather than inheritance through birth. What could have been a simple justification of a decision taken out of necessity becomes, in Tacitus’ depiction, a long-winded plea for an ideologically motivated change, in which Galba’s choice of Piso is presented as heralding a new era of freedom.

\textsuperscript{117} Syme 1958, ix.
\textsuperscript{118} Syme 1958, 120 and Sage 1990, 859-863 on the date of composition; Syme 1958, 686-687 and Martin 1981, 67 on the number of Books; the extant narrative breaks off at 5.26 (AD 70).
\textsuperscript{119} By way of comparison: Claudius’ adoption of Nero as his successor – an act with undisputably far-reaching consequences for the Roman state – is described in only two chapters in Tacitus’ other historical work the \textit{Annals} (12.25-26), while Tiberius’ adoption of his nephew Germanicus – which constitutes one of the main themes framing the first three Books of the \textit{Annals} – is dismissed in a single sentence (1.3.5); see below, Chapters 2 and 3.
this, Tacitus’ representation differs markedly from the way the incident is related in the parallel accounts of Suetonius, Plutarch and Dio, and from the treatment of the issue of imperial succession elsewhere in the *Histories* and the *Annals*. Moreover, Tacitus’ account of the adoption is loaded with contemporary resonances. For Tacitus’ audience, Galba’s adoption of Piso will have called to mind another imperial adoption, performed under very similar circumstances, only some years before the publication of the *Histories*: that of Trajan by the emperor Nerva in 97. Tacitus reinforces this evocation by endowing his representation of Piso’s adoption with several striking similarities with Pliny’s depiction of the adoption of Trajan in his *Panegyricus*.

In Tacitus’ narrative then, Galba’s adoption of Piso – our first case of contested succession – comes to acquire a significance far beyond its strictly historical importance. The present chapter sets out to investigate the role of Tacitus’ portrayal of the Pisonian adoption in the context of his thinking and writing about imperial succession. Two main questions guide the investigation; one related to the narrative of the *Histories* itself, the other to the context in which the work was written. First, Tacitus lets Galba make the adoption into a programmatic statement, but employs a range of techniques to suggest in various, but equally damning ways that the emperor and his intentions are a complete failure. How, then, is the reader to interpret Galba’s claims and ideals with regard to imperial succession on the level of the narrative, both that of Galba’s reign, and that of the *Histories* as a whole? Second, there are the many coincidental resemblances and deliberate allusions to the (depiction of the) recent adoption of Trajan by Nerva, but with one crucial difference – the latter adoption did turn out to be successful in terms of securing political stability. How are we to read Galba’s fiasco in implementing an adoptive Principate in a work written during the reign of the first adoptive emperor? An important tool in attempting to answer these questions is a comparison with the other ancient sources describing the same event: Plutarch’s and Suetonius’ *Lives* of Galba and Otho, roughly contemporary with the *Histories*, and the epitomes and excerpts of Book 64 of Dio’s *Roman History*, written little over a century later. These accounts exhibit several strong (sometimes even verbal) similarities with Tacitus’ narration, and are therefore generally assumed to be based on a ‘common source’, perhaps supplemented with other kinds of material in Tacitus’ case.120 Considering these

120 Syme 1958, 176-190; Martin 1981, 189-198; Damon 2003, 22-30 and appendices 1 and 4; following
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close correspondences, any divergence by Tacitus from the parallel accounts – in particular Plutarch, whose biography of Galba reads more like a historical narrative than like a biography proper – is all the more notable.121

This chapter is composed of four sections. The first (1.1) examines the background to the adoption, and, more specifically, the image which Tacitus paints of the situation in Rome and in the provinces before recounting the adoption episode. The state of affairs at the start of 69 is characterized by a general feeling of insecurity over the succession, moral corruption, and disaffection with Galba – leading the reader to suspect that the adoption which Tacitus will proceed to describe can only be unsuccessful. Section two (1.2) discusses Tacitus’ representation of the adoption itself, as well as the new method of succession proposed by Galba. It considers the means by which Tacitus makes the adoption into the central event of his Galban narrative, offers a lineal analysis of chapters 1.12-19, and briefly reviews the aftermath in the remainder of the reign’s chapters. The third section (1.3) further analyses one aspect of Galba’s new system: the criteria used by the emperor to select his successor, and to what extent these are met by the two potential successors. It argues that Tacitus represents Galba as choosing his successor on the basis of his character, and that the portrayal of the two candidates – Otho and Piso – bears this out, but that the narrative implies that Galba’s criteria of selection are highly imprudent in his situation. Section four (1.4) contextualizes Tacitus’ depiction of the adoption episode by confronting and comparing it with its representation in the parallel accounts, with the characterization of Galba in the whole narrative, and with the (description of the) adoption of Trajan in 97. Last, the conclusion offers some possible answers to the two main questions mentioned above: the interpretation of Tacitus’ depiction of Galba’s adoption of Piso, both on the level of the narrative of the *Histories* itself, and within its (Trajanic) context of composition.122

Damon, I will use the term ‘parallel sources/accounts’ for the texts of Plutarch and Suetonius.

121 On the unusual form and content of Plutarch’s biography of Galba, see Ash 1997.

122 Unfortunately, Christopher Whitton’s 2008 dissertation on ‘the rhetoric of accession’ in Tacitus’ early historical works came to my attention only after the main outlines of this chapter had been written down. In the process of revision, I have profited much from his keen observations and analyses; nevertheless, several of my arguments turned out to overlap with his, in particular those in his chapter 4 on Galba; where this is the case, I have provided references to Whitton in the footnotes. I would like to thank Christopher Whitton warmly for allowing me to use his original thesis files for my research.
Before examining the new system of succession as proposed by Galba, it will be convenient to discuss the background to the adoption, to be able to interpret the episode in its context. This section offers a lineal analysis of the chapters preceding the adoption (1.1-11), focusing on the ways in which Tacitus prepares his audience’s expectations before they come to the adoption and Galba’s speech itself. It draws attention to several elements that influence the reader’s reception and interpretation of Galba’s adoption and its justification: the attitudes of the Senate, army and people towards Galba, and the emperor’s characterization.

1.1.1 THE OPENING OF THE HISTORIES

The significance of the starting point

*Initium mihi operis Servius Galba iterum Titus Vinius consules erunt* (1.1.1): thus begin the *Histories*. Tacitus’ account of the civil wars and the principates of the Flavian emperors starts at the beginning of AD 69. At first sight, this starting date appears as remarkable and somewhat inconvenient; after all, the Julio-Claudian dynasty had ended with Nero’s suicide several months before, and the new emperor, Galba, had been acclaimed even before that, early in 68.\(^{123}\) The origins of many of the events and developments which Tacitus will narrate in his work, then, are located before

\(^{123}\) Galba was acclaimed by his troops on 2 or 3 April 68 (Wiedemann 1996b, 258); Nero was declared a public enemy and committed suicide on 9 or 11 June (*ibidem*, 261).
THE BACKGROUND OF THE ADOPTION

the starting point of his history. Several explanations have been proposed for Tacitus’ opening his Histories in 69, rather than with the fall of Nero and the rise of Galba in the spring of the previous year.¹²⁴ The most basic and formal rationalization is Tacitus’ adherence to annalistic convention, which dictates starting at the beginning of the year. Indeed, Tacitus’ allusion to Sallust in the starting point and in the phrasing of the opening sentence – as well as in many other aspects throughout the work – may be taken as attempts by Tacitus to insert himself in that tradition of republican annalistic historiography of which his admired predecessor formed part.¹²⁵

More important, however, are the interpretive and dramatic implications of this particular starting point. January 69 is the moment at which the tensions and problems which had been building up since Galba’s acclamation begin to erupt, when the Germanic legions’ rebellion on the first day of the year sets in motion a series of events temporarily climaxing in the murder of Galba, and eventually leading up to Vespasian’s victory. The start of the year, then, acquires significance as the beginning of the near-end of the state (1.11.3: annum .. rei publicae prope supremum) and at the same time the lead-up towards a new start, that of the Flavian dynasty.¹²⁶ Starting at this particular point, in medias res, also makes for a greater urgency and impact of the narrative: the sudden ‘plunge into the action’ and the quick succession of events – several battles and the deaths of three emperors within a couple of months – makes for a striking story in the fashion of Homer and his epic successors.¹²⁷ Furthermore, as Joseph argues, by starting in the middle and thus ‘removing the limits’ of the wars he is about to relate, Tacitus creates an impression of the limitlessness of civil war, and of its extension, both backward and forward in time.¹²⁸

Moreover, with respect to the issue of imperial succession, January 69 is ‘the point where the existing political fabric begins to rupture’, and which underscores more clearly and frightfully than ever one of the main problems of the Principate: the lack of a formal system to transmit imperial power, and its potentially disastrous consequences.¹²⁹ As has been discussed in the introduction to this chapter, Tacitus states that the inhabitants of Rome, after Nero’s fall and Galba’s accession, were in a

¹²⁴ Sage 1990, 871-874 provides a good survey of the debate, offering a sensible combination of explanations.
¹²⁵ Sage 1990, 873-874; cf. Martin 1981, 68; see Sall. Hist. frg. 1; see also below, note 153 for more references.
¹²⁶ Syme 1958, 145; Shotter 1967a, 160-163.
¹²⁷ Martin 1981, 68; Joseph 2012b, 37-42 (phrase from 42).
¹²⁸ Joseph 2012b, 37-42.
¹²⁹ The phrase is Sage’s (1990, 873).
state of agitation because ‘the secret of Empire was now disclosed, that an emperor could be made elsewhere than at Rome’ (1.4.2). Under the Julio-Claudian dynasty, imperial succession had been kept within the ruling family and had been decided upon within Rome. Galba, however, had been acclaimed by the legions, and had gathered most of his support outside Italy: he had been made emperor first and primarily at the instigation and authority of the provincial armies, rather than by sanction of the Senate or by acclamation by the Praetorian Guard. In the Histories, the ‘leaking out’ of this arcanum imperii has created general insecurity about the location of power, the position and influence of various groups, and the course of the succession. For the first time, the centre of power has shifted away from Rome and its traditional authorities; little do the characters in the narrative as yet know that it will not be the last time, and that further contenders and more dreadful wars await them in the following year. For in the first three Books, the struggle for control over the Empire will be fought out outside Rome; and rather than being the political and symbolic heart of the Empire, the city will become a lucrative prize of war (1.11.3), a passive décor for combat (1.40.1), and, ultimately, a defenceless victim of the contenders’ violence (3.71-72). Tacitus inserts many more references to the physical city of Rome – such as precise locations and specific buildings – in the Histories than he does in the Annals, emphasizing, as Edwards argues, the civil nature of the conflicts, which takes the violent struggles even to the most ancient and sacred places in the city. The reader, of course, well aware of the narrative future, will recognize the foreshadowing inherent in the posse principem alibi quam Romae fieri, and there is a grim sense of dramatic irony in the Romans’ initial panic over Galba’s accession: far worse was to come.

And it is this turn for the worse, manifested in an utter confusion about the location of power and a blatant disregard for the traditional sources of authority, with which Tacitus opens his narrative at January 69, when the Upper Germanic legions

130 Morgan 2006, 12 rightly observes that ‘[t]he point being made is geographical as well as constitutional’.
131 Cf. 2.10.1: civitate discordi et ob crebras principum mutationes inter libertatem ac licentiam incerta.
132 Fraser 2007, furthermore, makes an interesting case for Otho’s mention at 1.27.2 of his acquisition of a ‘dilapidated property’ (praedia vetustate suspecta) referring to Rome itself.
133 Edwards 1996, 74-82; Fraser 2007 on the emperors’ attitude towards the physical and symbolic city of Rome as part of their characterization in the Histories; Sailor 2008, 183-249 on the treatment of the city in the Histories as a way for Tacitus to write about the meaning of Rome and the Principate; Gowing 2009 on Rome in the Tiberian Annals (non vidi).
refuse to take the oath of allegiance to Galba (1.12.1). In Nero’s last months, there
had been contenders to the throne, to be sure, but none of them took the title of
emperor without sanction of the Senate; and they managed to keep their soldiers,
who were clamouring for them to seize power, in check. Julius Vindex appealed to
the Senate and people of Rome when he rebelled against Nero. Galba, despite
being acclaimed by his troops, refused to call himself Caesar or Imperator before
the Senate had officially recognized his claim to power; instead, he allegedly styled
himself ‘legate of the Roman Senate and people’. Verginius Rufus, who was of-
fered the Empire by his soldiers, rejected the power altogether, stating that it was
up to the Senate to choose an emperor. On the first day of 69, however, the com-
manders of Upper Germany are unable to control their legions, who, on their own
accord, throw off their loyalty to the emperor. As Damon notes, the phrase *rupta
sacramenti reverentia* evokes an image of ‘a more general ethical collapse’ through
the use of *rumpere* (a strong word normally used for breaking treaties) with *reveren-
tia* (which often functions in Tacitus as ‘a kind of ethical brake’) – all moral bounds
are shattered. Ostensibly, the soldiers refer the choice of a new emperor to the
Senate and the people: *imperatorem alium flagitare et senatui ac populo Romano arbit-
trium eligendi permittere quo seditio mollius acciperetur* (1.12.1). However, they only
grant them the *arbitrium eligendi* to cast their own disloyalty in a better light (*quo seditio mollius acciperetur*), and the fact that they consider it their prerogative to al-
low (*permittere*) these traditional sources of authority to make the decision is itself a
clear indication of the balance of power. Indeed, without waiting for any reaction
from Rome, the Germanic soldiers start to support Vitellius, the commander of the
Lower Germanic legions, although Tacitus only reports this after Galba’s death.

134  Wiedemann 1996b, 256-257.
135  Plut. G. 5.2; Suet. G. 10.1.
136  Plut. G. 6.2, 10.2; Wiedemann 1996b, 259-261. Plin. Ep. 6.10.4 reports his epitaph: *hic situs est Rufus, pulso qui Vindice quondam / imperium adseruit non sibi sed patriae*; Tacitus mentions the offer at 1.8.2.
137  Damon 2003 ad loc.
138  Damon observes (2003 ad loc.) that the legions ‘echo the ‘constitutionalist’ line of their former com-
mander, Verginius Rufus’; but in the soldiers’ case, the appeal rings hollow: 1.55.4: *ac ne reverentiam imperii exuere viderentur, senatus populique Romani obliterata iam nomina sacramento advocabunt* and 1.57.1: *superior exercitus speciosis senatus populique Romani nominibus relictis tertium nonas Ianuarias Vitellio accessit: scires illum priori biduo non penes rem publicam fuisset.
139  1.50.1 and 1.57.1, stating earlier (1.14.1) that Galba did not have information about Vitellius’ proclama-
tion when he decided to adopt Piso. Morgan 2006, 51-56 dates the change of allegiance to 3 January; cf. Welles-
GALBA

The events on the first day of 69, then, herald a new phase, one in which the military nature of imperial power, and the possible implications of this, are revealed more clearly than ever, with dire consequences for the state.

The effect of Tacitus’ choice to begin his work on the first day of January 69 is that several events of the preceding months remain untold in the Histories: Galba’s acclamation by his troops and his recruitment of a legion on his own authority; Verginius Rufus’ crushing of the revolt of Vindex, and his following acclamation by his soldiers; the Senate’s declaration of Nero as public enemy, Nero’s suicide, and the Senate’s voting of the imperial power to Galba; and finally, Galba’s entry into Rome and his first months in the city. Clearly, a knowledge of these events is crucial to an accurate understanding and interpretation of the civil wars and the rise of the Flavian dynasty that followed. Tacitus remedies this problem by inserting, after the prologue but before the actual narration of events, several chapters surveying the status quo among various groups and parts of the Empire at the beginning of 69 (1.4-11). This survey is not intended to provide the reader with a complete list of events preceding January 69 – in fact, many of them are not mentioned at all, or only very briefly, without many details. Rather, it serves Tacitus’ purpose ut non modo casus eventusque rerum, qui plerumque fortuiti sunt, sed ratio etiam causaeque noscantur (1.4.1). Tacitus only describes what he regards as consequential events and situations, elements indispensable for understanding why history unfolded as it did. Shotter states that the events of 68 were only relevant to Tacitus in so far as they shaped the negative public opinion about Galba, which is presented as one...
of the main reasons for his failure to maintain power. Indeed, much of Tacitus’ examination of the *status urbis, mens exercituum* and *habitus provinciarum* is devoted to reporting the attitudes and behaviour of such anonymous focalizers as the *patres*, the *plebs* or the *miles urbanus*. At the same time, by relating their opinions, Tacitus characterizes these groups, and sketches an atmosphere of moral decline, in which false information abounds, rumours thrive, and people and their deeds are constantly misinterpreted. Moreover, the survey reports Galba’s mind-set and character, the actions he took to bolster his power, and their mismatch to the situation. Last, it includes several foreshadowing references to later events. Taken together, the survey, which is retrospective and prospective at the same time, depicts the circumstances which make Galba decide to adopt Piso, and suggest the probable outcome of that choice. As such, it is necessary to take a closer look at, first, the prologue (1.1-3), and second, the survey of the Empire (1.4-11), both of which set the scene for the following narrative and draw attention to issues relevant to the interpretation of Tacitus’ representation of the adoption.

**The prologue to the work (1.1-3): civil war**

The extant *Histories* tell a story of civil war and its all-destructive concomitants and consequences: *opus .. opimum casibus, atrox proeliis, discors seditionibus, ipsa etiam pace saevom* (1.2.1). In the first chapters of the work, Tacitus sketches the image of a period tainted by the continuous and violent struggle for imperial power, in which influence and loyalties are continually and rapidly transferred, and the next pretender is always lurking in the background. Society is characterized by a breakdown of traditional values and an inversion of morals, in which care for the state is replaced by self-interest and friendship by treachery, offices are obtained through

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143 Shotter 1967a, 160-163.
144 Cf. Damon 2003, 28 and Pitcher 2007, 110: ‘a narrative which repeatedly highlights not just the readiness of people to analyze the characters of their fellow men, but also their tendency to misidentify what they see, whether through foolishness or with the intent to mislead others. This is a world where Vitellius’ profligate spending of his own and others’ resources is labeled generosity (1.52) ... and Domitian’s gaucheness is mistaken for modesty (4.40).’
crime, and delatores seize upon anything to indict their fellow citizens.\textsuperscript{147} Roman identity itself is turned on its head: praiseworthy exempla are found among the least respectable classes of people – barbarians, women, slaves (cf. 1.3.1) – while Roman soldiers devastate their homeland and slaughter their fellow citizens as if they were conquering foreign territory. Virtue itself is a guarantee for death (1.2.3: \textit{ob virtutes certissimum exitium}) and the traditional sources of authority – the Senate, the patresfamilias, even the emperor – are unable to control the violence and rapacity of their subordinates.\textsuperscript{148} The widespread death, perversion and destruction, accompanied by divine and natural omens, reach their horrendous climax in the burning down of the Capitoline temple, an event which may be seen to symbolize the ultimate breakdown of religious and political values.\textsuperscript{149} The collapse of morality is a commonplace in Roman perceptions and depictions of civil war; yet Tacitus’ representation of the ‘corrosive moral decay’ is so all-pervasive and powerful that ‘[b]y the end of Histories 3, Tacitus’ audience is left bruised and battered’.\textsuperscript{150} And it is not just morality that is inverted: as Ash observes, the image Tacitus presents his reader with is ‘a kind of ‘photo-negative’ of traditional Roman historiography’.\textsuperscript{151} The Histories contain the conventional themes and scenes of historical narratives – battles between armies, the siege and sack of a city, the conquest and subjugation of barbarians – but in a perverted shape, testifying to the disintegration of traditional values.\textsuperscript{152} The Sallustian, Virgilian and Lucanian reminiscences enhance the gravity

\textsuperscript{147}  1.2.3; see Keitel 2006 on this theme in 1.12-49.
\textsuperscript{148}  1.2.3: \textit{corrupti in dominos servi, in patronos liberti}; the passivity of the Senate and the emperor will become clear from the later narrative.
\textsuperscript{149}  1.2.2-3; see Edwards 1996, 69-95 on the Capitol as the heart of the Roman Empire; cf. Sailor 2008, 205-249.
\textsuperscript{150}  Ash 2009, 96 and 92. See Jal 1963, 360-488 on Roman perceptions of the connection between civil conflicts and morals, esp. 460-488 on the resulting ‘moral subversion’, and 489-499 on the changed nature of civil conflicts under the Principate. Several scholars have noted the medical metaphors Tacitus uses to describe the state of the Empire (e.g. \textit{validum} and \textit{aegrum} in 1.4.1); on the theme of disease in the Histories, see Edwards 2012a.
\textsuperscript{151}  Ash 2006, 72; but see Joseph 2012b, 31.
\textsuperscript{152}  Ash 2006 observes a ‘disturbing inversion of motifs from traditional Roman historiography’ (73): the vivid battle scenes are fought out between Roman citizens, the sack of cities takes place in Italy, and what appears to be a rebellion of provincial subjects – the Batavian revolt of Julius Civilis – is actually an uprising of a Roman citizen, encouraged by Vespasian’s party (74-75). Woodman 1988, 160-167 remarkably considers the prologue to announce a pleasurable ‘disaster narrative’ with a happy end: the \textit{rara felicitas} of Tacitus’ own time.
of the work.153

It might be argued that the loss of more than half of the original narrative distorts our perception, and may lead us to forget that the civil wars of the Year of the Four Emperors occupy only one of the 28 years narrated in the original work.154 Nevertheless, the Histories treat the events of 69 in a detail and at a length – three entire Books for one year – unparalleled in the rest of Tacitus’ historical writings, or indeed even in the whole of Roman historiography.155 The topic of civil war is, furthermore, continually stressed through Tacitus’ frequent use of the (epic) trope of repetition in his depiction – for instance, in the recurring ‘battles, murders, and other miseries’ – and his extension of the theme through his choice of starting point in medias res.156 Moreover, as some scholars note, the theme and imagery of civil strife continue to be present in the narrative even after the victory of Vespasian, in Books 4 and 5, albeit more implicitly and indirectly.157 Allusions to Lucan and Virgil vividly evoke earlier (civil) wars, imbuing the description of the conflicts of 69 with a sense of endless repetition, while the memories of Rome’s previous civil wars loom in the background and are referred to both by Tacitus and by his characters as a point of comparison for 69.158

Civil war, then, pervades the entire extant Histories, with reference to the narrative past, present and future: not only does it suggest the repetitiveness of civil conflict, it also provides an ominous framework for Tacitus’ representation of the Flavian dynasty, which would end with horror and bloodshed as well – the times are really ipsa etiam pace saevom.159 Indeed, the omnipresence of the theme of a conti-
uous state of civil war in the first five Books may have prepared for the depiction of
the reign of Domitian, in which all the atrocities of the previous Books may have
culminated.\textsuperscript{160} Even more so, as will be further elaborated below, it is highly likely
that we are to read Tacitus’ narrative of 69 and the ensuing Flavian dynasty through
our knowledge of the events of 96-98.\textsuperscript{161} As such, the theme of civil war acquires
particular relevance in view of the possibility of renewed conflict after the death of
Domitian and the military resistance against Nerva – a possibility only narrowly
averted by the adoption of Trajan. Considering the manifest contemporary re-
sonances, furthermore, it is significant that the opening chapter of the work revolves
around the theme of \textit{libertas} in its various appearances – the political liberty of the
Republic, the independence and impartiality of a historian (to speak the truth), the
freedom of thought and expression under Trajan.\textsuperscript{162} The concept is coupled with
the closely linked notions of \textit{veritas} (the truth, including the courage and political
freedom needed to voice it) and \textit{fides} (‘loyalty to the truth, with reliability as a re-
sult’).\textsuperscript{163} Notably, this thematically related cluster of \textit{libertas}, \textit{fides} and \textit{veritas} is also
invoked by Pliny in the preface to his \textit{Panegyricus} (1.6), and by Tacitus’ Galba in his
adoption speech.\textsuperscript{164}

The prologue draws attention, furthermore, to two elements influencing the
narrative itself: Tacitus’ personal involvement in the events he is about to describe,
and the problems facing any historian writing about civil war. In contrast to the \textit{An-
nals}, the \textit{Histories} deal with a period in which Tacitus himself was politically active,
and of which he therefore had first-hand knowledge. Although his political career
started only under Vespasian, Tacitus may have had vivid memories of the civil
wars, which took place during his adolescence, and will have known many who had
experienced them at close quarters.\textsuperscript{165} Moreover, the fact that it was a civil, not a

\textsuperscript{160} Cf. Heubner 1963, 20 on the description being more appropriate of Domitian’s time; Joseph 2012b, 180-
189 on the possible continuation of the civil war theme in the reign of Domitian.
\textsuperscript{161} See more fully in section 1.4.3 below.
\textsuperscript{162} Leeman 1973, 173-186, arguing that the \textit{libido adsentandi} can be linked to this as well: ‘\textit{Libido}, \textit{licentia} is a
degenerate form of \textit{libertas}, an irrational, unrestrained propensity to do what you like.’ (181).
\textsuperscript{163} Leeman 1973, 178-179.
\textsuperscript{165} 1.1.3: \textit{mihi Galba Otho Vitellius nec beneficio nec iniuria cogniti. dignitatem nostram a Vespasiano inchoatam,
a Tito auctam, a Domitiano longius prorectam non abnuerim}; cf. Syme 1958, 176. As consul in 97, he pronounced
the eulogy of Verginius Rufus, one of the main players in the events of 68.
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foreign war which Tacitus writes about, meant that distinctions such as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ were highly problematic, that many accounts of 69 written under the Flavians were likely to be biased towards the victors of the wars and that the others may have been layered with propaganda for the other contenders, and that there will have been a collective sensitivity about recalling the painful details of a year many would have preferred to forget. Combined, this means that Tacitus must have had a wealth of material – including eyewitness reports – to rely on, but that writing *neque amore neque odio* (1.1.3) was a particular challenge.  

1.1.2 THE SURVEY: STATUS URBIS (1.4-11)  
AND MENS EXERCITUUM (1.8-11)

The situation in the city is marked by diverging emotions. Among the civilians, the more honourable part of the population – the senators, respectable equestrians, the *pars populi integra* and the dependants of the accused and the exiled – express joy at Nero’s fall, while the basest elements – the *plebs sordida*, the depraved slaves and those who had profited from Nero’s disgraces – are sorrowful and prone to rumour (1.4.2-3). But, as Tacitus notes, even the delight of the more reputable citizens is not entirely selfless or noble: they are quick to take personal advantage of the situation. Galba’s inexperience as an emperor and his absence from Rome – he was still in Spain when Nero committed suicide in June 68, reaching the city only in October – causes the senators to exploit their new-found liberty more freely: *usurpata statim libertate licentius ut erga principem novum et absentem* (1.4.2). Only some Books later does Tacitus suggest what this entailed – mainly prosecution of Nero’s agents (4.42.6) – but the terms he uses to describe it here evoke indisputably negative connotations of usurpation and licence.

It is the mentality of the soldiers, however, which poses the greatest threat to Galba’s authority. One of the main features of the first three Books of the *Histories*...
is the increasing role of the military – both the provincial legions and the cohorts in Rome – in the acquisition, maintenance and transmission of imperial power, at the expense of senatorial and popular influence. As such, Tacitus devotes all but one of the chapters of the survey to the military situation, both in Rome and in the provinces. Among the military population of the city, discontent and eagerness for revolution prevail. The miles urbanus – probably the soldiers of both the Urban and the Praetorian cohorts – is prorus ad novas res due to several factors. First, because of their continuing loyalty to the Julio-Claudian house, and to Nero in particular, whom they had been persuaded to forsake only after cunning and urging: as Plutarch relates, Praetorian Prefect Nymphidius Sabinus had convinced them that Nero had already deserted them, and promised them an enormous donative in Galba’s name. This donative, however, was never paid to them by Galba, which is the cause of recurrent complaints focalized by the soldiers, who criticize the emperor’s avarice. Galba himself defends his refusal by publicly proclaiming that ‘he was wont to select, not buy, his soldiers’, a statement characterized by Tacitus as in itself noble (pro re publica honesta), but dangerous for Galba himself (ipsi anceps) in the present situation. This is a correct estimation, as will become clear; moreover, it is the first indication of what will be the main thrust of Tacitus’ (almost paradoxical) characterization of the emperor and his conduct – noble and upright in theory, outdated and dangerous in practice. Notably, the other sources report the same utterance, but they all place it after Galba’s entry into Rome; this must mean that Tacitus has deliberately transposed it, perhaps to suggest that the emperor was al-

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171 Damon 2003 ad loc. and ad 1.4.2; the fact that Tacitus does not bother to distinguish the two groups must mean that he considered them alike in terms of attitude and behaviour.
172 1.5.1; Plut. G. 2.1, 14.2.
173 1.5.1: postquam neque dari donativom sub nomine Galbae promissum; 1.5.2: nec deerrant sermones senium atque avaritiam Galbae increpantium; their anger is mentioned again in 1.18.3.
174 1.5.2: accessit Galbae vox pro re publica honesta, ipsi anceps, legi a se militem, non emi; nec enim ad hancformam cetera erant.
175 Note that the most conspicuously outdated general in the Annals, Germanicus, is depicted as behaving exactly contrarily: in 1.37.1, during the Germanic mutiny, Germanicus is pressured by the legions into paying out double the legacy promised by Augustus (1.8.1) out of his personal travelling-chest. Tacitus closes this shameful anecdote with the phrase pecunia et missio quamvis non flagitantibus oblata est – quite the opposite to Galba’s strict attitude (and one for which Germanicus is criticized by others in 1.40.1). As will be noted in the rest of this chapter, there are several similarities and differences between the portrayal of Germanicus and Galba.
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ready widely unpopular even before he entered the city.176 Like Tacitus, Plutarch evaluates the statement; but whereas Tacitus adds the nuance *ipsi aniceps*, hinting at its harmful consequences for Galba’s reputation, Plutarch is entirely positive, remarking that ‘he spoke out as became a great emperor’.177 What is remarkable, furthermore, is that Tacitus never mentions that it was Nymphidius who promised the donative in Galba’s name, probably without orders from the emperor, and that the amount promised was so high that it was impossible to pay it, even if Galba had wanted to – details that are reported by Suetonius and Plutarch.178 These facts make Galba’s reluctance to pay out the sum much more understandable and create sympathy for the difficult situation he was facing; but Tacitus deliberately leaves them out, making the emperor appear more imprudent than the parallel sources.

In addition, however, the focalizers of this censure of Galba’s refusal are also characterized, as their dissatisfaction reflects negatively on themselves. To report their rumours about Galba’s stinginess, Tacitus uses the words *avaritia* and *increpantium* (1.5.2). As Pitcher notes, Tacitus often uses the word *increpare* when the persons complaining do so for base motives; and the soldiers’ interpretation of the emperor’s frugality as avarice portrays them as greedy – an impression reinforced by their desire for *magna merita ac praemia* and their fear of missing out on these in peacetime.179 The soldiers might be right in considering Galba a stingy man, but this also depicts them as rapacious and too concerned with their personal interests.180 Indeed, later in the narrative (18.3 and 1.49.3), Tacitus agrees that Galba is frugal, even stingy, and should have paid the donative, but he does not concede that the soldiers’ demands for it were justified. He reproaches Galba not for withholding the soldiers their legitimate reward, but for not acknowledging the prevalent feeling among the military – no matter how contrary to his own sense of morality – and for

176  Suet. G. 16.1, Plut. G. 18.2 and Dio 64.3.3; Chilver 1979 *ad loc.*
177  Cf. Koestermann 1956a, 223.
178  Suet. G. 16.1: *cum in verba eius absentis iurantibus donativum grandius solito praepositi pronuntiassent*; Plut. G. 2.1-2: ‘it was *Nymphidius Sabinus* … who … promise[d] as largesse seventy-five thousand drachmas for those in service outside of Rome, a sum which it was impossible to raise without inflicting ten thousand times more evils upon the world than those inflicted by Nero’. The amounts were 30,000 HS for the Praetorian and Urban soldiers and 5,000 for legionaries respectively (Chilver 1979 *ad loc.*): an absurdly high amount, ‘double the highest known precedent’ (Damon 2003 *ad loc.*).
179  Pitcher 2007, 109-110; 1.5.1: *miles urbanus … postquam … neque magnis meritis ac praemia cundem in pace quem in bello locum … intellegit … pronus ad novas res*; cf. 1.45.1.
failing to see that he could have safeguarded his position by paying.

A similar line of reasoning applies to another of Galba’s features reproached by the soldiers: his strictness. Tacitus states that the soldiers feel throttled (angebat) by Galba’s discipline because they have been corrupted by years of service under Nero, up to the point that they are now loving the vices of their emperors as much as imperial virtues used to be revered.\textsuperscript{181} He contrasts the fame that Galba’s disciplina had gained from the soldiers in the past with the present dislike it arouses, and he shows how the military’s sense of respect is inverted. In this way, Tacitus characterizes Galba’s discipline as once laudable, but now old-fashioned; not only useless, but even counterproductive in a time when military laxity has become the norm.\textsuperscript{182} At the same time, it is a severe criticism of the mentality of the soldiers: their morals are so debased that perceive Galba’s (in itself praiseworthy) discipline as undesirable. The fact that they are the ones that make Galba’s discipline out of place, and perceive it as such, indirectly characterizes them as morally corrupt. This simultaneous characterization of Galba as old-fashioned strictly, and of the soldiers (and, in other conditions, the people) as reprehensible precisely for classifying it as such, is recurrent throughout the narrative.

Another cause of the urban soldiers’ agitation is anxiety about the potential gratia (esteem, appreciation) to be expected from an emperor who was acclaimed by the provincial legions.\textsuperscript{183} Presumably, they fear that Galba’s favour will be more inclined towards the legions who were the first to back him, and that they might not only miss out on material rewards, but also lose their position of superior influence, such as they had held under the previous emperors. As Damon notes, there is nothing to suggest that Galba treated his own legions differently; nevertheless, the urban soldiers may have feared he would, since Galba did replace their Praetorian Prefect Nymphidius Sabinus with a member of his own staff, Cornelius Laco.\textsuperscript{184} This ties in with another factor rousing the soldiers’ disaffection: the incitements to sedition of Nymphidius, who urged the soldiers to proclaim him as their emperor (imperium

\textsuperscript{181} 1.5.2: laudata olim et militari fama celebrata severitas eius angebat aspernantes veterem disciplinam atque ita quattuordecim annis a Nerone adsuefactos, ut haud minus vita principum amarent quam olim virtutes verebantur.
\textsuperscript{182} References to (praise of) Galba’s discipline are found in Suet. G. 6.3, 7.1, 9.1 and Plut. G. 17.1-2; Geiser 2007, 158-180 discusses Tacitus’ contrasting of Galba and Nero in this passage. Cf. Germanicus’ lack of discipline during the mutinies in Ann. 1.34-51, esp. 1.44 and 1.49.
\textsuperscript{183} 1.5.1: praeventamque gratiam intellegit apud principem a legionibus factum.
\textsuperscript{184} Damon 2003 ad loc.
sibi molientis) – which left many of them with a sense of guilt even after they had resisted and killed him (1.5.1-2). Tacitus does not provide any further information about Nymphidius’ attempted coup – surprisingly so, since Plutarch’s account gives him a rather important role in first aiding, and later opposing, Galba’s rise, and in influencing the attitudes of the urban soldiers.\footnote{Plut. G. 1.5, 2.1, 8-9, 11.1, 13-14. According to his version, it was Nymphidius who persuaded the Guard to defect from Nero and support Galba (G. 2.1); who sent Galba parts of Nero’s properties from Rome (11.1); enhanced his own influence in Rome so much that his colleague Tigellinus resigned his power to him and the Senate started treating him almost as emperor, and who had soldiers request that he be made sole Prefect for life (8); received help from members of the senatorial class in preparing his succession (9); who, after hearing that Laco had been appointed Prefect of the Guard, tried to pit Galba’s military officers against him and to alarm Galba with disquieting messages (13); and who unsuccessfully attempted to have the Praetorians proclaim him emperor (14). As a reaction to this, Galba executed Nymphidius’ associates, including Cingonius Varro, who had written the speech Nymphidius was to pronounce at his acclamation (14.4, 15.1).} As Koestermann and Chilver suggest, Nymphidius’ attempt to seize power, and the initial support which he gained in both military and civilian circles, are considered by Tacitus to be illustrative of the city’s prevailing frame of mind, and hence help to explain the volatility of the soldiers, and ‘foreshadowed, and even (\textit{conscientia}) made more likely, another revolt by the Praetorians’.

One consequence of the omission of the story of Nymphidius’ rise, however, is that it makes Galba’s punishments of his supporters seem more cruel and unjust than they might have been. In 1.6.1-2, Tacitus relates the emperor’s march to Rome, and the hostility which he provoked among the city’s population by executing two consulars, Cingonius and Turpilianus, and thousands of soldiers.\footnote{1.6.1-2: \textit{tardum Galbae iter et cruentum, interfectis Cingonio Varrone consule designato et Petronio Turpilianus consulari: ille ut Nymphidii socius, hic ut dux Neronis, inauditi atque indefensi tamquam innocentes perierant. introitus in urbem trucidatis tot miliibus inermium militum infaustus atque ipsius etiam qui occiderant formidolosus.} See Pomeroy 2006, 179 on the representation of Galba’s journey.} By leaving out the incriminating evidence against Cingonius, which Plutarch does include, Tacitus creates the impression that there was no ground for the execution; and the emotive phrasing \textit{inauditi atque indefensi tamquam innocentes} further enhances the indignation.\footnote{Heubner 1963 \textit{ad loc.}; Plut. G. 14.4, 15.1. In fact, Plutarch states that the executions, ‘even though just’, provoked indignation because the men had not been given a fair trial even though they were of high rank – not because they might have been innocent.} Also in other ways, Tacitus’ rendering of the episode accentuates Galba’s excessive strictness in comparison to the accounts of Suetonius, Plutarch and Dio, for

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instance by reporting the bloody results of Galba’s *severitas* almost immediately after the first reference to this trait in 1.5.2, and by using negatively charged words to describe them (*cruentum, tamquam innocentes, trucidatis, infaustus, formidolosus*). Moreover, contrary to the other sources, Tacitus does not mention Galba’s reasons for putting to death the soldiers, and he uses forceful language to express the outrage of the deed. He states that many thousands were murdered (*tot milibus*), that they were unarmed (*inermium* – note the striking juxtaposition with *militum*) and that they were slaughtered (*trucidatis*). Suetonius does not specify the number, does not mention that they were unarmed, and uses the less emotionally charged term *decimavit*; Plutarch mentions no numbers either, but he states that the soldiers had swords, were disorderly and tumultuous and were pressing Galba, and uses the word ‘murder’ (φόνου); and Dio states that the soldiers were agitating against Galba – their versions make the killing seem less arbitrary and harsh than in Tacitus’ account. Remarkably, even if Tacitus’ portrayal makes the events surrounding Galba’s march to Rome appear more cruel, he does not accord Galba a very active role in them: the emperor is never indicated as a subject of the actions, as in the parallel sources; instead, many absolute ablatives are used.

This exhibition of cruelty does not reflect well on Galba in the minds of the inhabitants of Rome; and his reputation is further damaged by the measures taken against two officials in the provinces, as narrated in the next chapter. Clodius Macer, legionary legate of Africa, had revolted and been put to death by the local procurator on Galba’s orders; the consular Fonteius Capito had been killed on the same charge by two generals of the Germanic legions, without imperial orders (1.7.1). Although Tacitus states in his authorial voice that both men had rebelled against Galba – and hence, we may infer, were justly executed – he reports rumours (*fuere qui crederent*) questioning the guilt of Capito, and denouncing Galba for sanction-
ing it, either because of the emperor’s mobilitas ingenii, or his dread of further investigation, and because it could not be undone anyway (1.7.2-3). These rumours are not reported in the parallel sources, who do relate the executions; the effect of Tacitus’ insertion is to create an image of imperial inconstancy and indifference, as well as a lack of authority.193 Tacitus then adds the authorial comment that Galba was so unpopular by now that everything he did was looked upon with the same odium.194 This may be seen as a qualification of the criticism cited just before: since Galba could no longer do any good in the eyes of the people anyway, the rumours about his behaviour might not be true. On the other hand, it also indicates to the reader that, whatever happened, the events evoked criticism of Galba’s compliance, and that any of Galba’s efforts, later in the narrative, to restore his reputation, are doomed to fail.

The impression of weakness is reinforced by other remarks and anecdotes about Galba’s inability to keep his subordinates and the other people around him in check. In the next two sentences, Tacitus describes how Galba’s old age causes slaves to hasten their pillaging, presumably because his reign – and thus their opportunity for plundering – might end soon.195 In Plutarch, it is only Titus Vinius who is represented as taking advantage of Galba’s old age and expected short reign;196 in Tacitus, ‘everything is for sale’, and slaves and freedmen alike indulge in their greed, and through their behaviour, the emperor’s reputation is tarnished as well. Although no different from the situation under Nero, the conduct of Galba’s court was not so readily accepted by the people (1.7.3: eademque novae aulae mala, aeque gravia, non aeque excusata), presumably because Galba – unlike Nero – presented himself as the advocate of discipline and frugality.197 Galba’s weakness and tolerance of the

193 Plut. G. 6.1-2, 15.2; Suet. G. 11.1 states, without any reservations, that both men were plotting against him; see Mooney 1979 ad loc. on Galba’s military image in the Suetonian passage; cf. Koestermann 1956a, 228.
194 1.7.2: inviso semel principi seu bene seu male facta parem invidiam adferebant; cf. Plut. G. 18.1, who connects it to Galba’s friendly treatment of Tigellinus. When comparing this with the result of Germanicus’ punitive measures during the mutinies in the Annals, it is notable that the latter is presented as consciously trying to avoid damage to his reputation by letting the soldiers themselves bear the ensuing odium (Ann. 1.44.3).
195 1.7.3; cf. Plut. G. 29.4 ‘they made merchandise of everything’. Galba’s year of birth is stated differently in the sources; see Chilver 1979 ad 1.49.1. In any case, he must have been in his seventies.
197 Cf. Wolff’s interpretation, cited in Heubner 1963 ad loc., which also takes into account the difference in age between Nero and Galba. As an experienced man, Galba should have been more capable of checking such licence; cf. Geiser 2007, 171, probably based on Suet. G. 14.2. Suet. G. 15.2 also criticizes Galba’s indulgence
bad behaviour of his two advisers is also signalled at the beginning of chapter 6 – ironically, immediately after the discussion of the emperor’s old-fashioned strictness, which apparently does not apply to his dealings with his closest associates. Indeed, that section on discipline ends with the authorial remark *nec enim ad hanc formam cetera erant* (1.5.2), which suggests that, while proclaiming himself as the champion of *vetus disciplina*, Galba did not live up to his own claim of strictness and incorruptibility in other situations.\(^{198}\) None of the other sources, however, qualifies Galba’s remark on not wanting to buy his soldiers through a reference to his failure to live up to his own ideals.\(^{199}\) Tacitus, on the other hand, stresses his inconsistency by outlining, in 1.6.1, how Vinius, designated *detrerimus mortalium*, and Laco, *ignavissimus* (sc. *mortalium*), are ruining Galba by shifting the hatred (Vinius) and contempt (Laco) provoked by their behaviour on to the emperor.\(^{200}\) As will be borne out by the rest of the narrative, Galba is not able to hold his own against his two depraved advisers – note how he is the passive subject of the sentence – as he does not put an end to their rapacity, and is swayed by them in all important matters; this is also the image sketched by the other sources.\(^{201}\) This is all the more serious, as their advice to the emperor is affected by self-interest, envy and rivalry among themselves, and therefore often turns out to be disastrous for Galba.\(^{202}\)

towards the crimes of those around him, contrasting it with his strictness in recovering Neronian gifts from the whole populace.

\(^{198}\) The phrase might also be interpreted as a reference to the prevailing moral atmosphere with which Galba’s stricter attitude is at variance, and therefore unsuccessful: Galba fell partly because his *olim celebrata severitas*, as exemplified by his refusal to buy the loyalty of his troops, did not correspond to the prevailing mentality (the *cetera* are then the actions and feelings of the rest of society); this is suggested by the preceding sentence on the soldiers’ dislike of his *vetus disciplina*. Most modern commentators, however, prefer the interpretation of inconsistency, and refer to Plut. *G*. 15.1 ‘for everyone expected a different mode of government, being thoroughly deceived, as is usual, by assurances made in the beginning’.

\(^{199}\) Geiser 2007, 161.

\(^{200}\) 1.6.1: *invalidum senem Titus Vinius et Cornelius Laco, alter detrerimus mortalium, alter ignavissimus, odio flagitiiorum oneratum contemptu inertiae destruebant*; the combination of the high register of *mortalium* with the harsh *detrerimus* and *ignavissimus* adds an extra sting.


\(^{202}\) The image of a slightly ignorant emperor being heavily influenced by his advisers, who are driven by self-interest and mutual rivalry, and who are convened in what turns out to be a ‘travesty’ of a traditional *consilium*, reminds the modern reader of Tacitus’ representation of the *consilia* of Claudius and Vologaeses in his later work the *Annals* (Book 12 and 15 respectively; the similarity of these two councils is explored by Clark 2011, whence [223] the designation of these councils as travesties). The extent to which the ancient reader of the *Annals* would have recalled Tacitus’ earlier depiction of Galba’s *consilium* on the adoption is impossible to
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Notably, Galba’s mental feebleness is connected to his old age and physical weakness: he is called *invalidus senex*, reminding the reader of Virgil’s depiction of the old men of Latium, and more generally, of the stock type of the *senex* from comedy.203 His age and elderly physique are criticized and ridiculed also at other points: in 1.5.2 his *senium* is condemned by the soldiers, and in 1.7.3 his elderly physical appearance elicits ridicule and disgust from parts of the population, who are accustomed to Nero’s youth and assess emperors on the basis of their beauty.204 Most of these negative comments on the emperor’s age are presented as the views of unnamed others, and judging from the tone used for narrating these – cf. 1.7.3: *ut est mos volgi* – Tacitus does not approve of their attitudes, but reports them to sketch the hostile public opinion at that time.205

The last element of disturbance in the city is the presence of soldiers from many different regions and units – *plena urbs exercitu insolito* – which had increased the revolutionary potential: *inges novis rebus materia, ut non in unum aliquem prono favore, ita audenti parata* (1.6.2). It is possible to read a foreshadowing of Otho’s coup in the adjective *audenti*, boldness being a feature with which Otho is frequently connected later in the narrative.206 Otho, however, is not otherwise named in the survey.207 Chapters 8 through 11 survey the ‘potential for turbulence’ in Rome’s provinces, and accord an ominously prominent place to those legions which will initiate the second war of the year – the Germanic armies and their commander and future emperor Aulus Vitellius – and those which will turn out victorious – the Syrian and Judaean armies of Mucianus and Vespasian.208 The future power of the Flah-
vian dynasty is explicitly foreshadowed by references to Vespasian’s son Titus and portents about their fortune. But while the troops in the East are still unmoved for now (Oriens adhuc immotus), and those in the other provinces are relatively quiet, the legions in Upper and Lower Germany are ‘vexed and angry’, quod periculosissimum in tantis viribus (1.8.2) – clear references to the revolt that will take place in Germany at the start of the year, but also to the future threat that Vespasian will pose from the East. On the one hand, these legions are proud due to their recent victory over Vindex; on the other, they fear they might not have gone over to Galba soon enough – after defeating Galba’s ally Vindex, they had initially acclaimed their own commander Verginius Rufus as emperor. In addition, they feel resentment at the murder of Fonteius Capito (cf. 1.7.1-2) and at Galba’s recall of Rufus from his command, ‘under the cloak of friendship’. After Galba came to power, the legions in Upper Germany were placed under the leadership of Hordeonius Flaccus, who lacked authority and was despised because of his age and physical and mental fragility. No complaints of the lower Germanic legions about their new general are reported, but his name – Aulus Vitellius – is portentous enough for the reader, and by adding that his only recommendation was his father’s extraordinary political career, Tacitus foreshadows the near-complete lack of virtues exhibited by Vitellius later in the narrative, after his own accession. Another factor in the soldiers’ volatility is suggested by Tacitus’ remarks on the relatively quiet state of the troops in Britain and Illyricum, which he attributes partly to their being separated from other armies (1.9.2-3). This also, retrospectively, casts an added shadow on the earlier observation about Rome being full of soldiers from different regiments (1.6.2) – nothing good can possibly come from that.

Furhmann 1960, 259 rightly draws attention to the difference in treatment between the two regions: whereas Tacitus describes the collective mentality of the soldiers in the case of the Germanic legions, in the East he focuses on the individual commanders Vespasian and Mucianus.  

209 1.10.3; Miller 1977, 16.  
211 1.8.2; cf. Plut. G. 10.3-4.  
212 1.9.1; as Damon 2003 ad loc. notes, this is indeed borne out by the following narrative, e.g. at 1.54.2 and 1.56.1.  
213 1.9.1: inferioris Germaniae legiones diutius sine consulari fuere, donec missu Galbae A. Vitellius aderat, censoris Vitellii ac ter consulii filius: id satis videbatur. The mood among the Germanic legions is further elaborated in 1.51-55.
1.1.3 THE SITUATION AT THE START OF THE NARRATION

The status quo at the beginning of 69, then, as sketched by Tacitus, is one of extreme discontent, anxiety and instability, both in Rome and in the provinces. One of the largest armies of the Empire is in an irascible state of mind – cf. the terms irati, indignabantur, furentes and accendebantur in 1.8 – and cannot be controlled by its commander. Rome is full of soldiers dissatisfied with Galba’s leadership and with (what they perceive as) a lack of recognition, of rapacious slaves and freedmen, a disgruntled proletariat, and upper classes which take advantage of the absence of the emperor, while all of these groups have developed a hostile attitude towards Galba. The city is ‘crowded with the disaffected and the armed’ ready to support anyone putting himself forward, and the situation is characterized by a general collapse of morality and military discipline. As some commentators note, Tacitus seems to exaggerate the disaffection: he had, after all, stated that the respectable part of the population was filled with joy at the change of ruler, and the urban soldiers seem better disposed towards the emperor in Plutarch’s account. Nevertheless, as Koestermann notes, the attitude of the city’s population has made an about-turn, from their initial joy at Nero’s downfall in 1.4.2 to their unfavourable estimation of Galba’s weakness and age compared with Nero in 1.7.2-3. Moreover, all of the groups reviewed are said to be stirred by the discovery that ‘an emperor could be made elsewhere than in Rome’ (1.4.2).

Importantly, as Fuhrmann notes, Tacitus clearly distinguishes between the situations in Rome and among the Germanic legions, discussing the state of affairs separately and postponing the arrival, in Rome, of the news of Vitellius’ acclamation until after Galba’s adoption of Piso and his ensuing death. As a result, he differentiates between the reasons for Galba’s failure and Otho’s successful coup in Rome on the one hand, and the elevation of Vitellius in Germany on the other – much

215  Chilver 1979, 57-58; Damon 2003 ad 1.5.1 praeeventamque gratiam, pointing out their sincere defence of Galba in Plut. G. 14. Koestermann 1956a, 222 rightly notes that the frequency of references to Galba’s strictness, frugality and age is due to the focus of much of the survey on the military’s attitude towards the emperor, because it is this group which will have a decisive role in the course of events; a fuller character sketch is provided only in the obituary.
216  Koestermann 1956a, 229-230.
more so than, for instance, Plutarch.\textsuperscript{217} Moreover, by inserting several ominous references to Vitellius’ future usurpation while deferring any certain knowledge about this in Rome until after Galba’s reign, Tacitus imbues the actions of both Galba’s and Otho’s parties with a sense of futility.\textsuperscript{218} The emperor himself is depicted in the first eleven chapters as a elderly fragile man, whose old-fashioned sternness found favour in previous times, but who fails to understand the present situation and is now hopelessly outmatched by widespread corruption and cunning, self-interested advisers – an image which is continued in the rest of the narrative. By characterizing Galba as such, Tacitus implies that Galba will not be capable to confront and resolve the problems outlined in the survey. Even before the narration starts, then, Tacitus has presented the reader with a recipe for disaster of which the narrative’s characters are as yet unaware.

It is furthermore notable that Tacitus concentrates mainly on the opinions, attitudes and actions of the military – those of the people and Senate are relatively underrepresented.\textsuperscript{219} Criticisms of Galba are often focalized through the soldiers, Tacitus stresses Galba’s inability to understand the mood of the troops and his difficulties of keeping them in check, and his characterization of the emperor highlights those particular features of the emperor which displeased the military: his frugality and strictness. And whereas Tacitus only discusses these shortcomings in a military sphere – e.g. Galba’s refusal to pay out the donative – Suetonius and Plutarch also relate anecdotes about these traits in other contexts.\textsuperscript{220} Rather little is said about the senators’ view on Galba or the emperor’s problems in the civil sphere, for instance his shortage of financial funds. As will be seen in the next sections, this tendency is continued throughout the narrative, testifying to the central importance of the military in the course of events of 69.

\textbf{Comparison with the parallel sources}

Tacitus’ representation of the reputation of Galba and the general mood at the start of 69, although largely corresponding to the parallel sources in the ‘bare facts’, is

\textsuperscript{217} Fuhrmann 1960, 269-271.
\textsuperscript{218} Fuhrmann 1960, 271, citing 1.30.3 and 1.40.2.
\textsuperscript{219} On the relative narrative importance of the Senate, people and military, and the predominance of the latter, see Chilver 1979, 47; Koestermann 1956a, 218-223; Sage 1990, 908-917; Morgan 2006, 6-7.
\textsuperscript{220} E.g. Suet. G. 12.3 on Galba’s dislike of luxury at a banquet and his small rewards to a steward and a flute player; Plut. G. 11.1 on Galba’s refusal to use the sumptuous furniture sent to him.
quite different in tone from the other accounts: it is darker, more complex, and more attentive to both Galba’s shortcomings and the instability and corrupt mentality of the age.\textsuperscript{221} Tacitus repeatedly uses various devices – among which suggestion, omission, forceful language, overt comment, and significant juxtaposition – to make Galba’s actions appear harsher than in the other sources, and to raise questions about their legitimacy; but at the same time, he accords them a more balanced judgment because he takes the circumstances into account. Suetonius’ biography rather straight-forwardly portrays a man whose achievements before 68-69 had been laudable, but who turned into a cruel, greedy and hated ruler after gaining power.\textsuperscript{222} On the one hand, this almost unequivocally negative picture arises because he reports many more acts of Galba’s that provoked criticism than Tacitus does.\textsuperscript{223} On the other hand, Suetonius hardly qualifies and contextualizes these criticisms: he does not provide many indications that the discontent with Galba was at least partly due to the particular frame of mind of the various groups at that time. For instance, when Tacitus states that Galba was considered overly strict by the soldiers, he adds that that was because of their own laxity (1.5.2). Tacitus generally paints a rather negative picture of military discipline and morality, which explains why Galba’s old-fashioned strictness – which is actually praised by him in 1.5.2 – did not go down well with that particular group. And when he reports popular ridicule of the emperor’s age and appearance, Tacitus censures the detractors (1.5.2: \textit{increpantium}; 1.7.3: \textit{ut est mos volgi}).

In Tacitus, some of Galba’s traits fail because they do not suit the context, not because they are flawed in themselves; the emperor’s inadequacy often seems to lie in his inability to see the mismatch, or his powerlessness in the face of manipulating figures like Vinius and Laco. These are without doubt serious shortcomings, but they are of a different nature than, for instance, the sloth and gluttony of Vitellius.

\textsuperscript{221} Since Dio’s (epitomized) account is too short to make any meaningful observations on general tendencies, I will omit it from the following comparison; see Murison 1999, 1-27 on the extant text, with 23-24 on Dio’s view of Galba and Otho.


\textsuperscript{223} E.g. Suet. G. 12.1 (rumours about Galba’s punishments of, and greed towards, cities in Spain and Gaul); 12.2 (the dismissal of the Germanic imperial bodyguard on suspicion of their inclination towards Dolabella); 12.3 (stories about his frugality); 13.1 (public ridicule of his age and frugality); 14.3 (reluctance to grant privileges); 15.1 (limitations on the holding of offices).
Suetonius, by contrast, writes that Galba’s reputation for cruelty and avarice was both ‘confirmed and enhanced’ by his entry into Rome (G. 12.1), thereby appearing to corroborate the initial impression without reservations. Although he does acknowledge uncertainty about the truth value of certain stories (G. 12.3), Suetonius suspends his judgment entirely; when Tacitus expresses hesitation about hearsay, he adds the caution that everything Galba did was interpreted for the worst (1.7.2), thereby diminishing somewhat the credibility of the rumours. And when relating the Germanic legions’ anger with Galba, Suetonius also uses strong terms – fremebat, fraudari (G. 16.2) – but does not attribute to the soldiers a similar burning rage and contempt for their commander as Tacitus does, and so depicts a less unstable and dangerous situation for the emperor. Suetonius’ portrait of Galba allows less nuance than Tacitus’ and pays considerably less attention to the circumstances which determined both Galba’s actions and their evaluation – circumstances which Tacitus depicts as so difficult that they mitigate Galba’s failures somewhat. Suetonius, of course, is writing biography rather than historical narrative, but the near-absence of a broader perspective results in a more one-dimensional picture of the emperor.

Plutarch’s narrative of the events before Galba’s adoption of Piso leans more towards the other end of the spectrum: of denouncing the spirit of the military and the corruption of the people around the emperor to such an extent that it almost acquits Galba of any responsibility for his own severe misjudgment of the situation. In general, Plutarch’s account of the events before the start of 69 is much more detailed than Tacitus’, and he pays attention to the impact of the circumstances, for instance in influencing people’s assessment of Galba’s conduct. His portrayal of the mood in the city and the Empire at the beginning of 69 is also broadly similar to that of Tacitus. Plutarch, also, is more unambiguously positive about the

224 Cf. Venini 1977 ad loc.
225 Cf. Murison 1992, 57; Benediktson 1997 on the correspondence between Galba’s behaviour and that of his ancestors in Suetonius.
227 E.g. Plut. G. 3.2: ‘But his simple and contented way of living, the sparing hand with which he dealt out money, always avoiding excess, were counted unto him, when he became emperor, as parsimony, so that the reputation which he bore for moderation and self-restraint was an insipid sort of thing;’ cf. 18.1 and 18.3.
228 Plut. G. 18.3: ‘But the agitation at Rome was still smouldering, and at the same time a certain respect for Galba’s presence blunted and delayed the spirit of revolution, and the absence of any manifest occasion for a change repressed and kept under cover, somehow or other, the resentment of the soldiers.’
THE BACKGROUND OF THE ADOPTION

emperor than Tacitus. Several positive characteristics and deeds of the emperor are mentioned, and even though he does often show the negative perceptions of Galba among various groups of people, Plutarch himself does not often criticize Galba, and he sometimes qualifies popular reproaches with reference to the critics’ wrong expectations.229 Moreover, most of the odium incurred by Galba’s actions is said to have been brought about by the actions of the evil Titus Vinius; for instance, Galba’s denial of honours to Verginius Rufus – a cause of dissatisfaction among the Germanic legions in Tacitus – is attributed to Vinius’ jealousy.230 Apart from his corrupt adviser Vinius opposing Galba, there is the wicked Nymphidius Sabinus, and the collaboration of the senatorial class with him.231 Equally important is the unruliness of the soldiers, with which Plutarch opens his account and which he describes as one of the main causes of the civil wars of 68-69: ‘Many dire events, and particularly those which befell the Romans after the death of Nero … show plainly that an Empire has nothing more fearful to show than a military force given over to untrained and unreasoning impulses. … [T]he Roman Empire was a prey to convulsions and disasters like those caused by the Titans of mythology, being torn into many fragments, and again in many places collapsing upon itself, not so much through the ambition of those who were proclaimed emperors, as through the greed and licence of the soldiery, which drove out one commander with another as nail drives out nail.’232 Plutarch sometimes even omits information explaining the military’s violent dissatisfaction, for example Galba’s discharge of several military tribunes, related by Tacitus in 1.20.2-3.233 Plutarch, then, attributes the disasters inflicted on the state in this period to the mentality of the soldiers and the corruption of those in power at Rome, thereby exculpating Galba himself to some extent. Tacitus, on the other hand, frequently draws attention to the ways in which Galba’s conduct does

231  Plut. G. 8-9, 13-14 on Nymphidius’ debased character and designs; 8.3-4, 9.4 on the senators.
232  Plut. G. 1.3-4 (my italics) with Little/Ehrhardt 1994 ad loc.; cf. 2.2-3, 6.3, 15.4, 18.2-4 for similarly negative assessments of the soldiers’ attitudes and behaviour. See Ash 1997 on Plutarch’s focus on the ‘potential destructiveness of soldiers in the grip of irrational forces’ (192), rather than on the characters and actions of Galba and Otho themselves; De Blois 2007 on Plutarch’s interest in military attitudes and failure of leadership.
233  De Blois 2014.
not meet the requirements of the situation, thus allocating responsibility for the emperor’s failure to maintain power both with Galba himself, and with the other groups in society.\footnote{Cf. Koestermann 1956b, 196.}

The first chapters of the \textit{Histories} sketch a situation of instability, insecurity about the succession, a general moral collapse as a result of civil conflicts, widespread discontent with Galba, and a lack of understanding of this on the emperor’s part. By doing so, Tacitus, much more than the parallel accounts, influences his readers’ perception of the events he will proceed to narrate. Before the reader gets to the centre piece of the Galban narrative – the emperor’s adoption of Piso – Tacitus has not only endowed the future adoption with a greater significance, but has also strongly suggested that any of Galba’s efforts to remedy the situation will be futile, and that the adoption will only have the effect of fuelling further disaffection.
1.2 Galba’s new system of imperial succession

This section examines the adoption itself: Galba’s motives for the adoption, the deliberations on a suitable candidate, and the presentation of his designated successor. Particular attention is devoted to the speech pronounced by Galba in front of his private council, in which Tacitus frames Galba’s adoption of Piso as a programmatic statement of a new general method of imperial succession. This section first discusses the preparations for the adoption, then analyses the entire speech as well as the two shorter announcements of the adoption in the Praetorian camp and the Senate, and briefly treats the direct aftermath of the adoption.

1.2.1 THE DECISION TO ADOPT (1.12-14)

The centrality of the adoption episode

‘This was the condition of the Roman state when Servius Galba, chosen consul for the second time, and his colleague Titus Vinius entered upon the year that was to be for Galba his last and for the state almost the end’ – with the repetition of the mention of the consuls of the year, Tacitus rounds off the preparatory survey and embarks upon the narrative proper.235 Within the narration of Galba’s reign, the adoption episode is, through the use of several devices, accorded a central place, especially in comparison with the parallel accounts and with the rest of the Tacitean

235 1.1.1: initium mihi operis Servius Galba iterum Titus Vinius consules erant and 1.11.3: hic fuit rerum Romanarum status, cum Servius Galba iterum Titus Vinius consules inchoavere annum sibi ultimum, rei publicae prope supremum.
depiction of Galba’s principate. Most simply, the adoption is the first actual event of the reign to be narrated. Strictly speaking, it is preceded by the announcement of the Germanic legions’ refusal to swear the oath of loyalty to Galba, and their demand for a new emperor (1.12.1). However, this cannot be considered an ‘event’ on its own, since its background and particulars are not mentioned at all; rather, it serves to explain why Galba decides to carry out the adoption, about which he had been thinking for some time, at this specific moment. As Damon notes, the adoption is only one of Galba’s ‘efforts to shore up his position’ related in chapters 12-20, including financial and disciplinary measures. However, these other two – an attempt to recover the gifts distributed by Nero, and the dismissal of four tribunes – are only narrated after the adoption, in chapter 20, even though at least the first of these must be placed some months earlier, as Suetonius and Plutarch do. This distortion of the sequence of events, which can only be deliberate, makes the adoption into the first act of the reign and hence enhances its importance by its emphatic placement. Another aspect of chronology further underlines the significance of the adoption: indications of temporality. As Damon notes, the dating of the events in the first two weeks of the year is exceptionally precise in comparison with the rest of the Histories. The mutiny of the Germanic legions occurs at the beginning of the year (1.12.1: paucis post kalendas Ianuarias), people in the city had been talking about the question of the succession for months (1.12.2: per illos menses), the announcement of the adoption to the soldiers is dated to the 10th of January (1.18.1: quartum idus Ianuarias), the period between the adoption and Otho’s usurpation consists of four days (1.19.1: sequenti quadriduo, quod medium inter adoptionem et caedem fuit), the coup itself takes place on the 15th (1.27.2: octavo decimo kalendas

236 Generally on the structure of these chapters see Miller 1977 and Morgan 1993; Fuhrmann 1960 on Books 1 to 3, with particular attention to Tacitus’ manipulation of chronology. Cf. Whitton 2007, 83-86 on the ‘privileged presentation’ of Galba’s adoption speech.
237 1.12.2: maturavit ea res consilium Galbae iam pridem de adoptione secum et cum proximis agitantis.
238 Damon 2003, 125-126.
239 Plut. G. 16.2 and Suet. G. 15.1 both put it before the mutiny of the Germanic legions, as observed by Chilver 1979 ad loc., who notes that, even if proxima … cura (1.20.1) does not necessarily refer to the temporal sequence but to the relative importance, Tacitus still suggests that these measures were effected after the adoption.
240 Contra Chilver 1979 ad loc., who accusses Tacitus of carelessness.
241 Damon 2003, 126 (ad 12.1 paucis post etc.) notes that Book 1 contains more precise dates (9 in total) than any other Book, and that 8 of these fall in the period 1-15 January.
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Februarias), and finally Piso in his speech refers back to his adoption five days earlier (1.29.2: sextus dies agitur).

Tacitus also manipulates time in another way to draw attention to the adoption: he slows down the narrative pace through an extensive and detailed depiction of the episode. The narrative rhythm in Book 1 is remarkably varied: after the prologue (1.1-3), the next eight chapters offer an overview of events and situations of almost the whole of the the previous year (1.4-11); then follow two chapters on the background and preparations for the adoption (1.12-1.13); then four chapters covering the actual adoption, which probably did not take longer than an hour (1.14-1.17); next, one day, January 10, of formal announcements of the adoptions in the Praetorian camp and the Senate in 1.5 chapter (1.18-1.19.1); seven chapters for the events of the following four days, but consisting mostly of the description of the background to Otho’s coup (1.19.2-1.26); 21 chapters on the events of the single day of Otho’s usurpation (1.27-1.47); and finally, the last three chapters are devoted to obituaries of Piso, Titus Vinius and Galba, and the mood in the city (1.48-1.50). As indicated by variations in rhythm, then, the two events on which Tacitus concentrates are the adoption (which occupies 8 of the 39 chapters of Galba’s reign) and its direct result, Otho’s coup. The narrative pace is especially low in chapters 1.15-16, which form the central part of the narration of the episode, depicting Galba’s ‘adoption speech’ in front of his consilium. This marks out the adoption, and above all Galba’s accompanying address, as particularly important. By contrast, in the biographers’ narration of the life – or, in the case of Plutarch, reign – of Galba, the adoption does not take up such a large portion of the text. In the remainder of the Histories, moreover, the issue of succession, although a recurrent theme, is never again discussed at such length.

Furthermore, the mere inclusion of such a long (two chapters) and grandiloquent speech of Galba’s in oratio recta, and the explicitness with which the emperor is made to talk about the matter of the succession – employing terms like successor and hereditas – draws attention to the event. Galba’s speech – as Whitton

242 The narrative rhythm of the Histories as a whole is quite suggestive, if only because the single year 69 takes up more than one quarter of the total work (the year 70 starts in Hist. 4.38), which covers 28 years in total.
243 In Plutarch’s Life – which, since it starts with Galba’s role in the events of 68 rather than with the previous part of his life, is more of a narration of Galba’s principate – 4 (19-21, 23) out of a total of 29 chapters are devoted to the adoption; this is about one seventh of the entire work (in Tacitus’ narration, it is around one fifth). In Suetonius’ biography, only one (17) of 23 chapters is concerned with it.
notes, the longest one in *oratio recta* in the whole extant *Histories*, and followed by
two briefer announcements of the adoption to the soldiers and the senators – is
matched by two other, corresponding speeches by the two candidates for the suc-
cession, Piso and Otho, in 1.29-30 and 1.37-38 respectively.244 These, too, are of
some length and are reported in *oratio recta*. Conversely, no speeches in *oratio recta*
are included by either Suetonius or Plutarch. Last, as Damon notes, the material
in chapters 1.12-20 ‘is fuller, more accurate, and more richly elaborated’ than that
in the parallel accounts.245 In various ways, then, Tacitus makes the adoption of
Piso into a central event of Galba’s reign – even if it did not actually lead anywhere.
There was, clearly, a sound historical reason for this: it was probably Galba’s prefer-
ence for Piso – made explicit in the adoption – that provided the immediate cause
for Otho’s usurpation. However, this chapter will argue that this is not the main
explanation for the extensive coverage of the adoption by Tacitus: it also functions
as a convenient vehicle for him to raise particular questions about the nature and
transmission of imperial power.

*The immediate reason for the adoption (1.12)*

Shortly after the beginning of the year 69, Galba receives news of the rebellion
among the legions of Upper Germany, who demand another emperor, to be cho-
sen by the Senate and people of Rome (1.12.1). Even though Tacitus suggests that
the soldiers’ reference to the Senate and people is insincere, their appeal to the
sovereignty of these traditional cornerstones of the Roman state would seem like
the kind of statement that fits with Galba’s upright, ‘constitutionalist’ character to
which Tacitus repeatedly draws attention. Nonetheless, the next sentence imme-
diately makes clear that Galba will not honour this demand, but instead decides to
speed up his plans for adoption. He had been deliberating on adoption previously,
both by himself (*secum*) and with his associates (*cum proximis*); all the others (*tota
civitate*), including the Senate, can merely speculate about the outcome. By relating
the news of the rebellion to Galba’s decision to adopt, Tacitus indirectly represents
Galba as thinking that his lack of a successor is the main reason for the soldiers’
discontent – a thought that he makes explicit later, in his speech: *audita adoptione
desinam videri senex, quod nunc mihi unum obicitur* (1.16.3). Galba’s clear lack of

244 Whitton 2007, 83.
245 Damon 2003, 126.
self-knowledge and understanding of the situation creates a touch of dramatic irony for the reader, who has just read Tacitus’ extensive outline of the *mens exercituum*, and consequently knows that the adoption will not be the solution to their criticisms.

The city had been rife with rumours for several months already, primarily because of people’s licence and fondness for that kind of tattle (*primum licentia ac libidine talia loquendi*), and second, because of Galba’s old age (*dein fessa iam aetate Galbae*), which presumably led people to think that he would soon pass away and be succeeded.246 Here, too, the persons spreading the rumours are not portrayed favourably by Tacitus: they are credited with licence, love of gossip and foolish hope, and denied sound judgment and love for the state.247 Moreover, the combination of *fessus* with the noun *aetas* ‘has a strong emotive force, with overtones of compassion for the helplessness of age’;248 Galba is almost represented as a victim of people’s hostile rumours. The emperor’s infirmity is mentioned again in the next sentence, where his physical weakness is connected to his lack of steadfastness and failure to control his associates: Tacitus adds that hate for Titus Vinius, who was becoming more powerful and unpopular by the day, was another motive for the people’s rumours (1.12.3). The emperor’s *facilitas* incited or magnified the greed of his friends: his feebleness and credulity made crimes worthwhile and not very risky. This covetousness of Galba’s ‘friends’ is denoted by the word *hiare*, which is found in satire to describe eager buyers, legacy-hunters and overly ambitious candidates for office.249 The specific combination of *cupiditas* with *hiare* is only found elsewhere in Seneca’s *De Beneficiis*, where it refers to people’s insatiable greed; in addition, the phrase *minore metu et maiore praemio peccaretur* echoes a Ciceronian formulation in the context of merciless profit-hunting.250 Galba’s friends are portrayed as ruthless vultures, and Galba is no better than they are for allowing these crimes.

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246 1.12.2; cf. also 2.1.1 for a similar statement, with the addition of rumours that Galba would adopt Titus.
247 1.12.3: *paucis iudicium aut rei publicae amor: multi stultae spe, prout quis amicus vel cliens, hunc vel illum ambitiosis rumoribus destinabunt.*
248 Miller 1986, 94.
249 Hor. Sat. 1.2.88 and 2.5.56; Pers. 5.176; cf. Hist. 3.55.2, with the same connotations (Damon 2003 ad loc.).
The consilium eligendi successoris and the comitia imperii (1.13-14)

The passage on Galba’s facilitas is immediately followed by a narratorial sketch of the balance of power at the court, which reinforces the impression of imperial impotence. The actual power lies with Vinius, Laco and Icelus, while Galba is not even named as a party of influence over his own reign – except as the patron of Icelus, who is now dominating his former master Galba: an ironical reversal of power. While a previous chapter had already indicated their immorality and bad influence on Galba (1.6.1), here it is their mutual hostility which is signalled: they are divided into two factions in the consilium eligendi successoris. Vinius declares himself in favour of Otho; Laco and Icelus are united in their opposition of his proposal, even if they do not support any other particular candidate: consensu non tam unum aliquem fovebant quam alium. Presumably, they oppose Otho’s candidacy not just because they do not want Vinius to get his way on principle, but also because they fear that he will gain personally from Otho’s adoption. After all, as follows immediately, Vinius was Otho’s friend, and rumours were circulating about a future marriage connection through Vinius’ daughter. This personal link between Vinius and his candidate is (indirectly) presented as one of the objections of Galba against Otho; the emperor will express his aversion to nepotism explicitly in his speech (1.15.2). The danger of the interference of private connections with politics is furthermore hinted at through the wording of the rumour, which might allude to the often-used combination of gener and socer in descriptions of the troubled relationship between Pompey and Caesar, privately connected but politically opposed,
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in the last decades of the Republic. This indirect comparison suggests that, while it is bad enough that individuals are inflicting ruin on the state through civil war for their own good, it is even worse in this case, since neither Vinius nor Otho are great men like Pompey or Caesar – a comparison also made explicitly by the people after Otho’s usurpation (1.50.2-3).

A notable first-person narratorial remark follows: *credo et rei publicae curam subisse, frustra a Nerone translatae si apud Othonem relinqueretur* (1.13.2), which is explained by the subsequent paragraphs, introduced by *namque*. The *credo* ... *subisse* part is an authorial remark; the *futura ... relinqueretur* appendix must be an indirect rendering of (Tacitus’ assumption of) Galba’s thoughts: he considered the state to have been ‘wrested from Nero in vain if it were to be left in the hands of (an) Otho’. As observed by Haynes, this is the only time in all of Tacitus’ surviving works where he uses the word *credo* in his function as a narrator (i.e. not for a secondary narrator in a speech); in addition, this is one of the rare places where Galba acts as a focalizer and the reader gets some insight into his thoughts. As such, this claim – that Galba is concerned for the state, and that he considers Otho’s potential effect on the state similar to the disasters inflicted upon it by Nero – must be considered especially significant. In fact, Galba has already been credited with care for the state in 1.5.2 (*Galbae vox pro re publica honesta*), and we will see that the subsequent narrative and Galba’s speech also repeatedly emphasize this theme, as well as the connection between Otho and Nero.

This link is immediately taken up in the rather long explanation for Galba’s objection to Otho in 1.13.3-4. Otho had spent his youth heedlessly and wildly, and acquired Nero’s favour through a shared interest in *luxuria*. He facilitated Nero’s relationship with Poppaea as his *consicus libidinum*, but was sent to Lusitania under the cloak of a legateship (*specie legationis*) because Nero suspected him of feelings

256 Damon 2003 *ad loc.*, with references. Pompey was married to Caesar’s daughter Julia. Geiser 2007, 177 adds that it would place Galba in a difficult position if his successor were also under a great obligation to one of Galba’s advisers.

257 My parentheses: I do not see why *Othonem* should be rendered by ‘an Otho’ (as Moore does), since Tacitus is talking very specifically about the Otho and the Nero.

258 Haynes 2003, 49.

259 Suet. O. 2.2 also mentions a sexual connection between the two men; Plut. G. 19.3 and Plin. *NH* 13.22 provide details on Otho’s *luxuria*. Suet. O. 2.1 also mentions Otho’s night-time behaviour, which might have served as one of the grounds for classifying Otho’s younger years as *petulanter* (translated by Damon 2003 *ad loc.* as ‘aggression that falls short of dangerous’).
Galba

towards Poppaea. Otho administered his province with kindness (comiter), was the first to join Galba’s party in Tarraconensis, and continued to be his most eager supporter as long as the war lasted (donec bellum fuit) – the implication is probably that his first place of influence was taken over by Vinius and Laco once Galba became emperor. He had conceived hopes of being adopted, which he clutched to more ardently every day (acrius in dies rapiebat), as the majority of the soldiers favoured him (favitibus plerisque militum) and Nero’s court, too, was well-disposed towards him, because he was, or he seemed, similar to Nero (prona in eum aula Neronis ut similem). One of Galba’s main objections to Otho’s candidature for adoption is also based on the latter’s perceived similarity to Nero. The passage evokes a mixed picture of Otho – heedless, luxurious and associated with Nero on the one hand; kind, enthusiastic and supporting Nero’s rival on the other. For the moment, Tacitus’ verdict on Otho is suspended, but his later narration of Otho’s suicide (2.46-50) certainly suggest that this is not the whole truth. By mentioning the soldiers’ and court’s support for Otho, nevertheless, Tacitus also signals to the reader that Galba is severely misjudging the actual bases of power in the state, and at the same time foreshadows Otho’s elevation by the military.

In the next chapter, Galba’s anxiety over the consequences of the Germanic revolt – he does not even trust the urban soldiers anymore – leads him to proceed to what he regards as the remedium unicum: a comitia imperii, or imperial election. Considering Galba’s ample military experience, his (in)famous discipline, and Tacitus’ addition that nihil adhuc de Vitellio certum, it seems somewhat strange that he saw no other option to curb the soldiers’ behaviour than adopting a successor. On the other hand, Galba might have intended Piso to act as an intermediary for him-

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260 Much has been written about the form and function of the Poppaea-story here, since it is also preserved in the parallel sources and Tacitus’ own Annals (Ann. 13.45-46, Plut. G. 19.2-20.1, Suet. O. 3, Dio 61.11.2-4) but with different details in every instance. Chilver 1979 ad loc. discusses the use of sources; Damon 2003 ad loc. provides references to the main studies. Suet. O. 3.2 uses similar terms to describe Otho’s removal to Spain; Plut. G. 20.1 overtly calls it an ‘exile’, and this is also the term used by Tacitus to describe Otho’s thoughts in 1.21.1: alterius exilii honorem. The story of Otho’s involvement in Nero’s relationship with Poppaea, and his subsequent removal fulfils a different function in Tacitus – where it emphasizes the close connection between the two men (and thus explains Galba’s objection to Otho), and clarifies how Otho could be the first to join Galba’s rebellion in Spain – than in Suetonius and Plutarch, where it functions as Otho’s motive to betray Nero for Galba (explicitly in Suet. O. 4.1); Damon 2003 ad loc.

261 Plut. G. 20.2-3 supplies details on Otho’s support of Galba.

262 The criteria of selection for a successor attributed to Galba by Tacitus are treated in the next section (1.3).
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self, for instance in confronting revolts, such as happens in 1.19.2, when the Senate contemplates sending Piso along with a delegation to the rebellious legions in Germany. Nevertheless, that Galba considers the adoption the only remedy to the situation illustrates how much the Tacitean Galba is out of touch with the reality of the situation.263 The phrase comitia imperii at first sight seems to imply that Galba is prepared to have people vote for a new princeps, in accordance with the legions’ demand that the Senate and people choose a new emperor; but it turns out to be the contrary – a meeting of a select party of Galba, Vinius, Laco (without Icelus), the consul designate and the Urban Prefect, in which Galba presents his chosen successor.

After devoting some words to his own old age, Galba sends for Piso to present him to the council.264 Before introducing him, Tacitus comments on the selection of Piso, giving two possible explanations: it was either Galba’s own choice, or – and this option is attributed to indefinite focalization – Laco had urged him, because Piso was a friend of his.265 In view of Tacitus’ regular use of ‘loaded alternatives’, in which one of the options is suggested to be the more likely on the basis of its placing and elaboration, the latter explanation – placed in the more emphatic last position, and both longer and more detailed – should in all probability be preferred.266 Moreover, by adding, in his authorial voice and in the indicative mood (fovebat, addiderat), statements which accord with the hypothesis of Laco’s support for Piso, Tacitus implicitly accepts the rumour as fact. Furthermore, such a scenario is in line

263 Murison 1993, 63-64 argues that the adoption was not so much Galba’s solution to the military rebellion, but his attempt to show the legions ‘who was the boss’, but that indeed, ‘suggests that Galba was unaware of, or at least chose to ignore, the realities of power in the Roman state’ (64).
264 Suetonius and Plutarch, however, state that Galba had not consulted anyone, but picked out Piso quite unexpectedly: Plut. G. 23.1: ‘suddenly, and without any previous notice of his intention’; Suet. G. 17: repente e media salutantium turba adprehendit.
266 See Sullivan 1976 and Whitehead 1979 on alternative explanations. Damon’s (2003 ad loc.) argument for her statement that Tacitus does not decide between the two alternatives – namely, because Laco’s interference is contradicted by the earlier Laco atque Icelus consensu non tam unum aliquem fovebant quam alium – is strong. Nevertheless, that remark referred to the factionalism among Galba’s advisers, and that impression comes out stronger when Laco and Icelus do not have an alternative to Otho, but simply oppose Vinius’ plan because it is Vinius’. Their consensus, then, is about opposing Vinius, not about supporting Piso: Laco may not have let Icelus in on his plan. That the story of Laco’s influence is not found in the parallel tradition need not be problematic: neither is the scene of the comitia imperii as a whole.
with the image of Galba’s previously signalled subordination to his advisers. The suggestion, then, was Laco’s; but – knowing Galba’s aversion against nepotism – he had commended Piso cunningly by concealing his acquaintance with him (callide ut ignotum), and Piso’s good reputation (prospera de Pisone fama) bolstered Laco’s recommendation.267 Here, Laco appears as the shrewdest of the three imperial advisers: both Vinius and he had put forward their personal favourites, and although the self-interest inherent in the proposals is insinuated by rumours in both cases, Laco emerges victorious because he understands how Galba should be handled.268 More importantly, by strategically inserting a suggestion of Galba’s obedience immediately before the adoption speech, Tacitus strongly influences the reader’s perception of the emperor’s pompously proclaimed principles about the selection of his successor.269

The chapter ends with a brief introduction of Piso, describing his ancestry and character. The son of M. Crassus and Scribonia, he derived his nobility from both his mother’s and his father’s side.270 He was a man of the ‘old school’ both in look and manner, and it was exactly this aspect which found favour with Galba, who, after all, has been characterized so far as a man of old-fashioned morality and strictness (1.14.2). However, Tacitus adds that this part of Piso’s character was suspected by those who ‘took a harsher view’ – an indication that the adoption will not be received particularly well. Remarkably, even though the chapter is about the choice of Galba’s successor, Tacitus does not allow the emperor himself to speak. His own stance in the matter is conspicuously lacking: the people gossip, his associates are fighting amongst themselves over the candidates, but we hear just one indirect line of thought from Galba. Even in his final choice for Piso Tacitus casts doubt on Galba’s ability to make independent decisions. Only when the choice has been made and has to be announced publicly is Galba accorded a speech. Yet, judging from what Tacitus has told the reader, both in the survey and in the chapters leading

267 There is a sense of irony in the prospera fama, as his reputation might have been favourable, but Piso’s actual life was devoid of all prosperity – a contrast brought out more clearly in his obituary: fama meliore quam fortuna (1.48.1).
268 This is also the case in 1.32-33, where Laco’s rhetoric convinces Galba.
269 Contra Koestermann, who states that Galba is portrayed as acting independently in this episode, and that the insertion of Laco’s proposal hardly weakens this impression (Koestermann 1956b, 196-197).
270 1.14.2. On Piso’s ancestry, see Syme 1986, 260, 276-281 and stemma VII; Kragelund 2002; cf. Syme 1960 and PIR² C300. Piso’s full name is Lucius Calpurnius Piso Frugi Licinianus; his father had been consul ordinarius in AD 27 and had been rewarded triumphal decorations after Claudius’ British campaign.
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up to the actual adoption, the reader will proceed to the speech with grave doubts about Galba’s ability to solve the problems facing him with this adoption.

1.2.2 GALBA’S SPEECH IN FRONT OF HIS COUNCIL (1.15-16)

Speeches in Tacitus’ historical works

Chapters 15 and 16 are exclusively dedicated to Galba’s speech accompanying Piso’s adoption. The speech, as mentioned before, is not found in any of the parallel sources, and is widely held to be crafted by Tacitus. The more or less free composition of speeches – both in oratio recta and obliqua – is a conventional feature of ancient historiography, and can serve various purposes, such as enlivening the narrative or pausing it to mark out important moments and create suspense, providing variety, introducing and exploring particular themes from different perspectives, or providing insight into the motives of a character.271 Furthermore, since ancient rhetorical theory dictates that the way of speaking should suit the character of the speaker, addresses can function as a means of indirect characterization, through the arguments, language and stylistic elements a speaker is represented to employ.272 Indeed, there are at times clear differences in content and style between the narration (in Tacitus’ own voice) and the speeches pronounced by figures in the narrative, as well as between the individual ways of speaking of various characters.273 In addition, the context and the reactions to a speech by the listeners in the narrative can be telling about the relationship of the speaker to his audience, or the effectiveness of his arguments and particular brand of rhetoric.274 Having a character speak very often can make a point about agency, whereas the ‘denial’ of dramatic speech to a

271 On speeches in classical historiography, see e.g. Miller 1975; Marincola 2007b; Levene 2009; the essays in Pausch 2010.


273 See Adams 1973 on the vocabulary of Tacitus’ speeches; Miller 1968 and Wharton 1997 on Tiberius’ speeches. Interestingly, the survival of the official transcription of a speech of Claudius’ on a bronze tablet found at Lyons has allowed scholars to compare Tacitus’ rendering of the oration (in Ann. 11.24) with the original, and hence to draw conclusions about the individuality and historical realiblity of the speech; see e.g. Miller 1956, Griffin 1982 and, the most recent overview, Malloch 2013, 339-342.

274 See e.g. Levene 1999 and 2009; Leidl 2010.
character in the narrative can be used as a technique of ‘character denigration’. Tacitus makes repeated use of all these functions in both of his historical works, although in general, the amount of speech in Tacitus is smaller than in Sallust and Livy, and he uses less direct speech and makes his speeches usually shorter than his two predecessors. However, Tacitus’ use of speeches in the first Book of the *Histories* is remarkable in two respects: this Book contains much more *oratio recta* than any of the Books in the *Histories* and many in the *Annals*, and the individual speeches are generally longer.Four major orations are represented in *Histories* 1: Galba’s adoption speech in 1.15-16, Piso’s and Otho’s addresses to the Praetorians in 1.29-30 and 1.37-38 respectively (both treated below, sections 1.3.2 and 1.3.3), none of which are reported in the other ancient sources, and Otho’s speech to his troops in 1.83-84. In addition, there is Galba’s brief announcement of the adoption in the military camp (1.18) in *oratio obliqua*, and the paraphrase of his speech to present Piso in the Senate in 1.19. These speeches are firmly integrated in the narrative, in the sense that they introduce, or relate to, larger themes of the *Histories*; moreover, they are linked to one another through thematic and verbal parallels. Considering the literary approach to Tacitus’ writings adopted in this thesis, the extent to which these speeches are based on historical evidence or were composed by Tacitus is of less importance than the role of these speeches in their representation of the speaker and the audience, and their function within the larger narrative; therefore, historical value is not a primary issue here.

275 Scott 1998.
277 Miller 1964, 289-294; note, however, that not all of the Books have been examined. As Keitel 1991, 2773 and 1993, 40 notes, *Histories* 4 has much more speech than Book 1, but Book 1 has the largest amount of *oratio recta*. On the speeches in the *Histories*, see Sage 1990, 920-926; Keitel 1991 and 1993; Levene 1999 and 2009.
278 See Keitel 1991 and 1993 for good investigations of their function and mutual responsion. Ullmann 1927, 202-205 treats the rhetorical aspects of these speeches.
Galba's speech

Galba starts out with distinguishing his adoption of Piso from a normal, private adoption – or adrogation, as the reference to the *lex curiata* and the *pontifices* make clear. If he were adopting Piso as a *privatus*, both he and Piso would profit from the added distinction that the other's lineage would confer through the adoption:

*et mihi egregium erat Cn. Pompei et M. Crassi subolem in penates meos adsciscere, et tibi insigne Sulpiciae ac Lutatiae decora nobilitati tuae adiecisse* (1.15.1). However, the Tacitean Galba has different reasons for adopting Piso, since he is not a private person, but an emperor: *nunc me deorum hominumque consensu ad imperium vocatum*.

Galba’s presentation of his rule as a calling rather than his own choice is notable: even though his troops might have urged him to assume the imperial title, he was the one that accepted it (1.15.2: *imperium ... accepi*) and actively raised military support against Nero, as he subsequently suggests in *principatum ... bello adoptus* and later *ego cum una legione and bello ... adsciti* (1.16.3). Moreover, it is clear that his claim to divine and human consensus is void, as the previous chapters have depicted the widespread resistance against his rule; later, in chapter 18, the gods will even show their disapproval of his course of action through ominous thunder as

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279 See Whitton 2007, 86-88 for a discussion of the introductory sentence *igitur Galba adprehensa Pisonis manu in hunc modum locutus fertur*. As mentioned before, Galba’s speech exhibits many resemblances to Pliny’s *Panegyricus*; these will be more elaborately discussed below (section 1.4.3), but are already referred to in the footnotes of the present section.

280 As his father was dead, Piso was *sui iuris*, and adrogation was the appropriate form of adoption. Because of the counterfactual subjunctive of *si te privatus lege curiata apud pontifices ... adoptarem*, some scholars have argued that Tacitus’ Galba does not adopt Piso in the *comitia*, but only later (in the camp), or not at all; cf. Heubner 1963 47-48. Indeed, it is not entirely clear when the actual adoption takes place, but the issue is not very relevant for our point, as it is not the formal procedure that interests Tacitus (and likewise Suet. G. 17.1 and Plut. G. 23.3), but the circumstances, motives and effects; cf. Murison 1991, 1698. In any case, the contrast here is not between an adrogation ‘proper’ and a kind of symbolic adoption, but between a private one, and a public/imperial one: *privatus* vs. *nunc me ... ad imperium vocatum*; cf. also Murison 1993, 71-74. Moreover, Galba, as consul and *pontifex maximus*, had some liberty to dispense with the regular procedures; the adoption, in any case, is recorded in the acts of the *Fratres Arvales*: *CIL* 6.2051 = Scheid 1998 no. 40, line 24. Cf. Plin. *Pan*. 7.5-6, 8.1 on the difference between private and imperial adoptions.

281 On consensus as the fundament of imperial power, see Flaig 1992. Plutarch’s Galba is also depicted, in similar language, as considering himself to be ‘called’ to the task rather than as having seized power himself (Plut. G. 29.2-3), while Dio (64.2.1) mentions that Galba kept voicing this conviction (see Murison 1999 ad *loc*. for the praise contained in this chapter and the next). The similarities and differences of Tacitus’ account with the parallel sources will be treated in greater detail below, section 1.4.1.

282 Morgan 2006, 22.
Galba makes his way to the Praetorian camp to announce the adoption.283

When adopting a successor to the throne, Galba continues, it is not ancestry, but rather character and patriotism that are important (praeclara indoles tua et amor patriae). The rejection of birth as a criterion for selection is both the main point of Galba’s argumentation, and the one at which he diverges notably from the practice of Augustus, whose example he professes to follow: Galba cites Augustan precedent for selecting a successor and promoting him during one’s lifetime, rather than leaving the question of the succession open.284 This precautionary measure of appointing a successor, he claims, may guarantee a peaceful transmission of imperial power and spare the state the destructive civil wars which had preceded his own accession – and which might indeed arise whenever an emperor died without a designated successor.285 Considering the context – the recent rebellion of Vindex, Nero’s suicide, the rumours about the defection of the Germanic legions, and the general unrest in the city – this is an entirely valid idea. But the dramatic – or perhaps tragic – irony is obvious to the reader: the adoption of Piso will turn out to be the very event which unleashes a new civil conflict, in the form of Otho’s coup.286 This may be hinted at through Galba’s reference to the maiores nostri fighting over the Principate in combination with his explicit mention of Piso’s descent from Pompey and Crassus, two of the major figures in Rome’s late-republican turmoil, who were, moreover, involved in frequent disputes with one another. By contrast, as Galba implies with the term quiescenti, Piso will not be any match for these violent forces, as he has no political or military experience.287 Moreover, Galba’s formulation here shows that, in addition to overestimating his support, he also overrates his power by thinking that the Principate is his to give away (offeram), instead of others’, such as the soldiers’, to bestow – as will prove to be the case with all imperial accessions during the year of civil war.

In justifying the adoption of a successor, as said, Galba refers to the precedent of

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284  1.15.1: exemplo divi Augusti qui sororis filium Marcellum, dein generum Agrippam, mox nepotes suos, post-remo Tiberium Neronem privignum in proximo sibi fastigio conlocavit.
285  1.15.1; cf. Plin. Pan. 5.1.
287  Piso had only been a quindecimvir: CIL VI 31723 = ILS 240; see below, section 1.3.2, on Piso’s qualifications for the emperorship.
GALBA’S NEW SYSTEM OF IMPERIAL SUCCESSION

Augustus. But there is a fundamental difference between the practices of Augustus and Galba: Augustus selected his successors from his own family (in domo), while Galba uses the whole state as a source of potential successors (in re publica).\(^{288}\) Galba passes over his own relatives and war companions – this must refer to his kinsman Dolabella and to his supporter Otho – as well as Piso’s relatives, with the argument *neque ipse imperium ambitione accepi* (1.15.2). In other words: being an emperor – and hence, selecting a successor to the throne – should not be concerned with personal gain (such as added distinction through connection with illustrious gentes) or with private favours (rewards for supporters or relatives), but with the welfare of the state only.\(^{289}\) Augustus’ nepotism, on the other hand, is emphasized not just by contrasting *domus* with *res publica*, but also by denoting Augustus’ intended successors with kin terms indicating their relation to the emperor: *sororis filium, generum, nepotes suos, privignum*.

With *non quia propinquos … non habeam*, we reach an issue which is mentioned by both Suetonius and Plutarch, but not by Tacitus: that it is not just Galba’s old age, but more in particular his childlessness (due to the death of his two children, as Suetonius tells us) and therefore his lack of a successor of his own blood that the adoption is supposed to remedy.\(^{290}\) Tacitus’ neglect to refer to this is remarkable, as the historical Galba’s primary reason for adopting someone from outside the family may well have been his lack of sons of his own, no matter how eloquently he may have talked about the virtues of adoption – and knowing this, his speech clearly has a hint of making a virtue of necessity. Considering Tacitus’ interest in exposing people’s real motives and the hypocrisy of their arguments, and given the important role of family ties in the imperial succession under the Julio-Claudians, one might expect Tacitus to remark upon Galba’s childlessness in the context of the adoption, but he only does so at the beginning of Book 2 (2.1). Perhaps the omission of Galba’s *orbitas* serves to illustrate the emperor’s failure to understand the popular criticism of himself, which encompassed much more than just a lack of successor.\(^{291}\)

Next, Galba explains why he has chosen Piso over his elder brother, who was

\(^{288}\) 1.15.2: *sed Augustus in domo successorum quaesivit, ego in re publica.*

\(^{289}\) Plutarch’s Galba makes a similar statement (Plut. G. 21.1), and comparable views are attributed to Trajan by Dio 68.4.1-2; cf. also Plin. Pan. 5.6, 6.3-5, 7.1-3, 9.4-5, 10.3-5.

\(^{290}\) This motivation is attributed to Galba in Plut. G. 19.2 and Suet. G. 17.1; cf. Suet. G. 5 on the death of his children.

also worthy of this fortune (*dignus hac fortuna*), were it not for the fact that Piso is better, *potior* (1.15.2-3). There is an obvious sense of irony in Galba’s reference to the holding of imperial power as *fortuna* (also in 1.15.4: *fortuna nostra*), which stands in dire contrast to both his own and Piso’s fate after the adoption.292 Piso is of the right age: he is old enough not to be tempted anymore by youthful desires, and, what must probably be appended, he is still young enough to rule for a long time – and perhaps even have children of his own and build a dynasty.293 Moreover, he is of impeccable behaviour (*nihil praeteritum excusandum habeas*) – both Piso’s reputation and the absence of *cupiditates* invite a comparison with Piso’s rival, Otho, whose past behaviour and (desire for) *luxuria* and power are indirectly presented as a motive for his rejection.

Piso’s past misery – the execution of many of his family members, and his own exile294 – leads Galba to caution him for the prosperity that is to come, and which tests man’s spirit more intensely than does adversity – this commonplace suits the strict, old-fashioned emperor.295 Significantly, this statement will, in fact, be borne out by the rest of the narrative, which illustrates and comments upon the ‘arrogance of success’ of the other protagonists in the *Histories.*296 A brief digression on the corrupting force of flattery and self-interest follows: the *obsequium* (subservience), *adulatio* (adulation), *blanditiae* (flattery) and *sua cuique utilitas* (self-interest) of the people around him may weaken an emperor.297 Even if the Galba and Piso speak to each other very frankly now, others will not, so Galba states, for they are more

292 Piso’s *fortuna* is taken up again in the next sentence, and also recurs in Piso’s obituary (1.48.1: *fama meliore quam fortuna*), which also refers to his preferential treatment (*properata adoptione ad hoc tantum maior fratri praedatus est, ut prior occideretur*). The repeated mention of *fortuna* in connection with Galba (also in his obituary at 1.49.2) may allude to the emperor’s special worship of this goddess, as mentioned for instance in Suet. G. 4.3 and later in 18.2. Galba’s reverence to Fortuna is also attested on coinage: Hekster 2010, 604.

293 1.15.3. Piso was 31 at the moment of his death: 1.48.1. Cf. Plin. *Pan.* 8.4 on the youth of the adoptee.

294 One brother, Cn. Pompeius Magnus, husband of Claudius’ daughter Antonia, was executed together with his parents in 46 or 47 (Osgood 2011, 149-150); the other, M. Licinius Crassus Frugi (cos. 64) had been eliminated by Aquilius Regulus in the latter part of Nero’s reign (Griffin 1984, 178, 196). Piso himself had merely been exiled by Nero.

295 1.15.3; cf. Plin. *Pan.* 31.1 for a similar argument. The theme of prosperity being more harmful than adversity was common, being first introduced by Cato in his well-known speech *Pro Rhodiensibus* (partly preserved in Gell. NA 6.3), esp. 6.3.14.


297 1.15.4. A similar point is made in Plin. *Pan.* 85.1; both may be inspired by Cic. *Lael.* 91 (Heubner 1963 *ad loc.*; see Keitel 2006 and Whitton 2007, 94-98 for discussion of the passage).
interested in their power than in their persons, and it is easier to agree than to give good advice.298 This distinction between a person and his function is a recurring commonplace with regard to attitudes towards the emperor.299 Yet Piso will, so Galba states, uphold the *praecipua humani animi bona* with the same constancy as before: trust or loyalty (*fides*), liberty (*libertas*), and friendship (*amicitia*). In very clear terms, the Tacitean Galba shows his aversion of self-interest (*pessimum veri affectus venenum, sua cuique utilitas*) and his attachment to the ideals of frankness (*simplicissime, veri affectus*), liberty, friendship and loyalty. These are themes that recur in the coinage of the historical Galba, the rest of Tacitus’ writings, and Pliny’s *Panegyricus*.300 Moreover, the remainder of the *Histories* will show Galba’s warnings to be accurate: these traditional values will indeed be overturned in the course of the civil wars – much more so in Tacitus’ representation of the events than in, for instance, Plutarch’s account.301 With his caution for advice based on adulation and self-interest (including rivalry among the advisers), Galba displays a keen insight in the realities of imperial power – an insight which, tragically, he fails to apply to his own situation, which is characterized by misinformation, deceit and manipulation of the emperor by others.302

In chapter 16, Galba returns to the justification of the adoption. In the previous chapter, as we have seen, he had motivated his search for a successor in the whole state rather than within his own circle by referring to his care for the state and absence of self-interest and nepotism. He now introduces a second argument: that consanguineous descent from a princeps is only fortuitous and does not guarantee good governance; unrestricted choice amongst all the citizens, conversely, enables one to really find the best man for the state. To build up this argument, Galba starts with a defence of the system of the Principate. If the Empire could do without a leader, the emperor states, he would be worthy to inaugurate the Republic; but as it is, the only thing left to do for the aged Galba is leave the Empire with a good successor, and for the young Piso to be a good emperor.303 As in the previous chapter,

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298 Sincerity and truth are recurrent issues in the *Panegyricus*, e.g. 2-3, 54.5, 84.1; see also Bartsch 1994, 148-187 on the *Panegyricus* ‘obressive attempt to prove its own sincerity’ (149).
299 Damon 2003 *ad loc.* cites Ann. 2.71.3 and Plin. Pan. 2.8 and 83.6 for similar sentiments.
300 See below, section 1.4.
301 Keitel 2006.
302 Keitel 2006, 222.
303 1.16.1; Damon 2003 *ad loc.* points out that Tacitus often uses *rector* ‘to highlight the gap between the
Galba presents his rule as a service to the Roman people (*nec plus conferre populo Romano*). This ‘apology’ for not restoring the Republic seems strange: surely none of Galba’s contemporaries was still convinced that a Republic would be a realistic or even desirable alternative to the Principate; Galba himself acknowledges that the necessity of one-man rule was established *pridem*: a long time ago. If there is one thing that the civil wars of 68-69 made clear, it is that the imperial system as such was not profoundly questioned: the violent conflicts were about *who* should be emperor, not about whether there should be an emperor at all. Galba’s preference for a republican system of government seems particularly misplaced in this specific context: a small *consilium* of imperial trustees, whose fortunes and high positions were entirely due to personal imperial favour.

Nevertheless, this reference to the freedom of the Republic, where no supreme leader was required (*stare ac librari sine rectore posset*), is necessary to make Galba’s next point: that, even within the restricted possibilities of one-man rule, some amount of liberty can still be found in the choice of system for imperial succession. Until now, succession to the throne had been hereditary: *sub Tiberio et Gaio et Claudio unius familiae quasi hereditas fuimus.* However, selection on the basis of birth is based on mere chance (*fortitum*) and is not reckoned higher, so Galba claims. Moreover, as the experiences of Nero’s reign illustrate, even the most lofty imperial ancestry does not guarantee good character or administrative qualities: despite his lineage (in which he prided himself too much: *longa Caesarum serie tumentem*), Nero was inhuman (*immanitas*) and prone to *luxuria*, which caused his downfall and proclamation as public enemy (1.16.2). By contrast, a method of succession based on adoption and the free selection among all the men in the state enables one, through the demonstration of *iudicium integrum* and *consensus*, to select the best candidate for the position. Galba’s adoption of Piso, so the emperor claims, will
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inaugurate a new system that selects emperors on the basis of their qualities, not their ancestry, and this will benefit the state: recognizing that the true freedom of the Republic is no longer possible, the best Galba can do is make sure the princeps is a good one. Within this ‘second best’ system of one-man rule, as it were, free selection of the best man provides what limited liberty is possible: loco libertatis (‘a substitute for freedom’) erit quod eligi coepimus. But of course, the freedom conferred on the Roman people by abolishing hereditary succession is minimal when the ‘free choice’ is made by the emperor and his close advisers. Moreover, Galba’s claim that adoption shows iudicium integrum and consensus is evidently contradicted by the narrative: there is a clear lack of consensus about the best candidate – as evidenced primarily by the internal quarrelling of Galba’s advisers and the multitude of candidates proposed in people’s gossip, and more fundamentally by the quick and easy usurpation of Otho – and Galba’s choice for Piso will prove fatal to both of them.

The phrase finita Iuliorum Claudiorumque domo optimum quemque adoptio inveniet nicely captures the contrast between the two systems of succession: on the one hand, the word domus and the mention of the two gentes Iulia and Claudia exemplify the personal nature of the Julio-Claudian Principate and method of succession. On the other hand, the label optimus points towards an objective quality (i.e. ‘good’ in general, not personally advantageous), and by making adoptio the agent of the clause (adoptio inveniet) a certain impartiality or objectivity is suggested, as if it were not the emperor himself, but the system of adoption that finds the best man. Yet the term ‘adoption’ is slightly misleading here, since it is not adoption as such that Galba is arguing in favour of, but extra-familial adoption, someone from the res publica instead of from his own domus. Tiberius and Nero also owed their power to an adoption, but they were already related to their adoptive father.

308 Translation Damon 2003 ad loc.; Moore’s Loeb translation has ‘a kind of liberty’.
310 The term optimus, of course, is also strongly reminiscent of Trajan’s title of optimus princeps; see below, section 1.4.3 on contemporary resonances in Tacitus’ depiction of the adoption.
311 Galba’s system: deorum hominumque consensu, amor patriae (1.15.1), in re publica (1.15.2), libertatem (1.15.3), res publica, bonum successorum, bonum principem, loco libertatis, optimum quemque (1.16.1), iudicium integrum, consensus (1.16.2), egregii, a bonis (1.16.3). The Julio-Claudian succession: in domo (1.15.2), unius

despite his reference to Nero’s despotism and his assertion that imperial descent is not reckoned higher than mere chance (1.16.2), Galba also states that emperors like himself, who have gained the throne through war or selection on the basis of their qualities, will always be regarded with envy, no matter how excellent they will be.312 This seems to be an implicit acknowledgement of the value which is generally attached to imperial ancestry and dynastic continuity. As the previous narrative has shown, the urban soldiers feel closely connected to the Julio-Claudian house and the plebs sordida have good memories of Nero; moreover, Otho’s connection to Nero appears to be considered an advantage by the people and the imperial court, and in the next Book, Vespasian’s two biological sons Titus and Domitian will be described by Mucianus as assets in the competition for imperial power.313 Indeed, Galba himself, whom Tacitus represents as setting great store by distinguished ancestry through his references to his own and Piso’s nobility (1.15.1 and 1.15.2), is said by ancient sources to have advertised his lineage.314 Some modern scholars, in fact, argue that Galba’s deliberate dissociation from his (still esteemed) Julio-Claudian predecessors may have contributed to his impopularity.315 The dynastic continuity produced by hereditary succession might be a more potent factor than the Tacitean Galba is willing to admit.

With invidia – clearly ‘a ludicrous understatement of the problems facing him’ – Galba moves on to the reality of the Germanic legions’ rebellion (duae legiones in hoc concussi orbi motu nondum quiescunt), assuring Piso that the circumstances of

312 1.16.3: nos bello et ab aestimantibus adsciti cum invidia quamvis egregii erimus; note the passive adsciti, in line with Galba’s earlier claim that he had been called to the Principate.
313 1.5.1-2, 1.4.3, 1.13.4, 1.78.2, 2.77.1.
his own accession were not undisturbed either, and that the adoption has removed the only charge laid against him: his old age. Although his old age is indeed one of the reproaches made towards Galba, the prior narrative has shown that this is certainly not the only one; and although the adoption of a successor might go some way towards reconciling the legions, this only works if Galba chooses someone who is favoured by them, which is not the case, since Tacitus has clearly stated that it is Otho who enjoys the favour of the military (1.13.4). After this brief and somewhat naïve reassurance, Galba proceeds with more general – and in this turbulent situation, arguably less useful – advice on how to reign. He hints at the difficulties facing a new emperor after the fall of a dynasty: Nero will always be missed by the worst parts of the population; it is the task of Piso and himself to make sure that this will not hold true for the good people as well (1.16.3). This again indirectly testifies to the popularity which Nero still enjoyed among parts of the populace, and makes Galba’s rejection of any association with the Julio-Claudians appear all the more imprudent. Moreover, as the previous narrative has shown, it is not just the pessimini who miss Nero; it appears that a larger part of the population dislikes Galba.

After declaring that this is not the time for further advice, Galba provides his new heir with a guiding principle for ruling: distinguish between good and evil on the basis of what you would yourself favour or reject if someone else were emperor (1.16.4). This seems a rather over-simplified conception of the task of an emperor, and one that only distinguishes between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ things without allowing much nuance – classifications which are problematic in any case, but even more so in a situation of civil war. Galba ends his speech with a characterization of the Roman people as being able to endure neither complete slavery nor absolute liberty (nec totam servitutem pati possunt nec totam libertatem), contrasting it with societies that are reigned by kings from one ruling house, and where all the others are slaves (neque enim hic, ut gentibus quae regnantur, certa dominorum domus et ceteri servi). Monarchy (to be inferred from regnantur) is associated with the words dominus, servus and, most significantly, domus, the term used twice earlier to refer to the domus

316 1.16.3; citation from Damon 2003 ad loc. The term senex recalls Galba’s pairing of mea senectus and tua iuventa in 1.16.1, and Galba’s devoting some words to his senectus before sending for Piso in 1.14.1. Plin. Pan. 6.3 has a similar formulation.
317 Cf. 1.25.2: erant quos memoria Neronis ac desiderium prioris licentiae accenderet (to side with Otho).
318 Koestermann 1956b, 203-204.
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Caesaris of Augustus and his successors. The governing of the Roman Empire, on the other hand, is denoted with the verb imperare, which has a much more republican and military feeling than the authoritarian regnare. In line with his earlier statement about the necessity of one-man rule to keep the immense Roman Empire in order (1.16.1), Tacitus’ Galba attributes to the Roman people an inability to handle complete freedom.

Galba’s adoption speech, then, clearly falters in various respects. Several of his claims are known by the reader to be untrue on the basis of the preceding narrative, and his rhetoric is often misplaced in this particular context, or inconsistent with his own behaviour. Nevertheless, Tacitus also credits the emperor with acute insight into some developments, and makes him unintentionally give repeated foreshadowings of the disastrous outcome of his decision.

1.2.3 THE AFTERMATH OF THE ADOPTION (1.17-1.49)

Piso’s response (1.17)

Tacitus ends his report of Galba’s speech with the statement that Galba spoke as if he were creating an emperor, while the others present reacted as if Piso had already been made emperor. The meaning of this is uncertain: it could imply that the actual adoption had yet to take place, or that, by officially designating a successor, Galba’s part was played out, and that his advisers already transferred their loyalty to the person who would soon become emperor. Piso, as they say – Tacitus purports to rely on other sources here: ferunt – gave no signs of elation or disturbance and displayed no changes in his face or pose (1.17.1: nullum turbati aut exultantis animi motum prodidisse and nihil in vultu habituque mutatum); he simply responded respectfully to Galba (sermo erga patrem imperatoremque reverens) while observing modesty in speaking about himself (de se moderatus). It was as if he ‘had the ability rather than the desire to be emperor’. The quasi imperare posset must refer to Piso’s balanced reaction to the adoption, which is certainly befitting of an emperor,
and is, to a certain extent, in line with Galba’s claims to have been called to the emperorship. As the reader knows, however, Piso will not live long enough to show whether he is indeed capable of ruling the Empire, or to disprove his initial reputation in the way his adoptive father will.\(^{323}\) It remains ambiguous whether Tacitus means that Piso was indifferent, or merely hiding his emotions of either happiness or fear – in which case he would immediately be contradicting Galba’s claim \textit{simplicissime inter nos hodie loquimur} (1.15.4). The \textit{posset magis quam vellet} seems to imply a certain reluctance on Piso’s part to become Galba’s successor; indeed, later in the narrative, Piso’s own address will show himself more realistic and aware of the dangers facing him than his adoptive father in his speech (1.29-30, discussed below, section 1.3.2).\(^{324}\)

\textit{The announcements of the adoption (1.17-19)}

Next, the council discusses the best location for the public announcement of the adoption: the rostra, the Senate, or the camp – corresponding to the three main interest groups: the people, the senators, and the Urban and Praetorian cohorts (1.17.2). They decide to honour the soldiers by giving them the ‘scoop’, as a way to acquire their favour \textit{per bonas artes}, in contrast to others’ – notably, as the following narration will show, Otho’s – more corrupt methods (1.17.2). This passage indicates the degree to which Galba is dependent on the soldiers’ support, since he chooses to announce the adoption to them first.\(^{325}\) Together, as the next chapter will show, this is not exactly a successful combination. Meanwhile, despite the closed character of the adoption in the council, rumours about the news cannot be sufficiently repressed to the large crowd waiting outside the palace, \textit{magni secreti impatiens}.\(^{326}\)

On the tenth of January, Galba sets out to the military camp, ‘a day of heavy rain … made dreadful by thunder, lightning, and unusual threats from heaven’ (1.18.1). Tacitus notes that Galba is not deterred by the ominously heavy weather as people

\(^{323}\) Cf. Tacitus’ final judgment on Galba as \textit{omnium consensu capax imperii nisi imperasset} in 1.49.4; see below, section 1.4.2 for a discussion of this passage.


\(^{325}\) Ash 1999, 24.

\(^{326}\) 1.17.2. The populace’s inclination to gossip about the succession had been signalled already in 1.12.2-3; cf. Flaig 2003 on the role of rumours in Nero’s fall.
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would have been in former times, either because he regarded these things as mere chance, or because no-one can escape his fate, however clear.\footnote{1.18.1; cf. Plut. G. 23.2. Pomeroy 2006, 182 n.33 draws attention to the possible allusion to Livy’s characterization of Cato the elder as rigidae innocentiae, contemptor gratiae, divitiarum (Liv. 39.40.10) – an appropriate person to indirectly (unfavourably?) compare Galba with; see also above, note 295 for another possible comparison of Galba to Cato. Interestingly, Livy’s description of Cato ends with a mention of his prosecution of Galba’s ancestor Ser. Galba.}

Two contrasts are indirectly drawn, first between the earlier comitia where citizens would vote for magistrates and which would be suspended in case of such adverse omens \piece{observatum id antiquitus comitiis dirimendis} on the one hand, and between the present era, in which successors are selected more or less in private, and emperors show no respect for the gods’ opinion, on the other.\footnote{Plin. Pan. 8.1 praises Nerva for his seeking counsel with gods and men, and announcing the adoption publicly.}

Second, between Galba’s considering these kind of omens \piece{fortuita}, and his claim that imperial ancestry is widely regarded as fortuitous (1.16.2) – as the remainder of the story will prove, and as both Tacitus and Otho already know, it is exactly the other way around, and Galba is (retrospectively) depicted as ignorant.\footnote{Tacitus mentions that this kind of weather used to count as a bad omen, and Otho in his speech refers to the }\footnote{Plin. Pan. 8.1 praises Nerva for his seeking counsel with gods and men, and announcing the adoption publicly.}

In any case, ‘[w]hatever the reason, it really does rain on this parade’, as one scholar concludes.\footnote{Pomeroy 2006, 183.}

In the camp, Galba delivers a short speech \piece{(imperatoria brevitate)}, stating that he adopts Piso after the example of Augustus and in a military fashion, \piece{quo vir virum legeret} (1.18.2). The inclusion of the reference to the \piece{mos militaris} is of course intended to appeal to the soldiers, but probably misses its point, as the custom seems to have been outdated already in the Augustan period.\footnote{Damon 2003 \textit{ad loc}, citing Liv. 9.39.5 for the practice, and noting that Augustus also referred to it when recruiting new senators (Suet. Aug. 35.1, 54.1).}

He then admits that two legions have rebelled, but asserts that it is but a minor disturbance, and that they will soon again be under discipline (1.18.2). Considering people’s inclination to spread rumours, Galba’s decision to acknowledge the problems in Germany \piece{ne disimulata seditio in maius crederetur} seems sensible. Yet by minimizing the gravity of the rebellion – Tacitus had stated that two whole legions demanded a new emperor (1.12.1): these were certainly not \piece{pauci auctores} nor just innocent \piece{verba ac voces} –

\begin{footnotes}
\item[327]  1.18.1; cf. Plut. G. 23.2. Pomeroy 2006, 182 n.33 draws attention to the possible allusion to Livy’s characterization of Cato the elder as rigidae innocentiae, contemptor gratiae, divitiarum (Liv. 39.40.10) – an appropriate person to indirectly (unfavourably?) compare Galba with; see also above, note 295 for another possible comparison of Galba to Cato. Interestingly, Livy’s description of Cato ends with a mention of his prosecution of Galba’s ancestor Ser. Galba.
\item[328]  Plin. Pan. 8.1 praises Nerva for his seeking counsel with gods and men, and announcing the adoption publicly.
\item[329]  Tacitus mentions that this kind of weather used to count as a bad omen, and Otho in his speech refers to the }\footnote{Damon 2003 \textit{ad loc}, citing Liv. 9.39.5 for the practice, and noting that Augustus also referred to it when recruiting new senators (Suet. Aug. 35.1, 54.1).}
Galba perpetrates a good deal of *dissimulatio* himself. Galba does not add any flattering words or financial reward to his address, and Tacitus reports the general reaction to this, focalized through the soldiers (1.18.2-3): they respond with gloom and silence, as if the right to a donative, acquired even in peace, had been lost in times of (or through) war. Only the tribunes, centurions and those that were nearest, and who were probably more or less obliged to, react in a positive manner.\(^{332}\) While this portrays Galba as an emperor who is not very keen to pay his soldiers more than necessary, this also illustrates the greedy mentality of most of the soldiers, the negative assessment of which is suggested by the terms *lenocinium* and *usurpatam*; again, like in 1.5.2 (see section 1.1.2 above), Galba’s detractors are criticized by Tacitus through their own views.\(^{333}\) But Tacitus also criticizes Galba for his refusal to grant the soldiers a donative: he calls him *parcus senex*, and observes that Galba could certainly have won over the soldiers by even the smallest payment – indeed, considering the promised amount, paying the whole sum would have been unfeasible, but a compromise would have saved the day.\(^{334}\) Tacitus adds an explicit comment which more or less encapsulates his view on Galba: *nocuit antiquus rigor et nimia severitas, cui iam pares non sumus* (1.18.3). The emperor’s strictness and severity are old-fashioned and over the top, but most of all harmful (*nocuit*), because they do not fit the times. The failure to understand this is not just Galba’s, however; the mismatch also derives from the fact that the morals of the age have degenerated: ‘we’ are no longer equal to such discipline. Remarkably enough, Tacitus speaks in the first person plural, acknowledging – not without a hint of regret – that his time can no longer live up to traditional Roman standards. This is also an indirect compliment to Galba, who does belong to the ‘good old times’ – but to his own detriment.

The soldiers, then, are presented as reacting to the absence of a financial reward; nothing is said about their response to the appointment of Piso as a successor. In fact, no mention is made about Piso’s presence at all in the camp during the announcement. The senatorial reactions to the news are different, though equally di-

\(^{332}\) Cf. Heubner 1963 *ad loc.*  
\(^{333}\) The word *lenocinium*, used only here in Tacitus’ historical works, and meaning here allurement or enticement, is primarily associated with pimping (*leno*). See Ash 1999, 24–26 on the centrality of the donative issue to Tacitus’ characterization of both emperor and soldiers, much more than in the parallel sources.  
\(^{334}\) 1.18.3: *constat potuisse conciliari animos quantulacumque parci senis liberalitate* Plut. G. 18.2 mentions the soldiers’ hopes that Galba would pay them, if not the whole sum, than at least the amount awarded to them by Nero, which was half of the promised sum (15,000); Suet. G. 16.1 also mentions the soldiers’ resentment.
rected by self-interest. Galba delivers a short and unadorned speech in the Senate (non comptior Galbae, non longior quam apud militem sermo), while Piso’s address is said to be comis: friendly or affable.335 The senators react ostensibly favourably, but each with their own motives (privatas spes agitantes sine publica cura): many with goodwill (multi voluntate), those who had disagreed with the adoption with more fervour (effusius qui noluerant), and the indifferent majority with willing subservience (medii ac plurimi obvio obsequio).336 Tacitus adds that nothing was publicly said or done by Piso in the following four days between the adoption and his murder (1.19.1) – another foreshadowing of his fate.

When announcing the adoption in the camp and in the Senate, Galba’s speech is unembellished (non comptior) and brief (imperatoria brevitate), and Galba’s brevity is echoed by Tacitus’ conciseness and lack of rhetorical elaboration in narrating it: three points of his speech to the soldiers are summarized in oratio obliqua, while the content of his announcement to the Senate is omitted entirely.337 The contrast with Galba’s extended and grandiloquent speech in the comitia, which comprises two whole chapters in oratio recta in high-flown diction, is notable. One may argue that there was no necessity for Tacitus to include longer versions of the two speeches to the troops and the Senate, since he had already elaborated the one pronounced in the council, but the fact that he chooses to elaborate that one is significant in itself. Nonetheless, Tacitus’ increasing brevity in reporting the three successive speeches mirrors the importance Galba seems to attach to the three groups, something which is also unmistakably reflected by their priority of receiving the news of the adoption: the emperor’s associates are the first to know and get an elaborate speech, the soldiers are second in line, because Galba wants to placate them, while the Senate – the only body capable of conferring official recognition on a new emperor – is the last to find out.338 This is observed by Levene as well, who concludes that the ‘imperial brevity’ as practised by Galba appears to be a function of the superfluity of the

335  1.19.1; Heubner 1963 ad loc. points out the difference between the speeches of Galba and Piso inherent in the words used for their addresses: a (no-nonsense) sermo for Galba, a (more elegant) oratio for Piso.
336  1.19.1. Koestermann’s statement (1956b, 197) that Galba’s speech ‘nicht ungünstig bewertet [wird]’ seems not to take into account the duplicity of the senators’ expression.
337  Morgan argues that the phrase nec ullum orationi aut lenocinium addit aut pretium in 1.18.2 also refers to a lack of adornment of the speech, and that the comptior in the next chapter picks up this theme, and signifies ‘a lack of politesse as well as a lack of polish’; Morgan 1993, 579-580.
338  On Galba’s disregard of the Senate see Morgan 1993, 577-581. Note that both Piso’s and Otho’s addresses to the Praetorians are rendered at greater length and in oratio recta by Tacitus.
Galba’s new system of imperial succession

occasion. ... When the real decision was made, it was done with all the traditional verbosity of the speaking ruler.339 As such, the implication is that Galba’s erroneous priorities – not realizing how important the support of the military is to the maintenance of his position – are a cause of his fall. Damon states that the imperatoria brevitatis refers to the commonplace of the ‘ideal of the rhetoric-free Roman general’, and that, presumably, Tacitus considers this appropriate in an address towards the soldiers and Senate.340 However, there are several indications to the contrary,341 and a comparison between the (either gloomy or insincerely eager) reactions of the audience to Galba’s speech and the (truly enthusiastic) response to Otho’s much more rhetorical address to in 1.37-38, might mean that Tacitus is suggesting that Galba’s terse style of speaking is not suited to the times.

Otho’s usurpation

Galba’s adoption of Piso, of course, far from resolving the problems the emperor is facing, merely accelerates his downfall. Although the focus of the present chapter is on the adoption episode, a brief overview of the events following the adoption may be expedient. After the announcements of the adoption in the camp (1.18) and the Senate (1.19), Galba and his advisers decide to send a delegation to the mutinous legions in Germany (1.19.2), revoke all of the gifts distributed by Nero (1.20.1-2) and dismiss four tribunes (1.20.2). In all of these episodes, Galba is depicted as acting rather incompetently; the narrative illustrates his lack of decisiveness and tact. With chapter 21, Tacitus switches his focus to Otho and the origins of his coup (1.21-26): Otho’s deliberations on his next move and his decision to seize power (1.21), the encouragement by his associates (1.22), Otho’s earlier preparations for his succession, mostly through corruption of the soldiers (1.23-24), and the preparations for his coup (1.25-26) – while Galba is completely ignorant of this, and is not informed by his Praetorian Prefect Laco (1.24.2, 1.26.2). Tacitus then turns to the usurpation itself: Otho’s acclamation by a group of soldiers (1.27), his entry of the camp with the passive consent by the rest of the troops in the city (1.28), rumours about the coup reaching Galba (1.29), Piso’s address to the Palatine cohort (1.29-30), further attempts to curb Otho’s support (1.31), deliberations of Galba

339 Levene 2009, 217.
340 Damon 2003 ad 1.18.2.
341 Levene 2009, 217.
and his advisers in the palace (1.32-34), Galba’s exit of the palace (1.35), Otho courting his troops in the camp while the soldiers prepare for the battle (1.36), Otho’s speech to his supporters (1.37-38), Galba and his associates moving to the Forum (1.39), arrival of the Othonians (1.40), the murders of Galba (1.41), Titus Vinius (1.42), and Piso (1.43), the immediate aftermath: Otho’s victory, joy among the Senate, people and soldiers, measures by the soldiers, elimination of Laco and Icelus, senatorial declaration of Otho as Augustus (1.44-47), obituaries of Piso and Titus Vinius (1.48), Galba’s obituary (1.49), fear in the city about the situation and the impending clash between Otho and Vitellius (1.50).

The detailed narration of Otho’s coup is not surprising: this was the second usurpation in a short time, and the beginning of a new civil war: that between the Othonians and the Vitellians. The internal rhythm of that episode, however, is remarkable. The actual clash in the Forum in which Galba is murdered and Otho seizes power – which one could argue is the most consequential event in this first half of the first Book – is narrated in four chapters: the murders of Galba, Titus Vinius and Piso all receive one chapter each. The preceding events, however, those between Otho’s acclamation and the armed encounter, take up 11 chapters: the attempts to suppress the soldiers’ rebellion (including Piso’s speech) three chapters, the deliberations about the situation among Galba and his associates in the palace four, three chapters for the preparations of the Othonian soldiers and Otho’s speech, and one for Galba’s journey to the Forum, which is again characterized by struggles within his group of advisers. The aftermath also receives more space than the event itself: four chapters narrate the rest of the day, and the last chapter of our passage describes the worries of the people about the new situation. In addition, the obituaries of Piso, Vinius and Galba take up two chapters in all. The actual moment of usurpation – the killing of Galba and his supporters by Otho’s troops – therefore merits fewer chapters than its (often abstract) circumstances, preparations and effects. As Martin notes, Tacitus ‘primary aim is not to give a complete factual narrative of events’.

343 Cf. his statement in the survey (1.4.1).
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in his supporters, and the deteriorating moral effect of the usurpation: the cruelty and lack of discipline among the soldiers, the adulation and hypocrisy of the Senate and the people. These are themes that explain why Otho’s coup was successful, and that illustrate Tacitus’ generally pessimistic view on the morals of this period as set out in chapter 1.2.

The Tacitean Galba, then, presents his adoption of Piso as the inauguration of a new system of imperial succession, in which future emperors are chosen freely from all citizens and on the basis of their suitability for the emperorship. This novel method is introduced as a deliberate deviation from, and improvement of, the Julio-Claudian de facto hereditary transmission of power, which does not agree with Galba’s ideals with regard to care for the state and the absence of self-interest. However, Galba’s adoption speech, and the description of the events leading up to it, strongly suggest that the emperor misjudges the situation and will, as a result, not be able to prevent the imminent dangers – a suggestion immediately confirmed by the aftermath: Otho’s bloody coup.

344 See Ash 1999, 26-29 on the causes of Otho’s proclamation, and the soldiers’ motivations; also Flaig 1992, 240-305 on Otho’s coup as a result of Galba losing the ‘Akzeptanz’ of society.
As noted above, Galba in his speech criticizes the customary criterion used to select imperial successors – kinship – and proposes to replace it with more ‘objective’ qualities. This section investigates the criteria put forward by Galba, and the way the candidates for adoption are represented as meeting these. Galba, it will be argued, is seen to think in predominantly moral terms about the emperorship, and Tacitus, accordingly, portrays the two candidates for adoption in such a way as to make their characters supply an indirect explanation for Galba’s choice for Piso and against Otho. He deliberately leaves out other potential successors in order to focus on the contrast between these two men, a contrast which he heightens through the use of omissions, parallels and allusions, and which likens Piso to Galba while making Otho appear the polar opposite.

1.3.1 THE CANDIDATES FOR THE SUCCESSION

Tacitus presents the matter of the succession as a choice between Piso and Otho only. Both men are named as potential successors, they are characterized in relatively great detail, their attitudes towards the emperorship are mentioned, as well as their qualifications and their sources of support, and they are discussed in popular rumour. In the Galban narrative, no other candidates are mentioned by name,
but later in the *Histories*, Tacitus does mention two other men who, apparently, were candidates at the time of Piso’s adoption: Vespasian’s son Titus, and Galba’s own kinsman Cornelius Dolabella. These two are also cited as potential candidates, they figure in rumours about the succession, and there are remarks about their qualifications and popularity and support. Cornelius Dolabella, a relative of Galba’s – and presumably one of the *propinqui* and *necessitudines* passed over for the adoption by Galba (1.15.2) – is first named at the end of Book 1, when Otho has him placed in Aquinum, although not under close guard. The reason for his removal is no particular crime, but merely his ancient name and his kinship with Galba.\(^{346}\) The implication must be that Dolabella’s illustrious ancestry makes him a threat to Otho. A whole Book later, after having returned to Rome on learning of Otho’s death, Dolabella is murdered on the orders of Vitellius (2.63-64). The ground for his execution is stated by Tacitus to have been a combination of hatred and fear: Dolabella had allegedly married Vitellius’ ex-wife, and in addition, Dolabella’s friend Plancius Varus had accused him – without any proofs – of breaking his arrest, offering himself as leader of the Othonians and trying to win the support of the cohort stationed at Ostia.\(^{347}\) The motive of private hatred may be incorrect, and it is ‘highly implausible (and is meant to seem so)’ that Dolabella would put himself forward to the Othonians, who had just been defeated by Vitellius.\(^{348}\) Nevertheless, that Vitellius is seen to fear the possibility of Dolabella seizing power implies that the latter may, in the minds of some, have been considered a potential candidate for imperial power.\(^{349}\) This is indeed the suggestion which arises from the parallel accounts. Plutarch mentions Dolabella as a favourite of some of the emperor’s friends but states that Galba disapproved of him, and Suetonius reports that Galba disbanded the imperial bodyguard because he suspected that they were more inclined towards Dolabella, who

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\(^{346}\) 1.88.1. Dolabella was perhaps a great-nephew of Galba’s; see *PIR*\(^2\) C 1347.

\(^{347}\) 2.63.1; 2.64.1.

\(^{348}\) Ash 2007 *ad loc.* (whence also the citation), who notes that Vitellius’ jealousy may be modelled on Tiberius’ hatred of Asinius Gallus for marrying Vipsania in *Ann.* 1.12.4 and may therefore not be true.

\(^{349}\) For the modern reader, furthermore, the suggestion appears somewhat stronger, given the similar formulation of the effects of Vitellius’ order to execute Dolabella as *magna cum invidia novi principatus*, *cuius hoc primum specimen noscebat*, which recalls the murders of two other potential rivals for power in the *Annals*, Agrippa Postumus (1.6.1: *primum facinus novi principatus*) and M. Silanus (1.13.1: *prima novo principatu mors*); Ash 2007 *ad loc.*
possessed gardens near their camp, than towards himself. Dolabella’s removal to Aquinum is also mentioned by Plutarch, who, however, writes that it was the Praetorian Guard who suspected him of revolutionary designs, and that Otho sent him away, perhaps out of fear, perhaps for his own safety. In any case, Dolabella is connected to imperial power in all three sources, including the Histories, and we may therefore conclude that he was named in the common source. Tacitus’ neglect to mention him as a potential candidate when he writes about Galba’s decision to adopt a successor must therefore be deliberate.

A similar omission concerns Titus. At the start of Book 2, when narrating the rise of the Flavians in the East, Tacitus relates Titus’ departure from Judaea. He had been sent out to congratulate the new emperor Galba and start a political career in Rome, but his journey caused people to rumour that he was actually on his way to be adopted by the elderly and childless emperor. Tacitus adds, ‘the report gained a readier hearing from the nature of Titus himself, which was equal to the highest fortune, from his personal beauty and a certain majesty which he possessed, as well as from Vespasian’s good fortune, from prophetic oracles, and even from chance occurrences which, amid the general credulity, were regarded as omens’ (2.1.2). Titus is considered capax for the emperorship (the meaning of quantaecumque fortunae) on the basis of his attractive appearance (decor oris) and ‘a certain majesty’ (quadam maiestate); perhaps not very relevant features, when one thinks of the troubled political situation, but features that set him apart from the old, physically unattractive and weak Galba. Later in the same Book, Titus is again portrayed as equal to im-

350 Plut. G. 23.1; Suet. G. 12.2.
351 Plut. O. 5.1; see Ash 2007 ad 2.63.1 Dolbellam.
352 2.1.1; cf.1.12.2. As Ash 2007 ad loc. notes, the causam ... ferebat indeed ‘hints ... that Titus’ journey has a hidden agenda’.
353 Ash 2007 ad loc.; Suet. Tit. 3.1 refers to Titus’ forma egregia et cui non minus auctoritatis inesset quam gratiae, praecipuum robur. The description of Titus, however, reminds the modern reader of Tacitus (and perhaps the ancient one as well) of another young and popular general, Germanicus, whose good looks are praised in the same terms (Ann. 2.13.1: decor and 2.73.2: corpus decorum). Notably, Titus, like Germanicus in Book 2 of the Annals (2.53-61) is depicted as sailing along the eastern coasts of the Mediterranean on his way to Syria, and as halting along the route to visit an old and renowned sanctuary to indulge in his antiquarian interest and to consult the oracle (2.2-4, also mentioned in Suet. Tit. 5.1 and Jos. BJ 4.9.2; see Ash 2007, 73-74 for the significance of these chapters). Both men are linked to imperial power in popular rumours, but both seem content (for the moment) to leave it to their fathers, Tiberius and Vespasian (2.1.3 and 1.34.1; Ash 2007, 73, who cites some more parallels with the situation of Tiberius and Germanicus at page 78, ad 2.1.3 sed ... excusatum); see also below, section 2.3.2 on the importance of Germanicus’ looks to his reputation as capax imperii.
perial power (*capax iam imperii*) and moreover popular with the Germanic legions due to his military service there (2.77.1). The speaker this time is Mucianus, who tries to persuade Vespasian to seize power, and enumerates his assets: a triumph and two sons, one of which he would himself adopt if he were emperor.\(^{354}\) Again, the term *capax* recalls Galba’s unsuitability for the emperorship – encapsulated in the judgement *capax imperii nisi imperasset* (1.49.4) – while Titus’ renown among the Germanic legions contrasts sharply with those soldiers’ disrespect for Galba.

Neither Dolabella nor Titus is mentioned by Tacitus in connection with Galba’s adoption plans and the rumours circulating in Rome in 1.12-16; the focus of the narrative is clearly on Piso and Otho. The reason for this may be that Tacitus prefers to concentrate on the two most important contenders – the intended successor (Piso) and the initially rejected, but eventually successful one (Otho) – to better contrast their characters; the inclusion of further persons would weaken the antithesis.\(^{355}\) A similar dualism is discernible in the Tiberian and Claudian Books, where the two pairs Germanicus/Drusus and Britannicus/Nero are presented as (rivaling) candidates for their fathers’ power.\(^{356}\)

### 1.3.2 THE IMPERIAL SUCCESSOR: PISO

*Galba’s reasons for choosing Piso*

Tacitus’ account of the adoption suggests several reasons for Galba’s choice for Piso. As discussed above (section 1.2.2), the emperor first mentions Piso’s illustrious republican ancestry. This appears to be an important consideration for Galba, as he opens his speech with his reverence for Piso’s descent from Pompey and Crassus (1.15.1), and refers to his nobility twice (1.15.1: *nobilitati tuae* and 1.15.2: *pari nobilitate*). Even if the emperor is at pains to distinguish the criteria of selection employed in private adoptions from those relevant to imperial adoptions, the repeated references to Piso’s distinguished ancestry suggest that it will have played a part in the decision.\(^{357}\) It did, at least, impress Antonius Primus, who, so Tacitus reports

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355 Morgan 1993, 574.
356 See Chapters 2 and 3; in the case of Claudius, Tacitus likewise deliberately omits a likely candidate, Silanus, from his depiction of the struggle for the succession.
357 See Kragelund 2002, 201-203 on the importance of Piso’s ancestry to the historical Galba.
later in the *Histories*, was rumoured to have (unsuccessfully) urged Piso’s brother, Scribonianus Crassus, to seize power in Rome, ‘distinguished as he was by his illustrious ancestry and his brother’s eminence’ (4.39.3). In the rest of his speech, the Tacitean Galba mentions Piso’s disposition, patriotism, impeccable reputation and age as qualities that impelled him to the adoption.358

However, the Tacitean Galba’s main criterion for his choice for Piso seems to be a moral one: a good, virtuous character. Throughout his speech, Galba casts his conception of the emperorship in strongly moral terms: he uses the terms *bonus* (1.16.3, 1.16.4), *optimus* (1.16.1), *dignus* (1.16.1), *egregius* (1.16.3), *malus* (1.16.4) and *pessimus* (1.15.4, 1.16.3) when speaking about the emperorship and succession. With regard to Piso, he employs the phrases *praeclara indoles tua* (1.15.1), *dignus* and *potior* (1.15.2), and *bonus successor* (1.16.1), while he denounces Nero not for any concrete acts but for his more abstract character traits *immanitas* and *luxuria* (1.16.2). In addition, he elaborates on (what he perceives as) the *praecipua humani animi bona*: Piso’s *fides*, *libertas* and *amicitia*, and condemns their opposites: *obsequium*, *blanditiae*, *adsentatio*, *adulatio*, and *sua cuique utilitas* (1.15.4). A good emperor, then, in Galba’s view, is first and foremost a good man, with a virtuous and respectable character: with a sense of liberty, sincerity, and care for the state instead of self-interest. These adhere quite well to the tradition rhetorical *loci apersona* with regard to the qualities of character, as used in epideictic oratory.359 Character is the main reason why Galba chooses Piso over Otho, as is also borne out by the rest of the narrative: for Piso is characterized in such a way as to resemble his adoptive father, while Tacitus’ Otho is the exact opposite of Galba and Piso.

**Piso’s characterization**

In his portrayal of the three protagonists of the Galban narrative, Tacitus employs parallels and contrasts which are not present in the parallel sources.360 For instance, Tacitus’ introduction of Piso draws attention to his old-fashioned sternness (1.14.2), which is said to be particularly pleasing to Galba. His disposition, then, is very similar to Galba’s old-fashioned, strict character, and is even described with

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358 Morgan 2006, 57-61 argues that the historical Galba chose Piso on the basis of his ancestry, age, and experience of exile, thinking that ‘he would be less inclined to abuse his power, and less likely to be corrupted by it.’

359 For *loci a persona* in praise and blame see Cic. *Inv.* 1.34-36 and 2.177-178; Ad Her. 3.10-15; Quint. *Inst.Or.* 3.10-23; cf. Quint. *Inst.Or.* 5.10.23-31 on arguments *a persona*.

360 Cf. Koestermann 1956b, 205.
similar words: *severus* and *moris antiqui* (1.14.2; cf. 1.18.3: Galba’s *antiquus* rigor and *nimia severitas*). Piso reacts with equanimity to his adoption by Galba, just like his adoptive father is undeterred by the heavy weather when he is on his way to announce the adoption. Piso’s address to the Praetorians in 1.29-30 likewise portrays him as similar to the emperor, and echoes many of the themes and arguments uttered by Galba in his adoption speech. Like Galba’s speech, Piso’s address is very likely Tacitus’ own composition, since none of the parallel sources reports its contents. Since Piso hardly carried out any actions through which Tacitus could have characterized him indirectly, the speech is an important tool to portray Piso, liken him to Galba, and thereby to suggest why both men failed.

Like Galba later on in 1.35.2, Piso addresses the soldiers as *commilitones* (both in 1.29.2 and in 1.30.2) – a curious statement coming from someone who did not perform any noteworthy military service and who, furthermore, was probably unknown to the cohorts until his adoption. Again like Galba (1.29.1), he is *ignarus* (1.29.2), but his ignorance does not relate to the activities of his advisers, or the circumstances, as it did for Galba. To be sure, Piso is quite aware of the difficulties facing him and his father, and he is much more cautious than Galba (in 1.15.2) in considering imperial power as *fortuna*: *ignarus futuri, et sive optandum hoc non men sive timendum erat, Caesar adscitus sum* (1.29.2) – it is from this wariness that his uncertainty arises. Echoing Galba’s words, Piso states that, in addition to this experience with adversity, he has indeed also come to experience the dangers of prosperity. While ostensibly similar to his father’s, Piso’s argument seems rather to refer to the personal danger inherent in imperial status (which he is experiencing acutely at the moment), and not so much to the possible corruption deriving from flattery and dishonest obedience. Piso stresses his care for the state – one of the features Galba prides himself in – by saying that he is not so much afraid for himself as for the fate of his father, the Senate, and the Empire.

361 Their reactions are linked by the use of *turbare* in both cases (1.17.1 and 1.18.1).
362 On the speeches in Book 1 responding to one another, see Keitel 1991.
363 Keitel 1991, 2776, referring to Ullmann; Plut. G. 25.4 only mentions briefly that Piso delivered an address.
365 Keitel 1991, 2776. Cf. Morgan 2006, 66: ‘for the emperor or his heir to address soldiers as comrades was itself a sign that civil war impended.’
366 1.15.3, 1.29.2.
367 1.29.2; note that *tristior* is also the word used to refer to people’s opinion of Piso in 1.14.2.
hand, by treating *domus nostra* and *res publica* as two separate entities, the fates of which do not necessarily coincide, Piso seems to disconnect their personal sphere from the public one, and, through the word *domus*, hints at dynastic ambitions.\(^{368}\) Like his father, Piso emphasizes that the adoption was a way to secure a peaceful transmission of imperial power.\(^{369}\) But while he does acknowledge the gravity of the situation and the crucial difference which the soldiers in the city can make, Piso is quite unrealistic in his perception of Galba’s accession and his own adoption – or at least pretends to be.\(^{370}\) Although the city proper might have been *incruenta*, Galba’s accession was not, as Tacitus has stressed (cf. Galba’s *cruentum iter* in 1.6.1).\(^{371}\) There was (and is) *discordia*, and the hope of the adoption providing tranquillity has been thoroughly deceived. Piso also resembles Galba in his emphasis on moral goodness: *nobis aut perire hodie necesse est aut, quod aeque apud bonos miserum est, occidere* (1.29.2), although it is evident that Galba did not have many qualms about executing opponents.

The next chapter consists of an attack on Otho and an appeal for the soldiers’ support. The invective against Otho includes the conventional *loci* of *ad hominem* attacks: physical appearance, drunkenness, *libido*, hypocrisy, prodigality, corruption, and *stupra*, and will be reciprocated by Otho himself in 1.37-38.\(^{372}\) However, they accord well with (what we may assume are) Galba’s thoughts about Otho (as in 1.13.2), and with the exhortations of Otho’s own advisers in 1.22.1.\(^{373}\) Piso starts with a *praeteritio* in which he alludes to his *nobilitas* (which had also been emphasized by Galba) and *modestia*, which he indirectly claims as virtues for himself by opposing them to Otho’s vices (1.30.1). He accuses Otho of undermining the Empire, even when he was still loyal to Galba, and by the same expression of feign-
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ing to be Galba’s friend. He ridicules him for his character, gait and effeminate adornments, and indirectly criticizes his supporters’ criteria for a good emperor. He attacks Otho’s luxuria, claiming that what he presents as liberalitas is actually prodigality, and so indirectly countering criticism on Galba’s frugality (1.30.1). The specie implies deliberate deception on Otho’s part; Otho, conversely, will in his own speech accuse Galba of the same kind of dissimulation (1.37.4: falsis nominibus; see below, section 1.3.3). Then follows criticism on Otho’s lust and drinking, after which Piso asserts that Otho’s vices will disgrace everyone (1.30.1); much like the way Vinius and Laco transfer the contempt for their vices to Galba in 1.6.1. The conclusion to Piso’s invective – nemo enim unquam imperium flagitio quaesitum bonis artibus exercuit – recalls both Galba’s description of his transferral of the Empire to Piso (1.15.1), and Tacitus’ famous evaluation of Vespasian as the only emperor who changed for the better during his rule (1.50.4), while later in the narrative, Otho is depicted as thinking along the same lines (1.83.1). However, Piso’s attack may also be taken to reflect on himself; just as no-one had even exercised imperial power in a righteous way after acquiring it through crime, so it seems unlikely that the Principate, obtained by Galba through war, would be carried on in peace by him and Piso. Moreover, denouncing Otho’s vices to a group that had earlier been depicted as loving the vices of their leaders as much as they used to admire their virtues (1.5.2) does not seem a very prudent strategy.

Piso then, in a formulation strongly reminiscent of Galba’s, sets up a contrast between the acquisition of imperial power by Galba and himself (through consensus) and Otho’s plans to obtain it through a disgraceful act – the contrast is clearly artificial, because Galba also gained power through violence. He then appeals to the soldiers’ morality and sense of honour, by naming the res publica, Senate and the people – although he fears that those may be empty names to many – and urges

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374 1.30.1: evertere imperium, etiam cum amicum imperatoris ageret, in which agere may be taken as ‘playing’, ‘acting’.
375 1.30.1. As Ash 1999, 93 observes, however, Piso underestimates Otho’s force of mind, which does not match his outward appearance.
376 Damon 2003, 160.
377 Morgan 2006, 66.
378 1.30.2: Galbam consensus generis humani, me Galba consentientibus vobis Caesarem dixit; cf. 1.15.1: nunc me deorum hominumque consensus ad imperium vocatum. Piso, contrary to his adoptive father, does not claim divine consensus – perhaps he is a bit less tempted towards bold claims after the adverse omena on the day of the public announcement of the adoption (1.18.1).
GALBA

them to prevent the *pessimi* from selecting an emperor. This reminds the reader of Galba’s statements in his own oration, that the best Piso and he can do is to provide the Roman people with a *bonus successor* and a *bonus princeps* (1.16.1), and to make sure that Nero will not be missed by the *boni*, just as he is now by the *pessimi* (1.16.3). The *fama* and *fides* (recalling Galba’s slogans in 1.15.4) of the Praetorians are as yet untarnished – they have not rebelled against their leaders, nor did they desert Nero – but they will be, if they allow a handful of base traitors to transfer the imperial power without opposing them (1.30.3). Moreover, if the soldiers do not prevent this, this kind of licence will spread to the provinces and cause wars – a keen insight indeed, as both Vitellius and Vespasian will be proclaimed by the provincial legions. Last, to complement his appeal to the Praetorians’ sense of morality, honour and responsibility, Piso promises a more worldly, material motive: a donative if they remain faithful to Galba, which is no smaller than the reward they would be given in exchange for the murder of the emperor: a last condemnation of Otho’s corruption.

To summarize, Piso is portrayed in such a way as to resemble his adoptive father Galba in many different respects. Piso is characterized as strict, concerned with moral virtue (*bonis artibus, pessimi, apud bonos*) and with care for the state; as is noted by scholars, his speech depends almost entirely upon moral arguments. The words employed for his depiction recall those used to describe his adoptive father, while Piso’s speech echoes several concepts and phrases used by Galba, although he sometimes employs them differently. On some points, Piso’s behaviour or speech runs counter to Galba’s ideals and character: he appears more realistic, for instance in recognizing that his patriotism is not shared by the majority of the soldiers, and in consequently appealing to their private benefits – their reputation and financial rewards – to incite them to action. This strategy initially works better than Galba’s adoption announcement had (1.31.1); however, it seems to be more

379 1.30.2: *si res publica et senatus et populus vacua nomina sunt, vestra, commilitones, interest, ne imperatorem pessimi faciant*. The same terms are used by legions refusing to recognize Galba at 1.55.4: *senatus populaire Romani oblitterata iam nomina sacramento advocabant*; cf. Haynes 2003, 57-62. The theme of *vacua nomina*, or the loss of meaning of words, the repeated misidentification, and the gap between appearance and reality, is also found in e.g. 1.29.2, 1.37.4, 1.83.2, 4.73.3.

380 This is not true; Tacitus himself states *miles urbanus … ad destituendum Neronem … traductus* (1.5.1), but this is presumably claimed by Piso to flatter the soldiers.

381 E.g. Levene 1999, 209, citing Ullmann.
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the prospect of a financial reward than the moral arguments which ultimately convinces the soldiers. On the other hand, like his adoptive father, Piso makes several naïve or wrong assessments, and like Galba’s, Piso’s rhetoric is partly ignorant, partly untrue, and has no ultimate effect: Otho’s support has grown too much to be checked. Significantly, however, both men do utter several statements that the following narrative shows to be correct, and as such, both act as ‘warner for the whole civil war narrative’. Tacitus, then, characterizes Piso in such a way as to magnify his resemblance to Galba – a resemblance also noted by Otho in his speech to his supporters: ac ne qua saltem in successore Galbae spes esset accersit ab exilio quem tristitia et avaritia sui simillimum iudicabat (1.38.1).

1.3.3 THE OBVIOUS CANDIDATE: OTHO

Otho’s characterization

The Tacitean Piso is made to resemble Galba in his portrayal, and as such is shown to meet Galba’s requirements of high birth and a virtuous character. Otho’s characterization by Tacitus, by contrast, is the exact opposite of that of Piso and Galba, suggesting Otho’s failure to fulfil Galba’s criteria of selection. Contrasts are set up between Otho and Piso, and between Otho and Galba. Otho’s father and grandfather had held offices, so his ancestry was respectable, but not as illustrious as Galba’s and Piso’s. His semi-exile (1.21.1: exilii honorem) is different from Piso’s very real banishment under Nero (1.48.1: ipse diu exul). The contrast is particularly clear

382 Levene 1999, 209.
383 Cf. Damon 2003, 160: ‘Piso resembles Galba not so much in disciplina and parsimonia as in his refusal to acknowledge a reality that falls short of ideal.’
385 Cf. Damon 2003, 136 ad 14.2 moris antiqui ... severus observes that Piso ‘resembles Galba ... more closely [in Tacitus] than he does in Plutarch’s version’.
386 Cf. Morgan 1993, 573, paraphrasing Courbaud: ‘[t]he close fit between Otho’s supposed deficiencies and Galba’s known prejudices clearly substantiates ... that the portrait was not composed as an end in itself, but to justify Galba’s decision on his successor’.
388 2.50.1. Otho’s family, from municipal origin, had climbed the social and political ladder under successive emperors and had risen to patrician status under Claudius: Damon 2003, 129.
in the matter of character. In moral terms, Otho is presented as inferior to Piso: his luxuria, corruption and former friendship with Nero do not redound to his honour – he is even described, together with Vitellius, as omnium mortalium impudicitia ignavia luxuria deterrimos (1.50.1). Otho’s incuriosa and petulans youth (1.13.3) form an implicit contrast with Piso’s blameless past (1.15.3). His ardent hopes of being adopted (1.13.4) are wholly different from Piso’s constancy and composure (1.17.1). Otho is portrayed as attaching less value to honesty, friendship and liberty, considering his betrayal of Galba, his usurpation, the trick by which he stages his usurpation (1.27.1), and his murder of his friend Vinius (1.44.1). Patriotism is a quality that cannot be attributed to him: his decision to usurp imperial power does not originate from any care for the state, but is entirely based on self-interest – on anger, need of money, and envy. Otho is compared or linked to several of Rome’s (eventual) enemies: Nero (see below), Catiline and Jugurtha. References to his vices are abundant, although they are often qualified by being focalized by characters in the text, and do therefore not necessarily represent Tacitus’ own views. At the same time, Tacitus notes various positive features of Otho’s character, although seemingly good actions are sometimes characterized as simply the temporary repression of vice. Indeed, Tacitus’ moral evaluation of Otho’s character and deeds is intricate and essentially ambiguous. The ambiguity is made explicit in Tacitus’ final judgement at 2.50.1: ‘By two bold deeds, the one most outrageous [i.e. the murder of Galba to seize power], the other glorious [i.e. his noble suicide], he

389 See 1.13.3 and 1.22 on Otho’s luxuria, wantonness, the licence of freedmen at his court, and his libido. Cf. Shochat 1981 on Tacitus’ tendentiousness, putting some of Otho’s actions in a less favourable light than warranted by the situation; Shochat takes his argument too far, in my opinion, but he has some interesting observations.
390 1.13.4, 1.21.1, 1.23.1, 1.44.1.
391 On the resemblances to Catiline, see Keitel 1987; Ash 2007 ad 2.50.1 maternum genus impar nec tamen indecorum notes the Sallustian echo materno genere impar erat, said of Jugurtha in Sall. Jug. 11.3.
392 Ash 1999, 89.
393 E.g. 1.13.4: comiter; 1.22.1: non erat Othonis mollis et corpori similis animus; Otho’s restraining of his soldiers’ cruelty at 1.45.2; his sound measure regarding furloughs at 1.46.4, good conduct through temporary postponement of vices at 1.17.1, his brave end at 2.46-50; cf. Ash 1999, 89-91 and Joseph 2012b, 153-167 on Tacitus’ depiction of Otho’s exemplary suicide.
394 See Ash 1999, 83-94 for a careful interpretation of Tacitus’ representation of Otho, arguing against internal inconsistency and against Otho being a simple foil for Galba, and drawing attention to the conflicting strands of representation of Otho after the civil wars. On Otho’s further characterization, see Geiser 2007, 211-216; Braun 1992; Keitel 1995.
The choice of a successor gained with posterity as much fame as evil reputation.' In the end, even if Tacitus does credit Otho with some good character traits and deeds, his moral virtue cannot match Piso's, who 'had to offer no excuses for the past' (1.15.3).

Moreover, Tacitus constructs a set of contrasts to ‘set up Otho as an antithesis to the emperor’, both by emphasizing opposing qualities, and by omitting details that would weaken the contrast. For instance, Tacitus sets Otho’s incuriosa pueritia (1.13.3) against Galba’s rei publicae cura (1.13.2), stressing Otho’s lack of cura publica. Otho’s luxuria and prodigality contrast with Galba’s frugality, his base motives for usurpation (anger, need of money) with Galba’s ostensibly noble reasons, his pragmatism and efficiency with Galba’s hesitation and mobilitas ingenii, his indulgence and desire with Galba’s strictness and discipline, his youth with Galba’s age (1.22.2). While Galba insists on authoritarian discipline, Otho mingles with the common soldiers and distributes kisses and flatteries to them, and behaves like a slave to his supporters (1.36.3: omnia serviliter pro dominatione). Otho also exhibits a better fit with the values of the time: he understands the moods of the soldiers and court and is able to capitalize on that, by displaying indulgence, luxuria and extravagance and taking a personal approach. He has the support of various important groups – Nero’s court, many of the soldiers, Titus Vinius – whereas Galba is hated equally by all of them. Otho is also more emotional and impulsive than Galba, which matches the attitudes of many of the soldiers. On the other hand, Tacitus refrains from mentioning Otho’s immense debts – reported later in the narrative and in Suetonius and Plutarch – before the adoption, which would equate him too much with Galba, who also suffered from financial problems; and from denoting

396 Morgan 1993, 572.
397 E.g. in simulating fear in 1.21.1 to justify his plans to seize power, in building his base of support in 1.23-25 and 1.36-38, in not shrinking away from having his former leader murdered, and in following his own course while still pleasing the soldiers at 1.45.2 and 1.46.4.
398 1.23-25 and 1.36; see Ash 1999, 29-35 for the personal loyalty of the Othonians to their leader and 90 on his ‘talent for managing people’. Miller 1977, 19 notes the contrast between the last word of 1.35 (incorruptus, referring to Galba) and the description of Otho’s petitioning for the soldiers’ favour, described from 1.36 onwards.
399 He is enticed to seize power by thoughts of luxury and licence, by omens and predictions of astrologers, by fear, hatred and jealousy; cf. 1.21-22 and 1.44; cf. also his fear at 1.27.2, the emotive language at 1.13.4 and the demagogy in his speech at 1.37-38 and 1.32.2: sclera impetu. Plutarch, too, emphasizes Otho’s fears, and Suetonius pays attention to his impatient and impulsive nature: Braun 1992, 97-101.
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Otho’s administration of his province as moderate – as Suetonius has done – as this would evoke connotations with Galba’s management of Africa as described elsewhere by Tacitus.400

Like Piso’s address some chapters earlier, Otho’s speech to his supporters in 1.37-38 contributes significantly to his characterization; in this case, in portraying him as the opposite of Galba and Piso.401 While to some extent mirroring Piso’s earlier address, Otho explicitly counters several of Galba’s and Piso’s arguments, and offers a reinterpretation of both the men and their actions. Both Piso and Otho start by establishing a personal connection to their audience by addressing them as commilitones, expressing doubts about their status and destiny, and stating that their fates are connected.402 After these captationes benevolentiae, both men discuss Galba’s seizure of imperial power and its consequences for the city of Rome, but to a wholly different effect. Piso speaks of the solacium of Galba’s peaceful accession (1.29.2) and contrasts it with the usurpation of Otho. Otho, conversely, talks of the horror of recalling Galba’s march to Rome and the accompanying executions – described in vivid detail403 – and uses that picture of Galbanian cruelty to evoke a grim prospect of what awaits himself and his supporters: cuius lenitatis est Galba, iam fortasse promisit (sc. poenam et supplicium, 1.37.2). Otho recalls several of the incidents narrated earlier by Tacitus – the murders of Nymphidius Sabinus (1.5.2), of Cingonius, Turpilianus and the soldiers (both 1.6.1-2), and of Capito and Macer (1.7.1-3) – and adds some others. By stating that Galba executed the soldiers quos deprecantes in fidem acceperat (1.37.3), he stresses the divergence between Galba’s proud proclamation of fides as one of the most important virtues (1.15.4) and his

400 Morgan 1993, 572-573; Geiser 2007, 211-221. Galba’s need of money: 1.20.1, Dio 64.2.1 (with Murison 1999 ad loc. on the historical background); Otho’s debts: 1.21.1, Plut. G. 21.2, Suet. O. 5.1-2; Galba’s proconsulship in Africa is described as moderate, but Otho’s administration of Lusitania as merely comiter, rather than with moderatio, as in Suet. O. 3.2 (note that it is described much more positively, as integre sancteque, by Tacitus later in his Annals, 13.46.3).
401 Keitel 1991, 2778. Again, this speech is not found in the parallel sources apart from a brief reference to it in Suet. O. 6.3.
402 Keitel 1991, 2778; uncertainty: 1.29.2 and 1.37.1; common fates: 1.29.2: si nobis aut perire necesse est; 1.37.2: adeo manifestum est neque perire nos neque salvos esse nisi una posse and 1.37.1; connection: 1.30.2 and 1.37.1. The collapse of stability as expressed in the uncertainty about names and labels is a topos: Damon 2003 ad loc.
403 Names of the victims and their places of execution are given, and emotive words and phrases such as tot milia innocentissimorum militum trucidaverit, feralem, and in oculis urbis decumari deditos iuberet, quos deprecantes in fidem acceperat.
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betrayal of that loyalty.

Then, both speeches embark on a vilification of the speaker’s opponents; again, there is a certain parallelism, as Piso denounces Otho’s weak and effeminate character, his luxuria, sexual licence and taste for alcohol, while Otho attacks the opposite vices in Galba: cruelty, severity, avarice and strict discipline, together with his lack of control over his rapacious associates. Both Piso and Otho accuse their opponent of dissimulation: Piso claims that Otho ‘played the emperor’s friend’ (1.30.1) and that people are deceived when they mistake his luxuria for liberality. Otho, on the other hand, turns all qualities in which Galba takes pride into negative features by stating that Galba is masking them with falsa nomina: Galba’s emendata et correcta castra are actually cruenta et maculata, saevitia becomes severitas, avaritia is labelled parsimonia, supplicia et contumelias turn into disciplina (1.37.4). The phrase nam quae alii scelera, hic remedia vocat echoes other instances of remedia applied by Galba to no avail: the election of a successor, resulting in the choice of a wrong candidate (1.14.1); the removal of four tribunes, causing fear rather than tightening discipline (1.20.3); and the maiora remedia which are never accomplished by Galba (1.29.1).404 Galba’s remedia, according to Tacitus as author, are ineffective rather than criminal, but the Tacitean Otho magnifies their negative effects.405 Otho then proceeds to denounce the rapacity of Galba’s associates, in particular Vinius’ wealth, and contrasts this with the emperor’s refusal to give the soldiers the donativa promised to them (1.37.5).406

The next paragraph of Otho’s speech, with a second commiliones, is devoted to Galba’s adoption of Piso. Otho describes Piso as ‘the man whose gloom and greed Galba reckoned made him most like himself’ (1.48.1) – an assessment in line with Tacitus’ depiction of both men. The adoption itself Otho calls infausta, referring to the divine disapproval expressed in the heavy weather on the day of the announcement in the camp – something also mentioned by Tacitus as an author at 1.18.1. In the last sentences of his address, Otho incites the soldiers to action, by stating that

404 See Edwards 2012a on remedia in the Histories.
405 Keitel 1991, 2780.
406 Cf. Tacitus’ comment at 1.48.4: testamentum Titi Vini magnitudine opum inritum. Modern scholars disagree about whose domus is meant here: Galba’s or Vinius’: Heubner 1963, Chilver 1979 and Geiser 2007 take it to refer to Vinius’, since his avarice and licence are discussed directly before this sentence; Moore’s 1925 Loeb translation explicitly refers to Galba; Damon 2003 does not give a verdict. I am inclined to follow Heubner’s reasoning.
the Senate and people also oppose the adoption, and that they rely on the soldiers’ strength to carry out the protest (1.38.1). Piso, too, in his attempt to win over the soldiers, appeals to the *nomina* of the state, the Senate and the people, although he acknowledges that these might seem *vacua* to his listeners. Otho adds that the soldiers face no danger and are not embarking on a war, because they are widely supported and Galba is detained, not even defended, by less than one cohort, which will soon be swayed – the only battle or contest (*certamen*) will be amongst themselves, competing for Otho’s obligation (1.38.2). This is not consistent with his own earlier utterances that punishment is demanded for Otho and his supporters and that there is a real risk of being killed (1.37.2). Otho’s assertions of danger at the start of his speech, however, seem intended to create a feeling of solidarity between himself and the soldiers by emphasizing their joint involvement, whereas his later declarations are meant to take away the soldiers’ worries and to raise their morale. His statement, moreover, contrasts with Piso’s claim that *bellorum* (sc. *exitus*) *ad vos pertinebunt* (1.30.3).407 Otho ends his address by stressing the importance of decisiveness (1.38.2), as he had been depicted as doing before in his thoughts (1.21.2). As with Piso’s speech, Otho’s is followed by impulsive and disorganized action from the soldiers: *rapta statim arma, sine more et ordine militiae, ut Praetorianus aut legionarius insignibus suis distingueretur* (1.38.3; cf. 1.31.1: *forte magis et nullo adhuc consilio rapit signa*).

Through his speech, Otho emerges as the opposite of Galba and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Piso. In contrast to Galba, Otho is vigorous and able to appeal to the soldiers’ sentiments, through the use of emotive and demagogic language, and by establishing a personal connection with his soldiers.408 On several points, his rhetoric is exaggerated and even false, especially compared with Piso’s earlier utterances on the same topics; and his accusation of Galba’s misrepresentation and use of *falsa nomina* can easily be applied to himself as well.409 Moreover, because of Piso’s neg-

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407 Damon 2003 *ad loc.*
408 Language e.g. *innocentissimum, trucidaverit, horror animum subit,* the exaggerations and plural forms of the names in 1.37.5, *hoc solum erit certamen, quis mihi plurimum imputet,* etc. Keitel 1991, 2778 notes that Otho’s fate is truly connected to that of the soldiers, whereas Piso differentiates them. Cf. Sage’s apt verdict (1990, 924): ‘In contrast to the hesitating Otho of the monologue (1.21), Tacitus presents us with an accomplished demagogue. The speech makes understandable Otho’s success and the loyalty he was able to command.’
409 Keitel 1991, 2779-2780 and Damon 2003 *ad loc.* for examples. Contrary to the falsehoods uttered by Galba, however, Otho’s seem to derive more from deliberate twisting of the truth than from ignorance or a mismatch with the times; cf. Keitel 1991, 2779-2780.
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ative characterization of Otho some chapters before, and due to his own sarcasm in the speech, readers might view Otho’s arguments with sceptisism. Nevertheless, Otho’s address depicts him as having a better grasp of the situation than both Galba and Piso, since his claims – and sometimes even their verbal expression – are often in keeping with Tacitus’ own authorial narrative of events earlier in the work. Several times, Otho’s words echo those of Tacitus himself in the preceding narrative, although often in an exaggerated form. Like Tacitus, Otho represents Galba’s entry into Rome as bloody – in contrast to Piso’s claim of an incruentam urbem (1.29.2). His image of the rapacity of Galba’s advisers is in line with Tacitus’ earlier remarks on their greed (1.7.3, 1.12.3); and both link the heavy weather on the day of the announcement of the adoption with divine disapproval (1.18.1, 1.38.1), instead of claiming human and divine consensus as Galba and Piso do (1.15.1, 1.30.2). Otho’s infausta adoptio (1.38.1) recalls Tacitus’ description of Galba’s entry into Rome as infaustus omine (1.6.2). Although not all details included in Otho’s speech are supported by other sources and some are clearly untrue, Otho’s perception of Galba’s behaviour is nevertheless closer to the narrative truth than that expressed by Piso in his speech in 1.29-30.

This contrast between Otho on the one hand, and Piso and Galba on the other, is further heightened because Otho’s address exhibits verbal correspondences with both Piso’s and Galba’s speeches. These echoes are perhaps designed to mock their exalted and old-fashioned language of self-presentation, especially in contrast to their less than elevated behaviour. Otho, then, seems to have a better understanding of the situation as it has been presented by Tacitus, and this firmly sets him

411 Otho’s tot milia innocentissimorum militum in 1.37.2 and Tacitus’ tot milibus inermium militum and tamen innocentes in 1.6.1; trucidaverit (1.37.2) vs. trucidatis (1.6.2); his auspiciis urbem ingressus (1.37.3) vs. introitus in urbem … infaustus omine (1.6.2); remedia (1.37.4) vs. remedium (1.20.3); Pisonem Licinianum accersi iubet (1.14.1) and accersit ab exilio (1.38.1); and Otho’s terms avaritia (1.37.4) and tristitia (1.38.1) have previously been used in presenting the impressions of unspecified focalizers about Galba and Piso (1.5.2 and 1.14.2); Heubner 1963 and Damon 2003 ad loc; cf. Geiser 2007, 251-252.
413 Such as 1.30.2: vacua nomina vs. 1.37.4: falsis nominibus; 1.30.1: vitia, quibus solis gloriam vs. 1.37.3: quam gloriam ad principatum attulit; 1.38.1: sine quibus quamvis egregia invalida sunt vs. 1.16.3: nos ... cum invidia quamvis egregie erimus. The same phrase quamvis egregius is also found in 1.26.2, in a narratorial comment on Laco’s behaviour; in that case too, things that are egregia, no matter how noble, are ineffective, because of the moral destitution of the age.
apart from Piso and Galba. But this is not necessarily a compliment: Galba might be ignorant, but there is a certain honour in that (cf. 1.5.2); Otho, on the other hand, is cast as a child of his (morally corrupt) time. Indeed, Keitel, drawing attention to the similarities between Otho’s address in 1.37-38 and his three other speeches in the Histories (1.21, 1.83-84 and 2.47), convincingly argues that these speeches, which abound in inversions of traditional exhortation motifs, ‘highlight the reversal of conventional military situations and the concomitant inversion of values characteristic of civil war’. In this light, Otho’s profession of uncertainty about his position and his references to Galba’s sola victoria, to divine support and to the virtue of the soldiers – all parainetic topoi, but reversed – show how much values and morality have turned around, and how much Otho is not a heroic Roman general.

Otho and Nero

Otho is, moreover, repeatedly associated with Nero, while Galba is dissociated from his predecessor. In explaining why Galba did not choose Otho as his successor, Tacitus states that he reckons Galba would consider the state to be ‘wrested from Nero in vain if it were to be left in the hands of (an) Otho’ (1.13.2), thereby suggesting that Otho’s likeness to Nero was the problem. In addition to aligning Otho’s expected effect on the state with the consequences of Nero’s rule, Tacitus spends the next paragraph highlighting the similarities and links between Otho and Nero (see above, section 1.2.1). Otho’s connection and (alleged) likeness to Nero are mentioned several times also later in the narrative. Nero’s court is said to favour Otho because they thought he resembled their former master (1.13.4), and both men are characterized by luxuria (1.16.2 for Nero, 1.22.1 for Otho). Several of the soldiers support Otho on account of their memory of Nero, actively evoked by Otho himself (1.23.1: memoria Neroniani comitatus contubernales appellando; 1.25.2: erant quos memoria Neronis ... accenderet), and Otho himself is tempted to seize power by the prospect of Nero’s luxurious and voluptuous court (1.22.1). Piso indirectly compares Otho to Nero by attributing a female attire to him (1.30.1: muliebri ornatu), a feature which was more commonly associated with Nero. Lat-
er in Book 1, Otho considers playing up his link to Nero to increase his popularity, and is associated with Nero by some people.\textsuperscript{418}

Tacitus does not play up the link as much as Suetonius and Plutarch, who mention Otho’s close (possibly even sexual) relations to Nero, his plans to marry Nero’s last wife Statilia Messalina, his continuation of Neronian policy in staff and building projects, and the use of the name Nero in official documents.\textsuperscript{419} There appears to have been a literary tradition linking Otho to Nero, and of the former’s ‘condemnation by association’ with the latter.\textsuperscript{420} But, as Damon points out, Tacitus in some cases tries to dissociate Otho from Nero by attributing to him some positive character traits and achievements not found in the Tacitean Nero, and by ascribing several links to ‘things Neronian’ to other actors or motives.\textsuperscript{421} Nevertheless, even if he could have played up the link more than he does, Tacitus clearly does want his readers to associate Otho with Nero. He repeatedly mentions the names Nero and Poppaea in the context of descriptions of Otho, and – as Damon argues – the whole Poppaea-story may have been mentioned to emphasize Otho’s similarity to Nero.\textsuperscript{422} Galba, on the other hand, is dissociated from Nero in the narrative, by himself, by Tacitus, and by indefinite focalizers.\textsuperscript{423} Otho’s resemblance and connection to Nero are hereby suggested as an important reason for Galba not to adopt him.

\subsection*{1.3.4 The Consequences of Galba’s Criteria}

The previous section has argued that Otho is characterized by Tacitus in such a way as to form an almost complete opposite to Galba and Piso, who are likened to one another in their portrayal in the narrative, and that as a result, Tacitus presents character as the main reason in Galba’s choice for Piso and against Otho. In doing

\textsuperscript{418} 1.23.1, 1.78.3; similar stories are found in Plut. O. 3.1-2 and Suet. O. 7.1. Cf. Ash 1999, 85 for another possible reference to Nero; Haynes 2003, 57-70 on Otho as a Neronian figure.
\textsuperscript{419} Suet. O. 2.2, 7.1, 10.2; Plut. O. 3.2; Dio 61.11.2; see Damon 2003, 256-257 and Ries 1969, 109-112. Note, however, that there is no non-literary evidence for Otho’s use of the name Nero.
\textsuperscript{420} Ash 1999, 86-87.
\textsuperscript{421} Damon 2003, 256-257 \textit{ad} 1.78.2 \textit{creditus est … agitavisse.}
\textsuperscript{422} Damon 2003, 131 \textit{ad} 13.3 \textit{coque … seposuit.}
\textsuperscript{423} In 1.5.2, (the soldiers’ hatred of) Galba’s discipline is contrasted with (their love for) Nero’s vices; his old age opposed to Nero’s youth in 1.7.3; Galba’s dislike of Nero is mentioned in 1.13.2 and 1.16.2. See Kragelund 1998 on the historical Galba’s rehabilitation of some of Nero’s victims.
so, however, Tacitus also offers implicit explanations of Galba’s and Piso’s downfall, and Otho’s initial success in seizing power, for the narrative suggests that the criteria which Galba is represented to employ in his search for a successor are rather imprudent in the situation as presented previously by Tacitus. In particular, enough indications of the widespread discontent with Galba’s character have been provided to make clear that the problems cannot be solved by someone who resembles the emperor so much. Although Piso’s goodness, sincerity, trust, friendship and care for the state are admirable qualities in themselves, Tacitus’ narrative has shown, and will continue to indicate, that these features are not shared or valued by the majority of the population. Instead, all layers of the populace – the Senate, the urban and legionary soldiers, the people – are portrayed as unconcerned for the state and driven by self-interest,\textsuperscript{424} as displaying servitude, dissimulation and flattery,\textsuperscript{425} and as loquacious and eager for (false) rumours.\textsuperscript{426} Throughout the \textit{Histories}, one of the main aspects of Tacitus’ portrayal of the atmosphere of 69 is the general collapse of traditional values and morality, making the luxurious Otho a potentially more acceptable successor than the upright Piso.

Piso’s distinguished ancestry, although traditionally highly-valued, does not seem to mean much to the Empire’s population as portrayed by Tacitus; indeed, the mere fact that Tacitus does not bother to state Otho’s ancestry until his obituary in 2.50.1 suggests that high birth was not a major factor in people’s support for a potential successor. In the survey, Tacitus attributes Vitellius’ appointment as commander of the Lower Germanic army to his descent, more specifically his father’s three consulships and censorships (1.9.1), but this seems to be Galba’s own conviction, which is not necessarily shared by the soldiers. In his speech urging Vеспa-

\textsuperscript{424} E.g. 1.12.1, 1.12.3, 1.19.1, 1.19.2, 1.26.1, 1.40.2. Ironically, only after Galba’s death are some credited with care for the state: 1.50.1: \textit{non senatus modo et eques, quis aliqua pars et cura rei publicae}. The soldiers’ only concern is with their own appreciation and reward (1.5.1-2, 1.8.2, 1.18.3, 1.25.2; the exception is the army in Britain in 1.8.2). Cf. Keitel 2006 on the incongruity of Galba’s claim to care for the state with the self-interest of people around him.

\textsuperscript{425} 1.11.3, 1.26.1, 1.28.1, 1.32.1, 1.35.1, 1.39.2, 1.44.2, 1.45.1, 1.47.1.

\textsuperscript{426} 1.4.3, 1.5.2, 1.7.3, 1.12.2, 1.13.2, 1.17.2, 1.14.1, 1.19.2, 1.22.2, 1.29.1, 1.34.1, 1.34.2, 1.35.2. See Ries 1969, 95-132 on talking and rumours in \textit{Hist}. 1.1-49; on the role of sermones and rumores in Tacitus in general see Scott Ryberg 1942; Shatzman 1974; Gibson 1998.
The choice of a successor

who is feared is noble enough in the eyes of the man who fears him’ (2.76.3). Piso’s
two assets – his virtuous character and his distinguished ancestry – appear irrele-
vant in the situation as sketched by Tacitus.

By contrast, the Tacitean Otho possesses several attributes which Piso does not
have – or is at least not stated to have by Tacitus – but which are highly significant:
connections with, and support among, the influential groups in society, experience,
and insight into the situation. Otho is favoured by Nero’s courtiers, consul Titus
Vinius, and the majority of the soldiers. He had gained some administrative expe-
rience as as governor of Lusitania – not a very important province, and one with-
out legions, but probably enough to give him some sense of the workings of public
administration. He was familiar with life at the imperial court, since he had been
a close acquaintance of Nero. Moreover, he is more in touch with the spirit of the
times, and knows how to win the soldiers’ favour. Even Otho’s alleged likeness to
Nero may have been perceived as an asset, as Tacitus indicates that Nero con-
tinued to be popular along the plebs sordida (1.4.3), the urban soldiers (1.5.1) and the
imperial court (1.13.4). Piso, by contrast, is only supported by Laco, is unknown to
the military and people, and, considering his stern character and likeness to Galba,
is not likely to gain their favour easily. Many of the senators are in favour of him,
but the majority is indifferent to the whole question of succession, and will have
consented to any candidate (1.19.1: medii ac plurimi obvio obsequio). Furthermore,
Piso does not have much military, administrative or political experience, due to a
long period of exile under Nero. As a result, he lacks knowledge of how to deal with
the current tense situation, and has no real connection to the armies, who are at the
same time the main critics of Galba and a determining factor in the course of events
in the civil wars.427 His understanding of the situation and his ability to win support
is a bit, but not much better than Galba’s, as testified by his speech and the reactions
to it. As Morgan observes, ‘Otho was the obvious candidate from the start.’428 Gal-
ba’s inability to understand this and act upon it is part of Tacitus’ explanation for
his failure as emperor.

427 Chilver 1979, 47.
428 Morgan 2006, 58.
GALBA

To sum up, Tacitus represents character as Galba’s primary criterion for the selection of his successor. This is borne out by the characterization of Galba, Piso and Otho: by using verbal similarities and contrasts, by stressing opposing qualities and actions, and by omitting conflicting details, Otho is presented as exhibiting some distinctly Neronian and ‘un-Galban’ traits, whereas Piso is largely equated with Galba. However, Tacitus’ representation also suggests that this criterion is not very important in the circumstances, and that Otho has some very real advantages which the Tacitean Galba overlooks. As such, Tacitus offers the reader an indirect explanation for the outcome of the adoption: the failure of Galba and Piso to maintain their positions, and Otho’s easy usurpation.
This section examines the way Tacitus frames his representation of the adoption, and as such influences his readers’ interpretation of the adoption episode. Through a comparison with the parallel sources, I argue that Tacitus makes the adoption appear both more crucial and more ineffective than Suetonius and Plutarch. The Tacitean Galba makes his adoption of Piso into a programmatic act, claiming to inaugurate a new system of imperial succession – thereby raising the stakes of his undertaking considerably in comparison to his counterpart in Suetonius and Plutarch. At the same time, Tacitus’ Galba fails more miserably than Suetonius’ and Plutarch’s emperor, by being characterized as weak, passive, ignorant, out of touch with the times, and inconsistent, and because his adoption of Piso is made to seem more imprudent. Simultaneously, the large number of similarities in situation and representation with Trajan’s adoption and its depiction in Pliny’s *Panegyricus* endow the unsuccessful adoption of Piso with contemporary resonances and urgency.

### 1.4.1 THE ADOPTION IN THE PARALLEL SOURCES

*Dio and Suetonius*

Assuming that both Tacitus’ narrative and the parallel accounts rely on a common source, notable divergences from the other sources point towards deliberate decisions on Tacitus’ part. The epitome of Cassius Dio only briefly mentions the adoption: ‘Galba, on being informed of the uprising of Vitellius, adopted Lucius Piso, a youth of good family, promising and intelligent, and appointed him Caesar’ (Dio 64.5.1). Nothing is said of the reason for the adoption or the occasion on which it
took place, no speech of Galba’s is mentioned, and no further information about his choice for Piso is given besides the latter’s ancestry and intelligence. The epitomator does add, however, that Galba had always honoured Otho, and that the latter was angered for being passed over by the emperor, suggesting, like Tacitus (1.13.4), that Otho had seemed a logical candidate for adoption (64.5.2). This resentment is presented as Otho’s motive for seizing power.

Suetonius, like Tacitus and Dio, links Galba’s decision to adopt to the rebellion of the Germanic legions; but whereas Tacitus makes his Galba say *audita adoptione desinam videri senex, quod nunc mihi unum obicitur* (1.16.3), Suetonius explicitly states *despectui esse non tam senectam suam quam orbitatem ratus* (G. 17). Suetonius situates the adoption in the Praetorian camp, before the assembled soldiers, and makes no mention of a private *consilium* – instead, he makes Galba pick out Piso at one of his *salutationes* (G. 17). Suetonius calls Piso *a nobilis egregiusque iuvenis*, implying criteria similar to those of the Tacitean Galba: noble birth and moral excellence. Suetonius is the only source who reports a previous relationship between Galba and Piso; the latter had supposedly ‘long been one of his special favourites and always named in his will as heir to his property and his name’ (G. 17). Tacitus, by contrast, creates the impression that it was Laco who had maintained a friendship with Piso, and who had urged the emperor to adopt him (1.14.1). Even if Tacitus presents it as a rumour, the second alternative appears more credible, reducing Galba’s independence and agency, compared to Suetonius’ account.429

Otho is not named as a rival candidate for adoption in Suetonius’ biography of Galba, but in his life of Otho, Suetonius, like Tacitus (1.14.1), reports that Otho had hoped to be adopted by Galba (O. 4.1-5.1). When writing about the *consilium eligendi successoris*, Tacitus implies that Otho’s hope derived from his enthusiastic support of Galba before he became emperor (1.14.4). It is only after Otho has been passed over with the adoption of Piso that Tacitus mentions a prediction by the astrologer Ptolemaus that Otho would be adopted as imperial successor (1.22.2). Suetonius also situates the beginnings of Otho’s hopes for adoption in his early period of support for Galba, but he explicitly attributes these hopes not to this support, but to the ‘state of the times’ and the prediction of an astrologer, here called Seleucus (O. 4.1). Moreover, Suetonius continues (O. 4.1-2) by relating that, following this prediction, Otho started to win over the soldiers with bribes, with the result

429 See the more detailed treatment of this passage above, section 1.2.2.
that ‘there was hardly anyone who did not both think and openly declare that he alone was worthy to succeed to the Empire’ long before the question of the adoption became urgent. Notably, Tacitus relates very similar anecdotes of bribing and corruption of the military already before the adoption, introducing the story with *sed sceleris cogitatio incertum an repens*, putting forward the possibility that Otho had been making preparations for a coup even before Galba refused to appoint him as his successor. Tacitus, however, only brings up this highly relevant detail after the adoption, which strongly affects the reader’s perception of Galba’s choice for Piso and against Otho. Before he narrates the adoption itself, Tacitus has told the reader that Otho had been a loyal and vigorous supporter of Galba, that on account of that he had conceived the hope of being adopted as his successor, and that that hope was encouraged by his popularity among the court and the soldiers (1.13.4) – in short, that he deserved to be adopted in return for his services, and that he was the favoured candidate. When Galba then proceeds to adopt Piso – who is not said to have assisted Galba previously, or to enjoy support outside Galba’s group of advisers – and rubs in his disregard for Otho by acknowledging that there are individuals who may have earned the honour of an adoption due to their help (1.15.2: *non quia ... socios belli non habeam*), the emperor comes off as particularly unfair and imprudent. Some chapters later, we hear that Otho may have been expecting imperial power on the basis of an (untrustworthy) prediction and had been actively preparing for a coup – a much less noble picture, but one that is only presented after Tacitus has firmly imbued the reader with the impression that Galba fails to understand the needs of the situation and the balance of power, and consequently makes dangerously unfair and unwise decisions.

**Plutarch**

A comparison with Plutarch’s account, which devotes five chapters to the adoption (G. 19-23), suggests further Tacitean particularities. In general, Plutarch’s depiction in his biography of Galba exhibits many similarities – verbal, thematic, and argumentative – to Tacitus’ narrative. In Plutarch’s text, too, Galba hopes to solve the problem of the Germanic revolt by the adoption of a successor (19.1, 23.1); Otho’s relationships to Nero and Poppaea are mentioned (19.2-5), as well as Otho’s early reputation for luxury (19.2), his governorship of Lusitania (20.1) and his loyal

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430 1.23.1; he later makes Piso refer to this as well: 1.30.1.
and energetic support of Galba (20.2); Titus Vinius suggests Otho in return for the latter’s engagement to his daughter (21.1-2); Otho is favoured by the soldiery (21.2); the adoption is accompanied by inauspicious weather (23.2); Piso reacts calmly to his designation as imperial successor (23.3); and only after Piso’s adoption is a prediction by the astrologer Ptolemaeus brought up (23.4). In particular, the arguments which Galba offers for his choice of successor – care for the state, the absence of self-interest, the choice of the best man for the Roman people – resemble Tacitus’ version: ‘Galba always showed clearly that he placed the public good before his private interests, and in the present case that he aimed to adopt, not the man who was most agreeable to himself, but the one who would be most serviceable to the Romans’ (21.1). Moreover, the qualities emphasized in Piso are his illustrious ancestry (19.1) and his virtuous disposition, especially his gravity and decorum (23.2), whereas Otho’s extravagance and lack of restraint – as well as his enormous debts – are said to have discredited him with the emperor (21.2). On the other hand, there are several respects in which Plutarch’s version differs from that of Tacitus, but concurs with Suetonius’ story. For instance, Plutarch also mentions Galba’s childlessness as a source of public discontent (19.1), notes Otho’s debts and his successful efforts to win the soldiers’ loyalty before he comes to speak of the adoption proper (20.3 and 21.2), makes the choice for Piso really Galba’s own, independent of any suggestion or pressure from others (23.1), and has the adoption take place in the camp and without being preceded by a private council meeting (23.2). One may assume that Tacitus has deliberately diverged from the common sources on these points.

In addition, there is a more fundamental difference between Plutarch’s account and Tacitus’ representation of the adoption: Tacitus accords Galba’s adoption of Piso a more general significance, with broader implications. In Plutarch, the slogans of choosing the best man for the state serve to justify Galba’s adoption of a certain person (Piso) in a particular context (the contestation of his authority coupled with his own age and childlessness) – Galba’s decision is not suggested to carry any weight or consequences beyond this specific historical event, and the emperor does not dwell on the use of extra-familial adoption to designate imperial successors in general. In Tacitus, by contrast, the adoption is depicted as holding a broader, al-

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431 Since Plutarch also calls the astrologer Ptolemaeus, Suetonius may have confused him with Vespasian’s Seleucus (2.78.1); Chilver 1979 ad loc.
most universal consequence. Galba is represented as establishing, for once and for all, a new system of imperial succession, on the basis of principle, rather than because of specific circumstances. His decision to adopt a successor does not arise from his lack of children – his childlessness is passed over by Tacitus, and Galba is made to assert that he does in fact have relatives – but is the result of a more deep-seated conviction that power should be given to the man most suitable for governing the Empire. Galba’s choice for Piso becomes the inauguration of a major political change, a shift away from the Julio-Claudian tradition of hereditary succession: the preference for a method of transmitting imperial power by selection rather than through inheritance, and the prioritizing of qualities and merit over birth. The emperor’s lengthy speech – no trace of which is found in Plutarch – serves to elaborate on this, and has significance for the rest of the work, by raising more general questions about the way imperial power should be transmitted and the qualities which an emperor should possess.

1.4.2 FRAMING THE ADOPTION: GALBA’S CHARACTERIZATION

The ‘narrative frame’ of the adoption episode – the surrounding context, which helps the reader interpret the episode itself – consists foremost of the emperor’s characterization. As has been touched upon already in section 1.1.2, throughout the narrative, the emperor is characterized as old, weak, ignorant of the situation, and as failing to live up to the strict standards which he proclaims – a portrayal which raises serious questions about the credibility of his adoption and speech.

Old age and weakness
At various points in the narrative, Galba is characterized as old, by several focalizers: Tacitus himself, characters in his text, and indefinite focalizers. His old age is repeatedly contrasted with the youth of Nero and Piso; and it is at times coupled

432 1.5.2 (focalizer: soldiers), 1.6.1 (Tacitus), 1.7.3 (Tacitus), 1.12.2 (Tacitus), 1.16.1 (Galba), 1.16.3 (Galba), 1.18.3 (Tacitus), 1.21.1 (Otho), 1.35.1 (Tacitus), 1.40.2 (Tacitus); see Ries 1969, 104-114 on rumours in relation to Galba’s senium. Tacitus only states his age in the emperor’s obituary (1.49.2); Galba was in his seventies: see Chilver 1979 ad 1.49.1.
433 Nero: 1.7.3; Piso: 1.16.1, 1.21.1 (and indirectly in 1.34.1).
with connotations of physical fragility, unattractiveness, and helplessness. Tacitus seems to deliberately play up Galba’s age and the accompanying connotations, compared to the parallel sources, which also frequently refer to Galba’s age, but do not connect this to fragility and vulnerability to the same extent as Tacitus. For instance, Tacitus relates that Galba, when deciding to leave the palace, is too weak to resist the crowd rushing in and is placed in a litter (1.35.1). When reporting the same anecdote, Suetonius (G. 19) does not mention the litter at all, while Plutarch (G. 26.2) does, but does not connect it to Galba’s age or infirmity. The murder of the ageing emperor in particular underlines his age and vulnerability. Chapter 1.40 narrates how Otho’s soldiers rush into the Forum to attack the old and unarmed Galba, and Tacitus compares them with Roman soldiers preparing to violently remove a Parthian king (1.40.2). But these are Roman soldiers (milites Romani), who normally should obey the emperor, but who are hurrying to slaughter (trucidare) their old and unarmed emperor (imperatorem suum inermem et senem). The ambiguity in inermis, which can mean both literally ‘without weapons’, but also more generally ‘defenceless’ or ‘helpless’, even ‘harmless’, creates a sense of vulnerability, which is enhanced by the portrayal of Galba as (grammatically) passive in the previous paragraph. The addition of suum to imperatorem and of Romani to milites, the references to violence and the forceful term trucidare (‘to massacre, butcher, slaughter’) heighten the atrocity of the scene and create a sense of pity with the aged emperor. Galba is not even accorded a dignified speech at the moment of his death: his last words are reported in oratio obliqua, Tacitus mentions doubts about their actual content, and his murderers do not actually care about what he says.

434 Fragility: 1.6.1: invalidum senem; 1.12.2: fessa iam aetate Galbae; 1.35.1: Galba ... neque aetate neque corpore sistens sella levaretur. Unattractiveness: 1.7.3: ipsa aetas Galba inrisui ac fastidio erat adsuetis iuventae Neronis et imperatores forma ac decore corporis, ut est mos volgi, comparantibus. Helplessness: 1.40.2: inermem et senem. The importance of physical attractiveness is also suggested by the use of the same word decus/decor as an explanation for Germanicus’ popularity in the Annals (2.13.1 and 2.73.2) and Titus’ reputation as capax imperii in the Histories (2.1.2).

435 References to his old age are found in Suet. G. 4.1, 13.1, 17.1 and 20.2 (none of these mention him as weak due to his age); Plut. G. 3.3, 8.1 (linked to physical weakness), 11.2 (subordination to Vinius), 13.2-3, 13.4 (physical unattractiveness), 15.3, 16.3 (weakness), 17.1 (influence of Vinius), 19.1, 27.3, 29.4 (physical weakness); Dio 64.1.3, 64.3.2, 64.4.4 (physical weakness).

436 As Ash 1999, 79-80 further notes, Suetonius’ Galba is ‘resigned to his own future’, whereas the Tacitean one lacks this insight and dignity.


438 1.41.2: extremam eius vocem, ut cuique odium aut admiratio fuit, varie pro<di> dere. alii suppliciter interro-
Tacitus’ description of Galba’s end, moreover, evokes Virgil’s depiction of the death of Priam through the inclusion of details not found in the other sources, and thereby increases the pathos, both for Galba himself, but also for the Roman state implicitly equated with Troy – indeed, like Troy, the heart of Rome will also go up in flames when the Capitoline temple is burnt down in 3.71-72.\textsuperscript{439} Tacitus, in painting the death scene of the ageing emperor, employs a wide array of rhetorical devices to arouse indigation and pity.\textsuperscript{440}

At the same time, Tacitus’ portrayal carries a strong condemnation of the deed and its perpetrators. As Damon summarizes: ‘The analogy between the Roman emperor and one of the interchangeable foreign dynasts, the venerability and vulnerability of the victim, the violent action (\textit{disiecta, proculcato, irrumpunt}), the contempt for cultural touchstones (Capitol, temples, past and future \textit{principes}), the moral labels (\textit{scelus, ultor}), all of these elements plainly convey outrage.’\textsuperscript{441} This almost leads the reader to forget the executions ordered by Galba himself, narrated earlier with the same expressions \textit{trucidare} and \textit{inermis}.\textsuperscript{442} Galba’s death scene, in fact, holds a particular relevance also for the rest of the \textit{Histories}, since his murder both refuels the civil war and creates a ‘terrifying precedent’ for the cruelties of the conflicts to follow.\textsuperscript{443}

\begin{quote}
gasse, quid mali meruisset, paucos dies exsolvendo donativo deprecatum: plures obtulisse ultero percussoribus iugulum: agerent ac ferirent, si ita \textlt<\textgt<> re publica videretur. non interfuit occidentium quid diceret; Ash 1999, 80. Tacitus tells us that conflicting versions of his last words circulate, referring to different traditions existing about Galba’s death. Tacitus does not name the sources and neither does he indicate clearly his preference for one version or the other; on sources, see Damon 2003 \textit{ad loc.}; Plut. G. 27.1-2 only preserves the ‘courageous’ version; Suet. G. 20.1 reports a story with verbal similarities to Tacitus’ version, indicating that the latter version is the more widespread, but he replaces the interest of the \textit{res publica} with that of the murderers; Dio 64.6.6 only has Galba’s question. However, although the last option may seem preferable on the basis of position and because it accords with Galba’s characterization as strict, Tacitus inserts a hint of feebleness, even in his last moments of life.\textsuperscript{439} Benario 1972; Ash 1999, 79-80; Joseph 2012b, 79-85.\textsuperscript{440} Such as emphasis on a victim’s vulnerability (e.g. due to youth, old age, physical weakness, poverty, etc.), the use of deliberate violence and cruelty, the associations of foreignness and barbarity, the eager onlookers, the stark contrast between his previous high position on the one hand, and his miserable end and the Othonians’ contempt on the other: see Cic. \textit{Inv}. 1.100-109 in on \textit{indignatio} and \textit{conquestio}; cf. Galtier 2011, 96-97.\textsuperscript{441} Damon 2003, 16.\textsuperscript{442} 1.6.2: \textit{introitus in urbem trucidatis tot milibus inermium militum}; Joseph 2012b, 48. Keitel 1995, 280 links this reversal of fate to the portrayal of Galba as a tragic tyrant. Notably, Plut. G. 15.2 uses the same terms (\textit{γέροντα γυμνὸν καὶ ἄνοπλον}) to describe Petronius Turpilianus, one of the two consuls ordered to death by Galba (as narrated in \textit{Hist}. 1.6.1), in a criticism of Galba’s despotism.\textsuperscript{443} Ash 1999, 83.
\end{quote}
sources, employs in depicting the scene and the individual murders – the Capitoline and its temples (1.40.2), the Lacus Curtius (1.41.2), the temple of the Divine Julius (1.42.1) and the temple of Vesta (1.43.2) – adds to the horror by locating the brutal killings in the political and religious heart of the city. Moreover, Galba’s murder evokes images of various other well-known deaths through a multitude of intertextual allusions, and is itself conjured up several times later in the narrative, prefiguring the burning of the Capitol, and drawing attention to the never-ending repetitiveness of civil war and its atrocities.

Galba’s old age and physical fragility are accompanied by related features: a kind of passivity, subordination to others, and (grammatical) lack of agency. This weakness is evoked through words such as invalidus (1.6.1), infirmus (1.12.3) credulus (1.12.3), mobilitas ingenii (1.7.2) and foeda inconstantia (1.19.2). His inability to stand up to his inferiors, mentioned several times, is the most explicit expression of this trait. His close advisers fail to provide Galba with relevant information and even misinform him, only think of themselves and their private gain, are divided by internal rivalry, and shift the contempt provoked by their actions unto their emperor, whose malleability facilitates their taking advantage of him (1.12.3).

Tacitus even explicitly states that ‘the actual power (potentia) of the principate was divided between Titus Vinius the consul and Cornelius Laco the Praetorian prefect, nor was the influence of Icelus, Galba’s freedman, less than theirs’ (1.13.1) – the title of emperor may belong to Galba, but Tacitus makes it very clear that he was not actually in control. The parallel sources also insist on the crimes and insolence of Galba’s advisers; but Tacitus adds to this by omitting some details – mentioned by

444 Edwards 1996, 76-77 (phrase from 77); Joseph 2012b, 90-95.
446 I find it hard to understand why Koestermann (1956b, 197) thinks that the foeda inconstantia with regard to composing a delegation in 1.19.2 is a critique on the ‘leading men’ rather than on Galba himself, as Tacitus explicitly states that senatus electionem Galbae permiserat, and emphasizes Laco’s blatant disobedience towards his superior, the emperor (Williams 2012, 216). Note that style emphasizes Galba’s fickleness: the asyndeton of legati … nominati excussati substituti imitates the swiftness with which Galba changed his mind.
447 1.6.1, 1.7.3, 1.12.3, 1.13.1, 1.24.2, 1.26.2, 1.32.2-33.2, 1.39.2, 1.48.4; see Damon 2003 ad 1.32-33 for useful remarks on Tacitus’ portrayal of the ‘advisers’. The verb eludere, describing Galba’s misinformation by Laco in 1.26.2, is often used for the deception of an old man in Roman comedy (Damon 2003 ad loc.); cf. Duckworth 1952, 242-249 and passim on the type of the senex in Roman comedy, who can be harsh, thrifty (though honest) and easily deceived (often by slaves); see also Cic. Am. 26.100 on the character of the improvidus and credulus senex.
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Suetonius and Plutarch – that conflict with a ‘picture of Laco as both significant and pernicious’, thus enhancing his harmful role. Moreover, compared to Suetonius’ biography, Tacitus presents the three advisers as much more mutually divided and hostile, and Galba as a victim of their internal rivalry. Plutarch, too, notes their competition, but does not elaborate on it as much as Tacitus; his focus is on the damaging influence of Vinius on Galba. Yet the Tacitean Galba is either ignorant of the misdeeds of his associates and subordinates, or condones them.

The emperor’s weakness and passivity are also conveyed to the reader in less explicit ways. For instance, by starting his narrative at the beginning of 69, Tacitus leaves out most of Galba’s actions and reign, and only introduces the emperor once he is on his way to his fall. And when he does bring him into the story, he postpones mentioning his name: Galba is spoken of twice as unnamed *princeps* in 1.4.2 and 1.4.3 until his name finally emerges in 1.5.1. However, it takes several more chapters until Galba is allowed agency of his own: in none of his first appearances does he take the role of an actor. Galba himself is either the object of a sentence dominated by others, or the mere owner of a feature which functions as the subject; there are hardly any mentions of his name in the nominative case. His first auton-

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448  Damon 2003 *ad loc.*, with more on Tacitus’ characterization of Vinius and Laco. Galba’s advisers and his inability to curb them are mentioned at Suet. G. 14.2 and 15.2; Plut. G. 4.3-4, 7.1-3, 10.3-4, 11.2, 12, 13.1-3, 16.3-4, 17.1, 18.2-5, 26.1, 27.4 and 29.4; Dio 64.2.1-3.
449  E.g. in Suet. G. 19, where Galba and his advisers deliberate in the Palace on the best course of action, no mention is made of conflicting advice, and Galba is portrayed as independently deciding on a different course of action. In the same scene in Tacitus (1.32-34), the emperor is the victim of his quarreling advisers: *repugnament huic sententiae Vinium Laco minaciter invasit, stimulante Icelo privati odii pertinacia in publicum exitium* (1.33.2). Also in G. 14.2, where Suetonius describes Galba’s subordination to Vinius, Laco and Icelus, nothing is said about any internal rivalries or hostilities.
450  Plut. G. 26.1, on the Palace deliberations, mentions disagreement among the advisers, but does not go into the details of their counsels; and whereas he does report Vinius’ preference for Otho as adoption candidate, and some others’ support of Dolabella (23.1), he does not state that Galba’s advisers clashed on the topic, or thwarted each other out of mutual hatred, as Tacitus does very explicitly in 1.13.1; see Koestermann 1956b, 201 on Vinius.
451  Aply summarized in 1.49.3: *amicorum libertorumque, ubi in bonos incidisset, sine reprehensione patiens, si mali forent, usque ad culpam ignorans*; Koestermann 1956b, 195 n.1 points out the passivity inherent in *incidisset, patiens et ignorans.*
452  Ash 1999, 75-76.
453  1.4.2: *posse principem alibi quam Romae fieri et 1.4.3: principem novum et absentem*; Geiser 2007, 156-157.
454  1.5.1: *donativum sub nomine Galbae promissum*; 1.5.2: *senium atque avaritiam Galbae; 1.5.2: Galbae vox;
omous action is the convening of his council to adopt Piso in 1.14.1, but his ability to act independently is immediately doubted again by introducing hesitation about whether Piso was Galba’s own choice (1.14.2). Only the speech is wholly his: as Whitton observes, it is embraced by two mentions of his name in the nominative. Galba is very seldom the focalizer of utterances, and, unlike Otho, his inner deliberations are rarely portrayed, with the result that the reader finds out little about his thoughts and feelings. Tacitus, moreover, often uses passive or impersonal verbal constructions (such as ablative absolutes) when writing about actions taken by Galba, making it appear as if things happen without the emperor being able to control them. Interestingly, it is Otho who, in his speech to his supporters, accords Galba a much more active role in the events, so as to make him appear more cruel and strict. In this sense, the Tacitean Galba resembles his predecessor Claudius in the *Annals*, who is also consistently portrayed as weak, submissive, surrounded by self-interested and internally divided ‘advisers’. Galba is much less passive in the parallel accounts, which, although noting his subordination to his advisers, accord him a much more active role in events.

Tacitus, then, emphasizes the emperor’s old age and weakness in comparison...
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with Suetonius and Plutarch. Ash states that Tacitus goes even further and leaves out details found in the parallel sources ‘which might undermine Galba’s identity as a frail old man’.\(^{462}\) Moreover, Tacitus exclusively connects Galba’s age to criticism, whereas Plutarch and Dio also draw attention to the positive sides of his maturity.\(^{463}\) Furthermore, whereas Suetonius’ and Plutarch’s Galba inspires fear in his subjects despite his age, the Tacitean Galba is despised and ridiculed on account of his age and weakness, fulfilling only the first part of Accius’ well-known phrase *oderint dum metuant*.\(^{464}\) Indeed, Tacitus plays up Galba’s age so much not just because people generally dislike old emperors, but rather because his old age affects, or is seen to affect, his capacity to rule. It makes him physically weak (i.e. not up to the tasks of an emperor, and not meeting the ideal of a strong and vigorous military commander), spineless and undecided (and thus relying too much on his advisers and unable to keep the people around him in check) and likely to die soon (and potentially leave the Empire without a successor).

*Misunderstanding and anachronism*

Associated with Galba’s old age is another persistent feature of his characterization in Tacitus, as also mentioned in section 1.1.2: his failure to understand the world around him – the reality of the circumstances, the true natures of the people around him, the requirements of the situation – and his being out of touch with his times. The connection between his age, his old-fashioned values, and their mismatch to the narrative present is made explicit in Tacitus’ remark on Galba’s announcement of the adoption to the soldiers: *constat potuisse conciliari animos quantulacumque parci senis liberalitate: nocuit antiquus rigor et nimia severitas, cui iam pares non sumus* (1.18.3). Galba’s ignorance is stressed repeatedly, in various ways. Most straightforwardly, the word *ignarus* is used to describe the emperor and those associated with him.\(^{465}\) At several points, Galba is (deliberately) deceived or denied...

\(^{462}\) Suet. G. 21; Plut. G. 13.2, 13.4, 15.4; Dio 64.3.2 and 64.3.4; Ash 1999, 78.

\(^{463}\) E.g. by stating that under Nero, ‘his great age gave an added confidence that he would always act with caution’ (Plut. G. 3.3) and that ‘even if Galba was bowed down with age and disease, yet his mind was vigorous’ (Dio 64.3.2), and by showing that the army officers had a certain respect for him on account of his age (Plut. G. 13.3).

\(^{464}\) Plut. G. 15.4; Suet. G. 16.1; Ash 1999, 77-78.

\(^{465}\) 1.26.2 (Laco), 1.29.1 (Galba), 1.29.2 (Piso), 1.39.2 (Galba), 1.49.3 (Galba); ironically, Galba’s associates call the Othonians *ignari* in 1.33.1 (Geiser 2007, 238); cf. Devillers 2012a, 167.
information by those around him, until he, *inopia veri et consensu errantium victus* (1.35.1), decides upon what will turn out to be a fatal course of action. At other times, it is the emperor himself who fails to grasp what is happening, as must often be deduced from the contrast between Galba’s own observations and those focalized by Tacitus or other characters. For instance, when Galba states in his speech that the only objection against him is his age (1.16.3), the reader knows this to be untrue on the basis of the frequent complaints about his strictness and frugality.

As touched upon above, Galba misjudges several other things as well: the gravity of the Germanic rebellion, the importance of the donative to the soldiers, the qualities required in a successor, Piso’s attractiveness to the soldiers and the Senate, Nero’s continued popularity, the characters of his advisers, the damage to his reputation caused by several of his measures, and the presence of *consensus* over his own rule and Piso’s succession. As has been noted, three of the four speeches in *oratio recta* in this Book are addressed to the Praetorians, ‘thus reminding the reader of just who ultimately disposes of power at Rome’; but the Tacitean Galba fails to see their influence and instead chooses his private council as the occasion for his main speech. Notably, even by the standards of his own – erroneous – criteria for choosing a successor, the emperor is seen to make a mistake: Tacitus’ narration of Otho’s brave suicide suggests that Galba has underestimated Otho’s moral worth. At other points, as said, the emperor does see clearly, but tragically fails to apply that insight to his own situation.

Coupled with this misunderstanding and ignorance comes an old-fashioned-
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ness and a mismatch to the times. Tacitus associates the emperor and his characteristics with words such as *antiquus*, *olim* and *vetus* (1.5.2, 1.18.3). Furthermore, he records the – predominantly negative – reactions to Galba’s actions and rhetoric, thereby indirectly showing how the emperor does not succeed in appealing to his subjects’ values and sentiments. Although Tacitus acknowledges the intrinsic value of Galba’s discipline, patriotism and frugality, he expressly states that they are outdated, and, more indirectly, implies that these are qualities that are not cherished by most others in the narrative. Clearly, this is as much a judgment on the general state of mind of the Romans as it is a critique of Galba. Galba’s references to morality are particularly out of place: Tacitus sketches a picture of a morally corrupt society, and, as Levene argues, ‘consistently links successful moral persuasion to moral disaster’. Galba’s definition of the emperorship in moral terms such as *bonus* and *optimus* belongs to the senatorial sphere and to an idea of the emperor’s moral excellence and ethical exemplarity – but morality and good examples are conspicuously lacking, and the Senate is represented as powerless. The parallel sources, by contrast, while occasionally describing Galba as an ‘old school’ commander, do not insist on it as much as Tacitus does.

*Failure to live up to his own ideals*

In addition to not matching the standards of his time, Galba is also portrayed as failing to live up to his own ideals, and as behaving inconsistently. In his adoption speech the emperor proclaims high principles and ideas, in an elevated (and un-Tacitean) style, at times verging on the exaggerated and pompous, yet the remainder of the narrative shows that he does not adhere to these proud declarations.

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473 See Büchner 1967; Geiser 2007 *passim*.
474 Levene 2009.
475 Levene 1999, citation (slightly modified) from page 213.
476 Noreña 2011, 283-297 discusses the shift from *optimus* to *dominus* in honorific designations of emperors, arguing that the epithet *optimus* (predominant in the second century AD), carries connotations of moral excellence and ethical exemplarity, while the term *dominus* (which becomes the main designation of the emperor in the early third century) refers to the emperor’s autocratic power and military domination. Sophia Bönisch (in a personal communication) draws attention to the strong senatorial flavour of the epithet *optimus*.
478 Damon 2003 *ad* 15.1 characterizes the style as distinguished by ‘predictability, concinnity, and amplitude’ and *ad* 16.2 as ‘cartoonlike in its exaggerated language and physical imagery’. The rhetorical elevation is sensed in words such as *dignus*, *egregius*, *suboles*, *in penates meos adsciscere*, *praecolarus*, *immanitas*, and *tumeo*. 

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Most notably, he claims to uphold republican standards and the authority of the Senate and people, and presents himself as the champion of liberty (even though in an abated form), opposing his rule to the tyranny of the Julio-Claudian monarchy – but he does not act on it.\footnote{E.g. 1.15.4, 1.16.1; see also above, section 1.2.2 for a more detailed discussion of the contrast between liberty and servitude set up by Galba in his speech, and Shotter 1991, 3281-3285; Whitton 2007, 100-104 makes an interesting case for Galba comparing himself to various ‘liberators of an earlier era’ through intertextual allusion; see Haynes 2003, 50-53 on the theme of libertas in the speech. See Wirszubski 1950 on libertas as a political idea in Rome; Hammond 1963 on the identification of liberty with the Republic.} Libertas was indeed a recurrent theme in the historical Galba’s self-presentation, for instance on coins with the slogans libertas populi romani restituta and SPQR and images of liberty caps and the personification of Liberty, recalling a well-known coin type struck by Brutus after his murder of Caesar.\footnote{E.g. H. Mattingly (ed.) 1976, Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum, 7-8, 24, 65-67, 142, 197-98; Hammond 1963, 99-101; Ramage 1983, 206-209; Murison 1993, 44 on Galba as a ‘constitutional legalist’; Fabbricotti 1976, 21.} Although Tacitus does not depict Galba as a freedom fighter to the same extent as the material evidence from Galba’s reign, or his biographers Suetonius and Plutarch, he does portray him as someone concerned with freedom.\footnote{Ash 1999, 74-77, pointing out several instances where Tacitus deliberately downplays this association.} But this is hardly borne out by the way he is represented as acting, especially in the context of his adoption of Piso (see above, section 1.2.2). Everything is decided upon within a small consilium, secrecy surrounds the deliberations, and rumours are anxiously repressed (1.17.2).\footnote{See Whitton 2007, 89-90 for a discussion of the phrase comitia imperii transigit, but he does not consider it ironic. See Büchner 1967, 180, and Plin. Pan. 8.1 for praise of Nerva’s more public adoption of Trajan.} When Galba reveals his choice of successor, his first and most elaborate announcement is directed at four of his associates; the soldiers are second, with a briefer address; and the Senate only finds out last, through a speech of Galba’s which Tacitus does not even bother to summarize.\footnote{Cf. Levene 2009, 218-223 and Devillers 2012a on the narrative of the Histories making broader (historiographical, political and epistemological) points about the power relations under the Principate; see also Levene 1999 on the Annals.} As argued before, (Tacitus’ depiction of) Galba’s way of handling the selection of a successor is suggestive of the realities of power under the Principate: important decisions are no longer made by the Senate and the people in public meetings, but by the emperor and his advisers alone, behind closed doors.\footnote{See Morgan 1993, 577-581 on the Tacitean Galba’s insults to the Senate.} While Galba claims to provide a measure of freedom with his new system of succession it is in fact exactly the absence of Galba
from Rome that creates freedom in 1.4.3.

Galba furthermore elaborates on the importance of *fides*, *veritas* and *amicitia*; but he himself betrays friendship and employs flattery when he makes use of *simulatio amicitiae* to remove Verginius Rufus from his Germanic command (1.8.2). Although Galba pretends to be honest about the Germanic rebellion to the soldiers in 1.18.2, he severely downplays its gravity up to the point of plain mendacity, either out of ignorance, or to appease the soldiers. He sets great store by his old-fashioned discipline, incorruptibility and absence of self-interest, but he allows his close associates to profit shamelessly from their personal connection to the emperor.  

Although he sharply criticizes Nero’s ancestral pride (1.16.2), Galba boasts about his own and Piso’s descent (1.15.1-2). Even Tacitus’ own characterizations of Galba are sometimes disproved, for instance when he calls the emperor *adversus blandientes incorruptus* (1.35.2) after having related how he is won over by the *speciosiora suadentes* (1.34.1): those offering the most well-sounding, but not necessarily most prudent or sincere, advice. In that same passage, Tacitus calls Galba *insigni amino ad coercendam militarem licentiam* (1.35.2), following an anecdote which entirely belies this quality (1.35.2). A soldier comes up to Galba, claiming that he has killed Otho, and showing his blood-stained sword, to which Galba reacts with a disciplinary remark – *commilito, quis iussit?* – which is all the more striking because of the *oratio recta*. The episode, on the face of it, shows Galba maintaining his military discipline, even in the face of general confusion (1.35.1: *nemo scire et omnes adfirmare*). However, the fact that one of Galba’s soldiers has killed Otho on his own initiative (so he claims) immediately contradicts Galba’s ability to control licence by his soldiers, and the phrasing of his reproach is hardly firm or authoritative: *quis iussit* is rather mild, and the term *commilito* suggests a comradely way of interaction between soldier and general, and not the strictly preserved hierarchy that Galba’s

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486 See Keitel 2006 for an analysis of the absence of *fides* and *amicitia* in Galba’s own situation.
487 As Damon notes (2003 *ad loc.*), there might be an echo of Livy’s description of the meeting of the Roman *consilium* just before the battle at Lake Trasumenum, where Flaminius’ preference for the *speciosus* instead of the *salutararius* advice causes Rome to suffer a terrible defeat at the hands of the Carthaginians: Liv. 22.3.8.
488 Damon 2003 *ad loc*; Geiser 2007, 243-244. In Suet. G. 19.2, the anecdote illustrates Galba’s belief in the false rumours of the suppression of the rebellion and his confidence in his own safety (*tanta fiducia*). In Plut. G. 26.2, the episode directly precedes Galba’s decision to leave the palace, perhaps suggesting credulity on Galba’s part.
discipline would call for. While ostensibly lauding the emperor’s discipline, then, Tacitus’ narration of the anecdote essentially demonstrates his lack of it.

The final verdict: Tacitus’ characterization of Galba

Although Tacitus includes few extended descriptions of Galba’s character, the main threads of his characterization of the emperor are borne out by a combination of explicit authorial comments, Galba’s own actions and words, and utterances focalized by (often indefinite) others, which – in line with the important role of the soldiers in the events of 69 – are most often the military. Galba’s character, as portrayed by Tacitus, appears to consist of a series of seemingly paradoxical combinations: excessive severity and frugality and professions of discipline together with physical and mental weakness; pronounced principles for governance, but a lack of insight into the situation and a failure in living up to his own standards; a set of theoretically laudable characteristics coupled with a grave mismatch to the times. Tacitus praises the emperor more than once, but also omits details that might portray Galba as a capable emperor, points out his lack of constancy in pursuing his own ideals, and emphasizes that his character and conduct are unsuitable to the circumstances and prevalent mentality. At the same time, he abundantly illustrates the corrupt mentality of the age, creating a multifaceted picture of both the emperor and the causes of the events of 69.

This impression of ambiguity and incongruence also arises from the emperor’s obituary. Tacitus records both positive qualities and failures, as well as internal

489 As noted above, Piso and Otho both (repeatedly) use the same term to address groups of soldiers, but always with the intention of winning over the soldiers by minimizing the distance between them and connecting their own fate to that of the soldiers. Other instances in the Histories: 1.29.2 (Piso addresses the cohort), 1.37.1, 1.38.1, 1.83.1, 1.84.2 (Otho addressing his soldiers), 2.66.2 and 4.72.4 (both narratorial, referring to actual fellow-soldiers among each other). See Ash 1999, 25-26 on the Othonians’ camaraderie with their emperor. Cf. the remarks by Suetonius on Caesar’s flattering of his soldiers by his addressing them as commilitones (Iul. 67.2) and on Augustus’ prohibition of calling soldiers commilitones because he considered that too flattering (Aug. 25.1).

490 Cf. Geiser 2007, 270-278 on ‘Widersprüchlichkeit’ being the main characteristic of the Tacitean Galba.

491 Praise: 1.5.2, 1.13.2; omission of details: noted in the sections above, e.g. the size of the promised donative, the provocations of the slaughtered marines, hints of his strength (Ash 1999, 78), positive qualities of his associates (and Damon 2003, 106-107 ad 6.1). Contra Koestermann 1956b, 196-199, Tacitus does not portray Galba chiefly positively.

492 1.49.2-4; Galba’s obituary exhibits some parallels in structure and content with that of Piso in 1.48.1. No extended analysis of Galba’s obituary is provided here for reasons of space; see Aubrion 1985, 459-461 and
inconsistencies, in a concise style distinguished by asyndeta and parallelism. Yet the two major contrasts are reserved for Galba’s personal fortune and his reputation as a capable emperor. Having succeeded in living *prospera fortuna* under five emperors – an almost unequalled accomplishment, as most people did not live to such an old age, much less managed to enjoy the constant favour of so many different emperors – his prosperity was quickly wiped out by the few months of his own rule: *alieno imperio felicior quam suo*. But it was not just his private fate which was destroyed by Galba’s attainment of imperial power: his reputation suffered likewise. Tacitus describes Galba’s governance of provinces and command of armies rather favourably, and with words lacking any suggestion of too strict a discipline: *militari laude, moderate, iustitia* – in comparison with Suetonius, Tacitus even attributes to Galba a more moderate and constant type of governance. As a result, Galba was *maior privato visus dum privatus fuit*, and *omnium consensu capax imperii* – but the sting of the evaluation is clearly in the tail: *nisi imperasset*. Before his accession, Galba was widely considered equal to the task of being emperor, and would have preserved this reputation, if only he had not actually become one, as the preceding narrative has amply illustrated. This final judgment encapsulates one of the major threads in Tacitus’ narration of Galba’s reign – his fundamental mismatch and incongruity to his surroundings – and is presented as one of the main reasons for his fall. In this, Tacitus


493 For the contrasting parallels in the obituary – characterized by Tacitus’ trademark *variatio* – see Damon 2003, 19-20; Sage 1990, 902-906 on the antitheses in the passage.

494 Suetonius uses the words *magna severitatis ac iustitiae cura* (7.1) to describe Galba’s administration of Africa (in contrast to Tacitus’ *moderate*), and *varie et inaequabiliter, acer et vehemens et in coercendis quidem delictis vel immodicus and in desidiam segnitiameque conversus est* (9.1) for his changing behaviour in Spain (whereas Tacitus has the brief *pari iustitia*). Plut. G. 3.2-4.1 just mentions distinction, praise and popularity for his three administrative posts.

495 Cf. Suetonius’ similar, but less pithy, comment: *maio re adeo et favore et auctoritate adoptus est quam gessit imperium* (G. 14.1). In the course of the narrative, the term *consensus* has repeatedly been used in circumstances devoid of all sound consensus – in arguments between Galba’s advisers (1.13.2), in Galba’s and Piso’s ignorant claims of their widespread support (1.15.1, 1.16.2, 1.30.2), in chaotic situations lacking concerted action or rife with false rumours (1.26.1, 1.35.1) or in which people are motivated only by self-interest (1.32.2, 1.33.1). Ironically – or tragically – enough, the fact that Galba would have been considered fit to rule, if only he had not, seems to be the only thing about which actual consensus exists. It is notable, however, that Tacitus refrains from endorsing this comment as a narrator by focalizing it through the anonymous *omnes*: Tacitus does not generally think very highly of public opinion, but in this case, his own narrative has plainly demonstrated his adherence to this judgment.
appears to be unique, as the two main parallel sources, Suetonius and Plutarch, do not stress this aspect so much, or even at all, as noted already above (section 1.1.3).

1.4.3 CONTEMPORARY ECHOES: PLINY’S PANEGYRICUS

One of the intriguing aspects of Tacitus’ Galban narrative, and of his representation of the adoption episode in particular, is the multitude of contemporary resonances implicit in its themes, arguments and language. To an audience reading the *Histories* at the beginning of the second century, the situation in which Galba found himself in January 69 will inevitably have called to mind the circumstances of Trajan’s adoption by Nerva in October 97. As Syme puts it, “The consular Cornelius Tacitus was no less dominated by recent history and inescapable parallels – the choice of an emperor, the temper of the troops, and the menace of civil war. The whole setting of Galba’s reign took on a sharp and contemporary significance. When an audience listened to the recitation of Book I of the *Historiae*, scene, persons, and events leapt into life, startling and terrifying.” But contrary to Galba’s attempt, Nerva’s adoption was successful, to the extent that it appeased the disaffected parties and secured a smooth transfer of power to Trajan when Nerva died some months later. As such, the depiction of Galba’s failed adoption in the *Histories* was not just particularly topical to a Trajanic audience – it will also have invited comparisons between the two situations and adoptions. The many contemporary resonances present in Tacitus’ Galban narrative do not merely originate from the – perhaps coincidental – resemblances between these two situations. Also in other ways, the historian encourages his audience to link their present to his narrative of the past, and to read his depiction of 69 with the experiences of 96-98 and the current Trajanic reign in mind. For instance, Galba’s designation of Piso as *bonus* and his reference to the *optimus* successor evoke Trajan’s title of *optimus princeps*. Furthermore, Tacitus inserts in his account of 69 several themes and concerns – such as senatorial behaviour towards bad emperors, and the extent of freedom possible under an autocratic regime – which have a strongly contemporary ring to them, and

496 On the historical background of 96-98 and its resemblances to 68-69, see the Introduction to this thesis.
497 Syme 1958, 150.
498 On this epithet and its meaning in the context of Trajan’s relationship with the Senate, see Fell 1992, 40-61; Bennett 1997, 104-117. Noreña 2011, appendix 13, 9-36 lists the epigraphic evidence for Trajan’s epithet.
resemble his reflections on the late-Domitianic period and the principates of Nerva and Trajan in the *Agricola*. But the most conspicuous parallels between Tacitus’ own time and the narrative present of the *Histories* arise from the many similarities between Tacitus’ depiction of the adoption of Piso by Galba, and Pliny’s comments on Trajan’s adoption by Nerva in his *Panegyricus*.

The *Panegyricus* is the (revised and published version of the) thanksgiving speech pronounced by Pliny in the Senate on the occasion of his assumption of the consulship of AD 100. In the address, Pliny praises Trajan, credits him with certain imperial virtues and portrays him as an ideal ruler. The language in which he does so may be assumed to adhere quite closely to imperial ideology, since Pliny will have tried to find approval with the emperor by meeting what he thought were his wishes. On the other hand, the speech has a protreptic function, in that the praise contained within it is designed to indirectly convey the behaviour expected from the new emperor by his senatorial peers. As a result, it is not always easy to make out whether particular themes or arguments in the address derive from Nerva’s and Trajan’s ‘official’ discourse or self-presentation – such as, for instance, imperial coinage, or the public announcement of the adoption – or whether they are Pliny’s own addition, intended to steer the emperor towards a certain course of action.

The similarities between the *Histories* and the *Panegyricus* with regard to the adoption are numerous and of different kinds: on the level of broader themes, with respect to specific arguments, and in the use of particular language. The main
theme of both representations is, of course, the new method of transmitting imperial power: by selection rather than inheritance, on the basis of merit rather than kinship, and from the whole pool of citizens instead of from one’s own family. At the same time, however, both accounts hint at the continuing appreciation for dynastic succession and biological kinship. Within these themes, several similar arguments are advanced: the contrast between imperial adoptions and private ones; adoption as providing a peaceful succession rather than one procured through civil war; adoption as a reaction to (military) unrest and disaffection; adoption as a way to select the best man for the emperorship; the contrast between the fortuitous nature of birth and the rational, deliberate choice based on merit; the youth of the adopted son; divine favour and inspiration; widespread consensus of the whole society for the choice of successor; the emperor’s and his successor’s service to the state and the absence of self-interest; the successor’s apparent modesty or reluctance; and the successor already considered as emperor by his subjects. Verbal correspondences are found in the use of terms like *rector* for the emperor, *fortuna* for the emperorship, *bonus* and *optimus* as moral classifications, *eligere* as a way of selecting a successor, and *consensus* on the choice of candidate.

Much has been written about the questions of the origin of these resemblances, and the priority of one or the other account; most probably, they arise from a shared

*Panegyricon* as well (e.g. 2.3, 3.1-2, 5.9, 8.5). Most notably, the cluster of *libertas, fides* and *veritas* occurs in the prefaces to both the *Histories* (1.1.1-4) and the *Panegyricon* (1.6), as well as in Galba’s adoption speech; see Leeman 1973, 173-186; Keitel 2006; Whitton 2007, 64-67.

505 1.15.2, 1.16.1; Pan. 7.1, 7.4-7.
506 1.16.3; Pan. 7.7, 89.2, 94.5.
507 1.15.1; Pan. 7.5-6, 8.1.
508 1.15.1; Pan. 5.1.
509 1.12.1-2, 1.14.1, 1.16.3; Pan. 5.6-8, 6.1-3, 7.1, 8.3, 8.5, 10.1.
510 1.16.1; Pan. 7.5-6.
511 1.16.2; Pan. 7.7, 11.4.
512 1.16.1; Pan. 8.4.
513 1.15.1; Pan. 1.4-5, 5.1-2, 7.5, 8.1-2, 10.4-5.
514 1.16.2; Pan. 10.2.
515 1.13.2, 1.15.2, 1.17.1; Pan. 5.6, 6.3-5, 7.1-3, 9.4-5, 10.3-5.
516 1.17.1; Pan. 5.6-7, 7.1, 9.4.
517 1.16.4; Pan. 5.3-4.
518 *Rector*: 1.16.1; Pan. 1.4. *Fortuna*: 1.15.2, 1.15.4; Pan. 9.4, 10.3. *Bonus* and *optimus*: 1.16.1, 1.16.3; Pan. 2.7, 4.1, 5.9, 7.2, 11.3, 88.4-10, 89.1. *Eligere*: 1.16.1, 1.16.2; Pan. 1.5, 7.4, 7.6, 10.2, 11.3, 89.1. *Consensus*: 1.15.1, 1.16.2; Pan. 10.2.
environment of Trajanic ideology and ‘current issues’ at that time, combined with mutual influence.\textsuperscript{519} For the first time in imperial history, an emperor had deliberately and successfully transmitted his power to someone outside his own family, and the novelty of the situation will have caused public debate about the methods of imperial succession and the role of adoption in this; and Tacitus’ \textit{Histories}, as a product of its time, probably reflects these concerns. Whatever the exact nature of the parallels, however, two points are important here. First, that Tacitus chose to incorporate and evoke these contemporary issues in his account of 69 – something which, as has been argued above, Suetonius and Plutarch do not do – and as such, to endow his history with a particular sense of urgency and topicality. Second, that Tacitus’ audience was familiar with the \textit{Panegyricus} – having heard its original announcement in the Senate, or possibly read its later published version – and that they, reading Tacitus’ depiction of Galba’s adoption of Piso, will have recognized the similarities to Pliny’s description of Trajan’s adoption, and as a consequence will have linked and compared the two events. Indeed, Pliny himself compares the adoptions at a certain point, stating that Nerva chose more wisely than Galba had done: after consulting with both men and gods, and deciding upon the right candidate.\textsuperscript{520}

\textsuperscript{519} On the relationship between the texts, see Durry 1938, 60-66; Bruère 1954; Büchner 1955; Sage 1990, 861-862; Woytek 2006, arguing for the \textit{Histories}’ chronological priority; Whitton 2007, 46-59, arguing for ‘mutual debt’ arising from a kind of ‘literary ἀγών’; Griffin 1996b, 95 n.77 further refers to the ‘popularity of the \textit{locus adoptionis} in the rhetorical schools’ as a source of similarities; Griffin 1999 on the relationship between Tacitus and the Younger Pliny.

\textsuperscript{520} \textit{Pan.} 8.1 (indirect comparison), 8.5 (direct, although not explicitly named).
Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Tacitus’ representation of Galba’s adoption of Piso differs significantly from its description in the parallel sources, in particular the accounts of Suetonius and Plutarch. The various minor divergences aside, there are three main distinctively Tacitean aspects to the adoption episode as presented in the Histories. First, Tacitus allows the adoption a much greater centrality and narrative significance than the other sources. Most simply, because he accords it so much space, as well as the longest speech in oratio recta in the entire (extant) work, the most explicit digression on imperial succession anywhere in his writings. More indirectly, by marking out imperial succession as a main theme for the whole of the Histories immediately at the start of the work – with the passage relating to the arcanum imperii in 1.4.2 – thus proleptically endowing the adoption with greater importance. And very evidently, by having his Galba present the adoption not as a decision occasioned by the specific circumstances, but as a programmatic and ideologically motivated act, the initiation of a system of general applicability. Second, Tacitus imbues the adoption episode with much more depth and contemporary relevance, and with greater potential implications for the evaluation of his work in his own time, by inviting comparisons with Nerva’s adoption of Trajan. As a result of the inescapable historical similarities, accompanied by a large and varied number of resemblances to Pliny’s depiction of Trajan’s adoption in the Panegyricus, the reader is encouraged to read Tacitus’ account with that recent event in mind and to compare and contrast the two. Third, Tacitus employs a full range of narrative techniques to make Galba and his adoption fail much more miserably and much more obviously than in the other sources. Before the reader has even arrived at the relevant episode, Tacitus has already led him to suspect that the adoption will be
unsuccessful, by sketching, in the survey, the volatile state of affairs, the hostile attitudes towards Galba, and the emperor’s outdated character. In the narration of the adoption episode itself, Galba’s decision to adopt, the criteria he uses to select Piso, and the rhetoric with which he presents his choice are suggested to be ineffective (from the reaction of his listeners), imprudent (considering the situation as sketched earlier), or downright incorrect (when confronted with Tacitus’ own statements). Furthermore, Galba is, in the remainder of the narrative, portrayed as lacking insight into the situation and unable to deal with the problems facing him, through his characterization as old, weak, ignorant, inconsistent, and out of touch with his time.

Tacitus, then, frames his depiction of the adoption episode in a highly distinctive way, one which raises questions with regard to our interpretation of the Galban narrative and of the Histories as a whole, and which invites reflection on Tacitus’ view on imperial succession in general, and on his own time in particular. Several interpretations suggest themselves, none of which appears exclusive. On the level of the Galban narrative, the implications of Tacitus’ representation of the adoption seem relatively straightforward: Tacitus’ depiction explains Galba’s downfall and Otho’s (temporary) rise. As emperor, Galba was not in tune with his time, unable to grasp the realities and requirements of the situation, and inevitably replaced by someone with a better match to the circumstances and the ability to capitalize on them. Notably, this is also a condemnation of that particular spirit of the times, which is characterized by licence, corruption, luxury and a love of rumour. However, compared to modern historical analyses of the period, Tacitus places more of the responsibility on Galba’s shoulders, and devotes relatively little attention to the – very difficult – circumstances of his rule.521

If we look at the narrative of the Histories as a whole – at least, the surviving parts – the situation becomes somewhat more complex. The Galban narrative is programmatic in many ways, introducing several threads of continued importance to the narrative, and functioning as a starting point for the discussion of particular ques-

521  Wiedemann 1996b, 261-267. Cf. Chilver 1979, 15: ‘One might speculate whether any man who became the first princeps to succeed the Julio-Claudian house, given the other difficulties in Rome and the provinces in the year 68, could have avoided disaster’, and Wiedemann 1996b, 261: ‘Each new emperor of the Julio-Claudian dynasty had faced considerable but quite different problems in establishing himself. Galba had to face most of them together.’
tions and issues which will recur throughout the rest of the work. Various main themes are first signalled here: the breakdown of traditional values such as friendship, trust and sincerity; the dangers of flattery and self-interest; the corruptive force of prosperity; the deceitfulness of imperial advisers; the increasing (and increasingly explicit and direct) role of the army in influencing politics, and the diminished independence and power of the Senate; the desirability or otherwise of the Principate, and the extent of freedom possible under such a system; the endless repetition and escalation of civil war, both in its literal shape and its internalized continuation under a Flavian pax saeva; the hollowness of rhetoric, the loss of meaning of words, and the misuse of language to achieve base aims. These are themes which are highly relevant to Tacitus’ interpretation and representation not just of 69, but also of the following Flavian dynasty – and which, moreover, the historian will further develop in his later Annals. As such, they may be seen as in some way characteristic of the Principate as perceived by Tacitus.

The same applies to the topic of imperial succession: with the adoption treated at such length, and accompanied by an extended speech on the benefits and disadvantages of various methods of imperial succession, immediately at the start of the narrative, Tacitus decisively establishes the theme of imperial succession as a major thread for the whole Histories – the first three Books of which, after all, deal almost exclusively with the struggle for imperial power. His depiction of the adoption episode draws attention to issues such as the qualities required of an emperor, the role of different groups and individuals in deciding upon the transmission of imperial power, and the various possible systems of succession. The narrative offers the reader different views on the advantages and limitations of dynastic succession compared to a system of selection and extra-familial adoption. Various characters discuss what makes someone capax imperii or what does not. In their respective speeches, Galba, Piso and Otho present their ideas on the emperorship and on the qualities necessary to govern the state. Piso is said to have been capable rather than willing to be emperor, while Otho is presented as fervently hoping for power, and

522 See Keitel 1991 passim; Keitel 1993; Levene 1999 and 2009; Keitel 2006, esp. 244: ‘The revolt of Otho and the destruction of Galba, then, function very much as paradigms for the account of 69 as a whole. Fundamental themes, distilled in generalities, are set out very fully in nearly every block of the narrative. Tacitus continues this technique through his account of the entire civil war, but less intrusively. Like Thucydides in his analysis of stasis at Corcyra, Tacitus, having done it once, need only allude to those basic themes as the narrative progresses.’
Galba is *capax imperii nisi imperasset*. The attitudes of the main constituents of society with regard to the imperial succession – the passivity of the Senate, the overriding influence of the military, and the fickleness of the people, as well as the lack of care for the state and the self-interest of all of these – are brought out clearly in the narration of the adoption. These themes – the criteria, agency, and method of transmission – recur throughout the narrative of the *Histories*, in various forms and situations.

The topic of criteria – of which qualities make a man suitable for the emperorship – is treated by Tacitus in relation to historical causation on a larger scale, to explain why, in contrast to his three short-lived predecessors, Vespasian did succeed in establishing a stable rule, and which aspects of his character or conduct made him a successful emperor. Several of Galba’s actions, attitudes and characteristics as described in relation to the adoption – such as his relationship and interaction with his advisers, the Senate, people and soldiers, or qualities such as strictness, age, ancestry and frugality – are repeated by his successors, in improved, deteriorated or completely reversed forms. For instance, while Galba’s elderly physique is ridiculed and his discipline censured by the people and the military, Titus is presented as being perceived as *capax imperii* on the basis of his youth, beauty and *comitas* (charm or friendliness), testifying to the qualities which are widely deemed important in an emperor. And whereas Galba is portrayed as being harmed and manipulated by his advisers, Vespasian’s associates Antonius Primus and Mucianus are described as furthering their leader’s cause – thereby making a point about the authority of the respective emperors as well as about their ability to judge persons correctly, and the outcomes of these qualities. As such, many of the aspects which the Tacitean Galba is presented as displaying in the adoption episode come to function as points by which to compare the four emperors – points at which Vespasian is depicted as doing better than Galba, Otho and Vitellius.\(^{523}\) As Damon phrases it, ‘understanding why [they fail] is essential preparation for understanding why Vespasian succeeds’.\(^{524}\) Vespasian, it should be noted, is described at the end of the Galban narrative as ‘unlike all his predecessors ... the only emperor, who was changed for the better by his office’ (1.50.4). As such, Tacitus’ account of Galba’s reign func-

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523 See Damon 2003, 10-11, 22, 105, 107, 109, 112-113, 128, 139, and appendix 3 on repeated incidents, as well as Damon 2006 and Pomeroy 2006; De Kleijn 2013 on Mucianus’ leadership in the *Histories*.
524 Damon 2003, 6, slightly adapted.
tions as a yardstick by which to measure the imperial contenders in the *Histories*, by establishing criteria by which to evaluate them, thus helping the reader understand why – in the long run – some fail and others succeed. Through his representation, moreover, Tacitus often questions the standards used to assess emperors and the qualities desired in a successor: for example, by qualifying criticisms on Galba’s physical appearance with the phrase *ut est mos volgi*, he suggests the irrelevance of this criterion. He is, furthermore, sensitive to the importance of the circumstances: through the narrative frame he constructs around the adoption of Piso, Tacitus suggests that Galba’s criteria for choosing a successor – distinguished ancestry and a virtuous character – are severely unsuited to the situation. Military and administrative experience and capacity, and understanding of and insight into people and the workings of power, and support (or the ability to win it) are implied to be much more important for successful governance in the eyes of Tacitus. The discussion of the appropriate criteria is continued in the *Annals*, where, for instance, Germanicus is depicted as replaying several of the traits of his narrative predecessors. Like Titus, he is associated with charms, mildness and beauty, and like Galba, he is presented as out of touch with his time, but in a very different fashion; and like in the *Histories*, Tacitus questions – sometimes even indirectly criticizes – the importance of these features in selecting a successor.

The issue of agency – more specifically the role which the various parties play in choosing an imperial successor – is another point introduced by the Galba narrative, to be further developed in the remainder of the *Histories*, as well as in the *Annals*. As one scholar observes, ‘[Tacitus] made the year of four emperors into a spectacle of the fragility of the Roman order. One after another, the armies promoted three emperors, only to overthrow them again. ... All politically active groups are censured: the senators welcomed as emperors men whom they had only recently declared enemies of the state (and vice versa) and spinelessly adapted to any regime. The urban population of Rome was addicted to the circus and the theatre, and was fickle and prone to lick the emperor’s boots. ... The army was venal and mutinous.’\textsuperscript{525} None of these groups are represented as displaying sound judgment and care for the state in supporting their candidate for the emperorship.\textsuperscript{526} In particular, given the military nature of the conflicts over power, Tacitus pays much

\textsuperscript{525} E. Flaig, *NPO*, s.v. Tacitus.
\textsuperscript{526} Cf. Sage 1990, 908-917.
attention to the role of the soldiers in directing the course of succession: he often focalizes comments on contenders for power through them, and he accords them much agency in backing or overthrowing potential successors. That Galba’s final choice for Piso as his successor is suggested to have been influenced by someone (Laco) whom Tacitus as a narrator has shown to be untrustworthy and ignorant is telling about (his view on) the emperor’s ability to rule. A similar dynamic can be discerned in the Claudian Books of the *Annals*, where Tacitus can be seen to indirectly criticize Claudius by presenting the latter’s arrangements for the succession as the result of the manipulations of his wives and freedmen.

Finally, in his examination of the best method of transmitting imperial power, Tacitus throughout the *Histories* provides several hints that, despite Galba’s claims to the contrary, dynastic succession was still the preferred way to transmit imperial power, and that having a biological heir was considered the best guarantee of a peaceful succession and hence stability – something clearly very important in times of civil war. Galba himself seems to recognize the popular predilection for hereditary succession in 1.16.3, and Mucianus’ speech in 2.76-77 is very explicit about the advantages to Vespasian of having mature sons of his own blood. Otho tries to link himself to the last member of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, while Vitellius tries to involve his and Otho’s families in the struggle for power (1.75.2) and shows his infant son, wrapped in a general’s cloak, to the armies (2.59.3). As will be seen in the next chapters, dynastic considerations are also represented as powerful in the Julio-Claudian successions. In those cases, however, Tacitus indirectly expresses his own view on the matter, by demonstrating the value which is generally attached to consanguinity and dynastic continuity while at the same time suggesting its irrelevance to good emperorship. In the *Histories*, on the other hand, he does not appear to offer a conclusive evaluation on the merits of adoption versus consanguinity.

This takes us to the last level of interpretation: the contemporary context. Tacitus’ depiction of Galba’s adoption of Piso, and in particular Galba’s adoption speech, inevitably conjured up Trajan’s recent adoption in the minds of his readers; as Whitton states, ‘[i]t is a manifesto for Empire by extrafamilial adoption published under the first emperor created by such an adoption. It demands our attention.’

Moreover, it was written at a time when Trajan, the first real adoptive emperor, was...
displaying strongly dynastic tendencies, by actively honouring his blood-relatives with titles and privileges, advertising his own family on coinage and in monuments, and thus creating a public image of an imperial family. Pliny, despite his praise of an adoptive system of succession enabling the selection of the best man, also prays that Trajan might have a son of his own blood to succeed him. The context in which Tacitus was composing Galba’s adoption speech and its narrative frame was one in which the merits of the different methods to transmit imperial power were particularly relevant. As a result, several scholars have seen in Tacitus’ account either praise for, or condemnation of, a system of imperial succession through extra-familial adoption in general, and Nerva’s adoption of Trajan in particular. This seems unlikely for several reasons. Overt criticism on Tacitus’ part is difficult to reconcile with his successful political career, both before and after publishing the Histories. Even an assumption of more concealed critique – in the form of a kind of double-speak, which ostensibly dealt only with the past, but in which one could read a more contemporary subtext as well, if so desired – seems hard to sustain. Neither is plain endorsement of Galba’s claims very probable, considering the damning narrative frame constructed around it by Tacitus. Nerva, of course, did better than Galba in several respects: he chose someone with more support and experience, and after consultation with various others, and announced the adoption publicly. As a result, some have interpreted Tacitus’ depiction of Galba’s failure as indirect praise for Nerva. But in general, it is not Tacitus’ style to pass explicit and unequivocal judgments. Some deny the presence of any clear-cut contemporary lesson in Tacitus’ representation.

In my opinion, Tacitus refrains from expressing any clear opinion on the matter in general, neither implicitly praising Nerva because he did better than Galba, nor condemning a system of adoptive succession on principle by showing how Galba fails in this particular instance. To be sure, the way in which Galba’s adoption of Piso is framed implies criticism – yet it is Galba’s criteria, his choice of successor, the way the decision is made, and all of this in these specific circumstances which is

528 Whitton 2007, 85 summarizes and collects the various scholarly views; see also Heubner 1963, 48-49. It is interpreted positively by e.g. Shotter 1991; Morford 1991, 3434-3440; against such a reading e.g. Syme 1958, 207; as veiled criticism e.g. Welwei 1995.

529 On doublespeak and figured speech, see Ahl 1984; Bartsch 1994.

530 Sage 1990, 921-922 and Martin 1981, 251 [= n.4 from p.71]; see also Luce 2012 on cautionary remarks on taking speeches as expressions of Tacitus’ own views.
censured, not a system of extra-familial adoption as such. Rather, I would argue, through the contrast between Galba’s claims and the narrative frame surrounding it, and through the insertion of allusions to the contemporary situation, Tacitus invites his readers to ponder the issue themselves. He encourages them to read his account of the past with their own present in mind, but also to think about Trajan’s adoption in the light of Piso’s earlier – and failed – adoption. He urges them to examine the similarities and differences between the two situations, to discern what has changed, and what has remained the same. Using the adoption of Piso as a ‘conversation starter’, and continuing to bring up the topic throughout the narrative (e.g. in Mucianus’ mirror speech at 2.76-77), Tacitus broaches an issue which will have been much-discussed in the period following the adoption and accession of Trajan. By linking past and present, Tacitus encourages his reader to reflect on the different systems of imperial succession – hereditary vs. selective – and their advantages and drawbacks, and on their relevance to Trajan’s age in particular. As such, he uses Galba’s speech as ‘the first phase of a major political debate’ conducted over the course of the work, and further continued in the *Annals*. By raising various questions and providing different answers to these, he prepares the reader for the discussion to come, and gives him guidelines for assessing it. In the context of this thesis, finally, Tacitus’ Galban narrative fulfils a similar role: it draws attention to the relevant questions with regard to Tacitus’ representation of imperial succession, and indicates different possible responses to these. Two of these questions or aspects will be further explored in the following two chapters: Chapter 2 on Tiberius investigates the criteria of selection, in particular that of kinship, in the imperial succession, while Chapter 3 on Claudius examines questions of agency in the transmission of imperial power. In both cases, the Galban narrative will be seen to have raised important questions and provided – mostly ominous – precedents.

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531 Cf. Morford 1991, 3455: ‘What the speeches of Galba and Mucianus made clear was that adoption, as a device to secure libertas, was bound to fail if it was not backed by military experience and the auctoritas that flowed from it, and by the dignitas of previous achievement in a public career.’

532 Cf. Nesselhauf 1955, 493-495; Whitton 2007, 83-84; Devillers 1994, 345-346; Chilver 1979, 76: ‘For an historian writing in Trajan’s early years it was a reasonable solution to let the theme be developed, in opposing directions, by speakers of whom he indicated neither wholehearted approval nor wholehearted condemnation.’

533 Damon 2003, 136.
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Chapter 2
In the *Histories*, the Tacitean Galba proposes to transmit imperial power through a method of free selection and adoption. Even if far from effective within the narrative, his speech does draw attention to the problems involved in a system of succession based primarily on kinship. Ancestry alone clearly is no guarantee for good governance, but neither are character or good intentions – Tacitus famously describes Galba as *omnia consensu capax imperii, nisi imperasset*. The questions implied in the last chapter, then, are: what makes a man worthy and capable of being an emperor? What are the criteria for being considered *capax imperii*, and how do different perceptions of the requirements for the emperorship result in conflicts, both within the imperial family, and between the emperor and the rest of society? This chapter investigates these questions in the context of Tacitus’ portrayal of the reign of Tiberius.

In the Tiberian *Annals*, the issue of imperial succession is rarely treated as explicitly and at such length as in the Galban narrative of the *Histories*: most of the references to the matter are scattered, brief and often indirect, many of them in the form of anonymous rumours. Nevertheless, the transmission of and competition for imperial power – both current and future – is an important topic in the Tiberian Books. The prominence of the theme can be seen in the major episodes treated by Tacitus, the threads running through the narrative, and the structuring of the material. All of the seven ‘major episodes’ in the Tiberian hexad as identified by Walker can be connected to this issue;\(^5\) the theme of ‘intrigue for the succession’ may

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5 As Walker 1960, 16-17 has pointed out, Tacitus often treats his material episodically: within his narration of a year, he concentrates on one episode that is treated at length and in detail, while the other events are treated
be considered one of the three strands of narrative running through the Tiberian Books;\(^{535}\) and in about half of the cases, Tacitus starts his narration of a new year with events related to the succession issue, independent of whether they actually took place at the chronological beginning of that year.\(^{536}\) Succession, then, can be regarded as a central theme in the Tiberian hexad, both in terms of the amount of text devoted to it, and as regards the ubiquity and frequency of shorter references to it.\(^{537}\)

As said, this chapter approaches the topic from the perspective of the criteria for determining suitability for the emperorship. I argue that Tacitus, through his depiction of the succession issue, questions the criteria employed by the majority of the population – the Senate, people and army, but also the imperial court and several individuals. Imperial succession is from the outset perceived as wholly dynastic: everyone in the narrative assumes that Tiberius will transmit his power to his biological son Drusus the Younger and his adoptive son Germanicus (section 2.1). But these (future) holders of power are not equally esteemed by their subjects: although Drusus and Germanicus are ostensibly treated as equal successors, it is clear that Germanicus completely outshines his adoptive brother in popularity and narrative prominence – while Tiberius is disliked by all (section 2.2). Through the representation of the emperor and his designated successors, Tacitus suggests that kinship and an attractive personality are the decisive criteria for making a man considered \textit{capax imperii} in the eyes of the population. By narrating the deeds of these men, however, he implies that these factors are largely irrelevant for determining capability, and that competent alternative candidates are disregarded more briefly or superficially. This episode is usually related to the rest of the year’s narration and to the major episodes of the other years, and together with those may be considered to indicate main threads in the narrative. On the basis of the amount of text devoted to them, Walker selected seven ‘major episodes’ in the Tiberian hexad: the senatorial debate on Tiberius’ position after the death of Augustus (1.7-14); the mutinies among the Pannonian legions (1.16-30) and on the Rhine (1.31-52) with the measures of Drusus and Germanicus; Germanicus’ campaigns in Germany (1.55-71 and 2.5-26, which I interpret as two separate episodes); the death of Germanicus (2.69-83); and the return of Agrippina and her children to Rome, followed by the trial of Cn. Piso (3.1-19); she lists none for Books 5 and 6 due to their fragmentary state.

535 Walker 1960, 17-22; she defines ‘strand’ as ‘a certain individual, or situation, or conflict, [that] is stressed not by extended description but by continual reference’ (17).
536 Ginsburg 1981, 23-27, noting that 11 of the 21 narrative years ‘open with entries relevant to the succession theme’ (26).
537 Cf. the caveats with regard to ‘cherry picking’ and selective interpretation at Walker 1960, 9-12; see Kraus 2009 on the role of the theme of imperial succession in the Tiberian hexad.
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cause of the force of dynastic considerations (section 2.3). Last, the role of kinship is examined further (section 2.4), arguing that Tacitus represents consanguinity and adoptive ties as being perceived differently, and that Germanicus and Agrippina implicitly challenge Tiberius’ position through their kinship connections.
2.1 Dynastic tendencies in imperial succession

From the very beginning of the *Annals*, Tacitus suggests that imperial succession is widely considered to proceed along dynastic lines; in a highly problematic way already under Augustus, and certainly so under Tiberius. In the opening chapters of the work, Tacitus uses various techniques – structure, flashbacks, allusions, innuendo – to depict the Principate as an hereditary monarchy, and this impression seems to largely adhere to the non-Tacitean evidence for, and dating from, the reign of Tiberius. However, Tacitus adds a dimension not found in other (documentary or literary) sources: evocations of violent intra-familial struggles for power in Rome’s regal period and the tragic house of Atreus, endowing the Roman imperial succession with disquieting connotations and foreshadowings.

### 2.1.1 THE PRINCIPATE AS HEREDITARY MONARCHY

*The starting point of the Annals*

Tacitus chooses to open the narration of the *Histories* at a moment highly significant to his interpretation of events: the moment at which it becomes painfully clear that there is no system of imperial succession to speak of (see above, section 1.1.1). The violent consequences of this revelation – the civil wars of 69 – become the overture to the main topic of the work: the Flavian dynasty. The starting point of the *Annals* (AD 14) is equally evocative and consequential; here, too, Tacitus suggests his view through the structuring of his narrative. Rather than beginning his history of the Julio-Claudian dynasty with the establishment of the Principate and the long reign of its founder, Tacitus opens the *Annals* with Augustus’ death, the
first imperial succession, and the rule of Tiberius: *pauca de Augusto et extrema ... moss Tiberii principatum et cetera* (1.1.3). In fact, in the single manuscript in which the work is preserved, it is tellingly called *Ab excessu Divi Augusti*; the title *Annales* was only introduced in the sixteenth century.\(^{538}\) For a work so concerned with the workings of imperial power as the *Annals*, the omission of much of Augustus’ reign – the origin of the new imperial system – seems, at first sight, a remarkable choice. However, it is precisely the first succession which is revealing about the true nature of the political system of the Principate, at least as Tacitus conceives of it. The smooth transmission of imperial power to a kinsman of Augustus, who had been openly designated heir to the throne, made two things clear: that ‘the system stood independently of Augustus’ – i.e. that his supreme power was not merely based on his personal authority, but was part of a *de facto* permanent position which could be occupied by others as well – and that what Augustus had presented as a *res publica restituta* was, in fact, an hereditary monarchy.\(^{539}\)

Monarchy, moreover, is firmly established as the framework for the *Annales* in the very first chapter of the work.\(^{540}\) The opening sentence – *urbem Romam a principio reges habuere* (1.1.1) – in particular is noteworthy in several respects. First and most obviously because Tacitus uses Rome’s early period of kingship to introduce a work concerned with an – ostensibly – entirely different political system. Second because its phrasing is both an allusion to, and a pointed alteration of, another well-known line on the origins of Rome and its government, from the ‘archaeology’ of Sallust’s *Bellum Catilinae*, as has been recognized by all commentators: *urbem Romam, sicuti ego accepi, condidere atque habuere initio Troiani* (6.1). Whereas Sallust connects the beginnings of Rome with the Trojan foundation and rule, Tacitus deliberately deviates from this starting point, omitting any reference to this phase, and beginning Rome’s history with the regal period. Tacitus’ exclusion of Rome’s Trojan origins here is remarkable, considering Livy’s start of his history of the city

\(^{538}\) Goodyear 1972, 85-87 gives a brief overview of the discussion on the possible original title; see also 3-19 on the manuscripts and editions, with bibliography.

\(^{539}\) Shotter 1991, 3276; see also Syme 1958, 369 (although he continues until 374 arguing for AD 4 as a more suitable starting date); view more firmly taken in Timpe 1962, 17-18; Shotter 1967a, 159; Martin 1981, 108; Sage 1990, 973. Tacitus himself explains the omission of the Augustan period in terms of the room for literary improvement on existing accounts (1.1.2), but, while a possible consideration, it cannot have been the only one.

\(^{540}\) On the preface see Koestermann 1961; Wimmel 1961; Schillinger-Häfele 1966; Leeman 1973; Marincola 1999; Kraus 2009, 100-104.
with Troy, the importance attached by the gens *Iulia* (and Augustus himself in particular) to its Trojan ancestry, and Tacitus’ mention of the Julians’ link to Troy elsewhere in the *Annals*. Moreover, Tacitus’ other notable variation on Sallust – the use of *a principio* rather than *initio* – suggests that the rule of kings over Rome still continues: Rome has been under the rule of kings not in, but since its beginning. A similar implication may be derived from the resemblances between Tacitus’ opening sentence and the start of Justinus’ abridgement of the *Historiae Philippicae* of the Augustan historian Pompeius Trogus: *principio rerum gentium nationumque imperium penes reges erat* (1.1). Like Tacitus, Trogus begins his history with the regal period, but unlike Tacitus, Trogus does confine kingship to that era (*principio*), rather than extending it into his own time. With the very first sentence, then, Tacitus introduces monarchy as a major theme for his history of the Julio-Claudian principate, insinuates that kingship is a permanent factor in Rome’s history and government, and implies a direct continuation between Rome’s early kings and the reigns of the Julio-Claudian emperors.

The centrality of monarchy is reinforced by the rest of the chapter, which centres on ‘the perpetual antagonism between *libertas* and *dominatio*’ in the history of Rome. Immediately after the opening sentence, Tacitus summarizes the transition from the regal period to the republican era, and from the late republican civil wars to Augustus’ institution of the Principate. But the description is restricted to one short paragraph, and ‘formulated in terms of transitions of autocratic power between prominent individuals’ and as ‘temporary suspensions of *libertas*’ – five
centuries of republican history are reduced to a mere succession of various kinds of individual domination, leading almost logically to the absolute power of the princeps. Clarke 2002, 85 and Leeman 1973, 193; cf. Levene 2010, 298-299; Kraus 2009, 100-104 draws attention to repetition.

The list, however, draws attention to two fundamental differences between all these earlier positions of sole power and that of Augustus. Whereas those had been temporary, Augustus succeeded in obtaining lasting power, and turning it into a permanent position which could be transferred to his successors: imperial power differs from republican commands in its enduring nature and its potential for inheritance. Note the explicit temporal limitations attached to these power: ad tempus, nec ... ultra biennium, neque ... diu valuit, non ... longa dominatio, cito; cf. Timpe 1962, 17-18 and Klingner 1969, 499: ‘[Tacitus] stellt ... den Prinzipat des Augustus, nach einer Reihe mißglückter Ansätze, als den ersten geglückten Versuch eines einzelnen Machthabers hin, alle Staatsmacht an sich zu ziehen, diese Machtstellung für die Dauer zu behaupten und sogar übertragbar zu machen.’

In the remainder of his work, then, Tacitus’ focus is on the continuation of this power and its transmission to Augustus’ successors: Tiberii Gaioque et Claudii ac Neronis (1.1.2) and pauca de Augusto ... mox Tiberii principatum et cetera (1.1.3) – the point at which his narrative begins. Kraus 2009, 101-102; cf. 102: ‘His primary subject is the succession of the Empire from Augustus, its inventor and first holder, to the second princeps, and the third, and so on.’

Augustus’ subsidia dominationi (1.3-4)

Starting with the end of Augustus’ reign and the first imperial succession not only gives Tacitus the opportunity to underline the dynastic character of the Principate, it also allows him to concentrate his depiction of Augustus’ reign on the aspects which he considers most relevant to the rest of his narrative. Martin 1981, 108.

Before embarking on his narration of Tiberius’ reign, Tacitus devotes the first chapters of the Annals to some pauca de Augusto et extrema (1.1.3): a very concise summary of his aggressive rise to domination (1.2), his attempts to fortify the newly established Principate and arrange for the transmission of imperial power after his death (1.3), rumours about the succession during Augustus’ old age (1.4), and his actual death (1.5). Chapter 1.3 is almost entirely devoted to Augustus’ use of his family members to maintain and secure his newly-gained power for the future: his elevation of several of his kinsmen to positions of power through the distribution of honours, com-
mands and powers, as well as by strategic marriages and adoptions.\textsuperscript{551} Formally, the passage depicts Augustus’ involvement of his family members in the business of the state; however, the ring-composition of the passage – starting with \textit{subsidia dominationi} and ending with \textit{quo pluribus munimentis insisteret} – strongly suggests that the promotions and privileges described in the sentences in between are to be interpreted as arrangements for the succession, even if the word \textit{successio} itself is conspicuously absent.\textsuperscript{552} The ’butresses’ and ’bulwarks’ are intended to safeguard the continuation of Augustus’ imperial power and position in the event of his own demise. Notably, this is one of the (relatively) rare passages in which Tacitus presents his own outlook on the succession: in most other cases when the succession is spoken about explicitly, views or comments are focalized through other, often indefinite focalizers.

Augustus’ arrangements for the transmission of imperial power are cast in overtly dynastic terms. Tacitus denotes the persons he names by their kinship relation to Augustus,\textsuperscript{553} he draws attention to Augustus’ connecting them to himself by creating new kin ties through marriage and adoption,\textsuperscript{554} and he evokes dynastic con-
notations through the use of the term *domus*. The Principate, of course, was not officially an hereditary monarchy, and modern scholars are divided on the question to what extent the historical Augustus conceived of the emperorship as a dynastic system right from the beginning, and consciously constructed a line of succession within his family. The real Augustus certainly promoted many of his relatives to high positions, and advertised members of his family in various media. This issue of dynastic intentions, however, is too large and complex to be treated, much less resolved, here; moreover, this thesis is concerned with Tacitus’ representation rather than with actual historical reality. Whether or not his sources pointed towards dynastic plans on Augustus’ part, what matters here is that Tacitus chooses to depict Augustus’ reign and plans for the transmission of his power as already firmly dynastic.

This impression is continued in the next chapter (1.4), where unnamed focalizers speculate about who will succeed Augustus. The only candidates named are two kinsmen of Augustus: Tiberius and Agrippa Postumus. Their kinship connection to the emperor is not explicitly mentioned as a reason for their potential succession, but it may be deduced from the use of the *hapax* (in the whole of extant Latin literature) *domus regnatrix* (1.4.4), which carries strong connotations of hereditary monarchy, and from the fact that Agrippa’s only possible claim to imperial power lay in his direct descent from Augustus: as people are reported to have said, he was completely unsuitable otherwise (1.4.3). Moreover, Tacitus presents people as expecting that Tiberius’ mother and sons will play important (albeit detrimental) parts in his governing of the state (1.4.5). So, before the question of the succession to Tiberius is even brought up, the transmission of imperial power has already been Augustus’ adoption of Agrippa is not mentioned: he is just called nepos. Indeed, since the abdication (enforced emancipation) of Agrippa by Augustus, probably in AD 6, he was no longer Augustus’ son; Levick 1972 and 1999a, 57-58 and, more recently, Pettinger 2012, 67-73.

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555 1.3.1: *integra etiam tum domo sua*; cf. 4.3.1: *plena Caesarum domus*, referring to Tiberius’ son and grandsons as potential successors. Also in 1.4.1, *nulla in praesens formidine, dum Augustus etate validus seque et domum et pacem sustentavi*, his *domus* seems to be on a par with the emperor himself and peace as prerequisites for public peace of mind; and at 1.6.3, the *domus* is connected to the governance of the state. In the first ten chapters of the work, the word *domus* occurs eight times, always referring to the imperial house, mainly in an abstract sense. Rowe 2002, 19-20 observes that the SCPP (for which see below, section 2.1.2) sets apart the Pisones from the imperial family by avoiding the use of the word *domus* in the case of the former.

556 See above, note 18.

557 See e.g. Zanker 1987, 148-151, 217-232; Rose 1997, 11-21; Severy 2003, 96-139; Claes 2013, 146-147.
Dynastic tendencies in imperial succession

described as, or implied to be, dynastic, setting the tone for the rest of the work.

2.1.2 DYNASTIC EXPECTATIONS IN THE SUCCESSION TO TIBERIUS

In the matter of the future succession to Tiberius, these tendencies are continued. Although it is rarely made explicit, Tacitus represents imperial succession as dynastic throughout the Tiberian hexad: Tiberius intends his descendants to succeed him, and they are expected to do so by various groups in society. Germanicus and Drusus are heirs apparent, and their children will be next in line for the throne.

Drusus, Germanicus and their children

In the only passage in which the Tacitean Tiberius’ thoughts about the succession are described at length, when he is pondering the issue at the end of his life, it is evident both that imperial power is his to transmit – *dubitavit de tradenda re publica* – and that his successor will be a kinsman.558 In the first Books, Drusus and Germanicus are regarded by Tacitus as the successors to Tiberius, as *plura munimenta*, in the event of Tiberius’ death (1.3.5). When discussing Tiberius’ potential succession to Augustus, people are described as fearing that the two princes will tear the state apart while fighting for the succession.559 And the Tacitean Tiberius is represented as fearing that Germanicus might wish to speed up his accession rather than to wait for it.560

After Germanicus’ death, Tiberius’ biological son Drusus becomes the only heir apparent, with Tiberius’ grandsons as ‘back-ups’. In 3.31.1 (AD 21), Drusus shares the consulship with his father, and a year later he is granted *tribunicia potestas* (3.56.1-4, AD 22). Tacitus explains that this was a tool devised by Augustus to designate imperial successors; whether this is historically accurate or not matters less

558  6.46.1-2 (discussed more elaborately in section 2.3.4 below): *gnarum hoc principi, eoque dubitavit de tradenda re publica, primum inter nepotes …. etiam de Claudio agitanti … sin extra domum successor quaereretur, ne memoria Augusti, ne nomen Caesarum in ludibria et contumelias verterent metuebat.*

559  1.4.5: *serviendum … duobusque adolescentibus, qui rem publicam interim premant [i.e. ‘by monopolizing the prizes of the state’, Furneaux 1896 *ad loc.*] quandoque distrahant [i.e. ‘by disputing the succession’, *ibidem*]; see Woodman 1998c, 237-242 on this passage.

560  1.7.6: *ex formidine, ne Germanicus, in caius manu tot legiones, immensa sociorum auxilia, mirus apud populum favor, habere imperium quam exspectare mallet.*
for our purposes than that Tacitus represents Tiberius as using it as such.  

Tacitus states that it was only after the death of Germanicus that this power was decreed to Drusus, thereby publicly revealing him as his father’s successor: Tiberius had not made a choice between his two sons while Germanicus was alive. Drusus’ position as successor may also be discerned in 4.3, which narrates Sejanus’ strategy for increasing his influence and obtaining the *summa*: supreme power. After sketching the growth of his power in 4.2 – to the point at which Tiberius openly calls him his *socius laborum* (4.2.3) – Tacitus describes the main obstacles standing between Sejanus and supremacy: Tiberius’ son and grandsons, whom Sejanus intends to eliminate.  

Apparently, as long as they are alive, there is no possibility for Sejanus to succeed: relatives are the first choice – so Tacitus implies. This view is also suggested by the reaction to Sejanus that Tacitus attributes to Drusus. The prince is described as *impatiens aemuli* (4.3.2), implying that he considers himself to be the heir apparent – an argument which is repeated some chapters later, where he is said to complain that ‘with a son alive and well, someone else was being called ‘assistant in command’” – clearly an outrage, in his opinion. Tacitus, then, depicts Tiberius, Sejanus and Drusus as conceiving of the latter as the heir apparent to the emperor.

After Drusus’ death, the expectation of succession is transferred to the remaining offspring of Tiberius: his grandsons, both adoptive and biological. The two eldest, Nero and Drusus Caesar, had already been given special treatment before the narration of the death of Tiberius’ son Drusus. In 3.29, when Nero Caesar assumes the *toga virilis*, Tiberius requests several privileges for him from the Senate, and is depicted as aligning Nero with Drusus the Elder and himself – thus confirming his special position. The same is repeated three years later for Drusus Caesar (4.4.1).
Dynastic Tendencies in Imperial Succession

Their special status is highlighted again some chapters later, when Tacitus mentions that the pontiffs and other priests had included Nero and Drusus Caesar in their vows for the emperor’s preservation, angering Tiberius, who is not pleased to see the young men placed on a par with himself and tells the Senate not to repeat such premature honours (4.17.1-2). Tiberius’ reaction is explained by Tacitus to be the result of Sejanus’ constant warnings about popular support for Agrippina (and, presumably, her children).565

Indeed, immediately after the funeral of Tiberius’ son Drusus, Nero and Drusus Caesar are depicted as the new targets for Sejanus, something which had already been foreshadowed in the earlier passages describing the young men taking up their togas of manhood. Tacitus has deliberately transposed Nero’s entry into manhood – which occurred in June – to the end of the year, collocating it with the notices of his marriage to Drusus’ daughter Julia, and the engagement of Sejanus’ daughter to one of Claudius’ sons. This juxtaposition of affairs relating to the imperial family is significant in several ways.566 First, because it puts together Tiberius’ measures to fortify the domus Caesarum (by requesting honours for Nero and marrying him to his own granddaughter) with another decision which is conceived by the people as weakening it. The betrothal of Sejanus’ daughter and Claudius’ son is seen as polluting the nobility of the house and as raising Sejanus’ position by connecting him to the imperial family – a connection which, as the narrative will show, will have fatal consequences for many of the individuals involved. Moreover, as Ginsburg notes, it contrasts the people’s joy at the growing-up and rise of one of Germanicus’ children with their hostile reaction to Sejanus’ future link to the imperial family, instigated by Tiberius. Thus, it ‘anticipates events which will form the major focus of the narrative later in the work: the growing power of Sejanus and his designs against

565 4.17.3: instabat quippe Seianus incusabatque diductam civitatem ut civili bello: esse qui se partium Agrippinae vocent, ac ni resistatur, fore plures; neque alium gliscentis discordiae remedium, quam si unus alterve maxime prompti subverterentur. As Ginsburg 1981, 23 notes, Tacitus never mentions the vows at the beginning of the year; that he does so here must be seen in terms of the thematic significance of the incident; see Martin/Woodman 1989 ad loc. on this passage functioning as the introduction of Tiberius’ and Sejanus’ hostility towards the house of Germanicus, which will be elaborated in the following chapters, and continued throughout the rest of the hexad.

566 3.29.3-4: auctum dehinc gaudium nuptiis Neronis et Iuliae Drusi filiae. utque haec secundo rumore, ita adversis animis acceptum, quod filio Claudii socer Seianus destinaretur. polluisse nobilitatem familiae videbatur suspectumque iam nimiae spei Seianus ultra extidisse; Ginsburg 1981, 38-39 and n.32; Woodman/Martin 1996 ad loc.
TIBERIUS

the family of Germanicus. The placement of Drusus Caesar’s donning of the toga virilis (4.4.1) is likewise noteworthy, as it immediately follows Tacitus’ description of Sejanus’ plans to eliminate Tiberius’ son and grandsons in 4.3; as Ginsburg keenly observes: ‘[i]n advancing Germanicus’ children, the Senate was merely fattening fresh lambs for the slaughter’.568

As said, right after his reference to Tiberius’ funeral oration for his deceased son, Tacitus recounts Sejanus’ deliberations on ways to remove Germanicus’ sons, quo-rum non dubia successio (4.12.2). Moreover, there seems to be a more widely shared feeling that Nero and Drusus Caesar play a role in the state due to their ancestry. Some chapters earlier, when entrusting Germanicus’ orphaned sons to the care of the Senate now that their ‘foster father’ Drusus has passed away, Tiberius is represented as stating, in oratio recta, that their fortunes are of public importance due to their birth: they are Augustus’ great-grandsons.569 Birth matters in a more narrow sense as well: Nero Caesar, the elder of the two boys, is described as closest to the succession – the focalizer remains unclear – and this sense of priority is used by Sejanus to entice Drusus Caesar to plot against his older brother.570 The Senate and people are presented as supporting (the advancement) of Nero and Drusus, even after the Tacitean Tiberius has made public accusations against them; their descent from Germanicus is an important factor in the boys’ popularity.571 Ultimately, Nero

567 Ginsburg 1981, 46-47 (citation from 47); see also ibidem 40-41 on the significance of the notices at the end of Tacitus’ narrative years, which often recall past events, reinforce prior impressions, or anticipate events later in the narrative.
569 4.8.5: Augusti pro nepotes, clarissimis maioribus genitos … ita nati estis, ut bona malaque vestra ad rem publicam pertineant. I disagree with Furneaux 1896 ad loc., who takes bona malaque to refer to qualities rather than fortunes.
570 4.59.3: Neronem proximum successioni; 4.60.2: qui fratrem quoque Neronis Drusum traxit in partis, spe obiecta principis loci si priorem actate et iam labefactum demovisset. That priorem actate is so explicitly mentioned as an argument must be taken to mean that the eldest brother was first in line for the succession, if only because of his age, experience and probably more advanced public career. Eck/Caballos/Fernández 1996, 246, observe that Nero’s formal priority to his younger brother Drusus with regard to the line of succession is indicated by his more extensive mention in the SCPP (lines 146-147), where Nero is named, but Drusus is referred to without his name. This more or less automatic preference for the eldest of the two contrasts notably with the claim of the Tacitean Galba in Hist. 1.15.2, of passing over Piso’s elder brother for the adoption on the ground that he is less well qualified for the emperorship.
571 3.29.3: plebi admodum laetae quod Germanici stirpem iam puberem aspiciebat; 4.15.3: egitque Nero grates ea causa patribus atque avo, laetas inter auditantium affectiones qui recenti memoria Germanici illum aspicit, illum audiri rebantur; 5.4.2 (after Tiberius denounces Nero and Agrippina by letter): simul populus effigies Agrippinae
and Drusus Caesar, together with their mother Agrippina, are banished and imprisoned by Tiberius and Sejanus, and pass away before the end of Tiberius’ reign.\textsuperscript{572} Knowing that imperial power is transmitted within the family, but not being connected to the \textit{domus Augusta} by birth, Sejanus decides to create kinship connections through marriage. He had already betrothed his own daughter to a son of Claudius’ – an alliance which was interpreted by many as a sign of higher hopes, and therefore resented.\textsuperscript{573} In trying to rise further, he asks Tiberius for the hand of Drusus’ widow Livilla, who had – in Tacitus’ narration – already helped him in eliminating Drusus and whose aid would later enable him to proceed against Nero Caesar.\textsuperscript{574} Tiberius, however, responds that a marital connection between Sejanus and one of the princesses would be widely interpreted as an indication of excessive ambition on his part – and indeed that Augustus took the political significance of such a connection into account when marrying off his daughter Julia (4.40.5-6). Some chapters later, when Agrippina asks Tiberius for permission to remarry, the emperor’s answer may refer to the same matter: that any potential marriage would have significant political implications.\textsuperscript{575} In Tacitus’ depiction, then, it is widely ex-

\textit{ac Neronis gerens circumsistit curiam faustisque in Caesarem omnis falsas litteras et principe invito exitium domui eius intendi clamitatu}; 6.23.2. tradidere quidam praejectum fuisse Macroni, si arma ab Seiano tempatur, extractum custodiae iuvenem (nam in Palatio attinebat) ducem populo imponere. In 5.10, moreover, a false Drusus, allegedly on his way to invade Egypt or Syria with his father’s former armies, assembles a gathering of followers in the East; see Tuplin 1987.

\textsuperscript{572} The various stages are: 1.69.1-5: Sejanus inflames Tiberius’ anger towards Agrippina; 4.18-20: friends of Germanicus and Agrippina accused and condemned; 4.52.1-2: Claudia Pulchra, second cousin of Agrippina, is condemned on the charge of various crimes; 4.54.1-2: Sejanus lures Agrippina into believing that Tiberius is planning on poisoning her, after which she refuses food at dinner, and Tiberius understands that she accuses him of trying to poison her, and is rumoured to plan her destruction; 4.59.3: Sejanus has some men undertake accusations against Nero Caesar; 4.60.1-3: Nero is harrassed and evaded by his clients and Tiberius, while his wife Julia reports all his doings to her mother Livilla, who shares them with Sejanus; Sejanus convinces Drusus Caesar to plot against his brother, at the same time planning the former’s downfall; 4.67.3-4: Nero Caesar and Agrippina in custody, being watched by their guards; 4.68.1-70.4: condemnation of Titius Sabinus, friend of Agrippina and Germanicus; 4.71: Tiberius’ fears of Nero and Agrippina; 5.3-5: Tiberius sends a letter to the Senate denouncing Agrippina and Nero Caesar, the people and a senator protest, and Tiberius berates them in an edict; 6.23.2-24.3: death of Drusus Caesar; 6.25.1-3: death of Agrippina.

\textsuperscript{573} 3.29.4; 4.7.2: \textit{communes illi cum familia Drusorum fore nepotes} (one of the signs of Sejanus’ growing influence as Drusus presents them in his complaints against him).

\textsuperscript{574} First adultery and help against Drusus: 4.3; help in accusing Nero Caesar: 4.60.

\textsuperscript{575} 4.53.2: \textit{sed Caesar, non ignarus quantum ex re publica peteretur ... sine responso quamquam instantem reliquit}. Martin/Woodman 1989 \textit{ad loc.} on the two possible interpretations of the passage.
pected that imperial power will be passed on within the family, and that Germanicus and Drusus, and after them their sons, are to succeed.

The Tiberian evidence
That the succession issue is cast in dynastic terms by Tacitus should not surprise us: after all, writing almost a hundred years after the events, he knew that members of the Julio-Claudian family would continue to reign for more than half a century, only to be eventually replaced by another dynasty, that of the Flavians. This gives rise to the question to what extent these dynastic tendencies were already present during the principate of Tiberius, and whether the line of succession was clearly propagated at that time. In other words: how distinctively Tacitean is the focus on dynastic succession, when compared to other (types of) sources – epigraphic, numismatic, material, and literary – of Tiberius’ reign? We possess several long epigraphic documents dating from Tiberius’ reign which deal directly and explicitly with matters concerning the imperial family and in particular the two heirs apparent: senatorial decrees and laws relating to the deaths and funeral honours of Germanicus in 19 and of the Younger Drusus in 23, and to the trial of Cn. Calpurnius Piso (and some of his associates), the legate of Syria accused of *maiestas* and the murder of Germanicus. Copies of these official documents, pertaining to the aftermaths of three critical moments in Tiberius’ early reign, were set up in cities and military camps throughout the Empire. Together, they provide an invaluable contemporary perspective on the position, representation and popular perception of the imperial family.

During his special command in the Eastern provinces, Germanicus had fallen out with the consular legate of Syria, Cn. Calpurnius Piso. When Germanicus fell ill and died in Antioch in the autumn of 19, probably as a result of a disease, the prince and his associates attributed his death to Piso’s attempts on his life by poison and magic. Germanicus’ decease caused immense public grief, and led the Senate and the popular assembly to decree a collection of funeral honours to him similar to those voted to Gaius and Lucius Caesar after their deaths. These decrees – more

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576  Rowe 2002 is an excellent study on these documents and how they exemplify the new political culture of the Principate; Lott 2012 conveniently assembles and contextualizes them, with commentary.
577  On the SCPP as a source for imperial ideology, in particular in relation to the *domus Augusta*, see Potter 1999.
578  Tacitus treats at length the conflicts between Germanicus and Piso, the former’s death, and the reactions
precisely, the *senatus consultum de memoria honoranda Germanici Caesaris* and the accompanying *rogatio* about the *Lex Valeria Aurelia* – are recorded in the so-called *Tabula Siarensis* (hereafter TS) and the *Tabula Hebana* (*TH*) as well as in some minor fragments.579 The honours comprise, among many others, sacrifices to commemorate his death, the erection of several arches in Rome and the provinces, the inclusion of Germanicus in Salian hymns, the setting up of portraits of Germanicus and his father Drusus the Elder in the portico of the temple of Apollo on the Palatine, and the addition, in the name of Germanicus, of five new centuries to the *comitia centuriata*.580 When Tiberius’ other son Drusus died in 23, he was likewise granted elaborate funerary honours, details of which are preserved in fragments of a *senatus consultum* (*CIL 6.31200*) and a *rogatio* found on the *Tabula Ilicitana* (*TI*) and smaller fragments.581 The honours are very similar to those decreed to Germanicus a few years earlier, with the addition of others. Finally, the Senate’s verdict in the trial of Piso is recorded in the *senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone Patre* (*SCPP*) published in 20.582 Piso, who had committed suicide during the course of the trial, was posthumously convicted of *maiestas*, but acquitted from the charge of murder.583 All of these documents give clear signs of a widespread dynastic conception of the emperorship and of the central position of the imperial family within the state and its governance.584 They place much emphasis on fecundity and on Tiberius’ parental relationship to his sons, and contain expectations of dynastic succession,

to it: 2.53-61, 2.69-83, 3.1-6. The massive grief is referred to in various places both in Tacitus and in the documents: 2.82.1-5, 2.84.1, 3.1-6; TS 4-11; SCPP 57-58; references to the restraint of grief: SCPP 131-151.

579 The *Tabulae Siarensis* and *Hebana* are published in González 1984 and Crawford 1996, no. 37, with bibliography; see also Sánchez-Ostiz Gutiérrez 1999; collections of essays on the *Tabulae* are González/Arce 1988 and Fraschetti 2000 (*non vidi*).

580 Tacitus mentions some of the honours in 2.83.1-4, but is deliberately selective: González 1999 on his tendentiousness.

581 Crawford 1996, no. 38, with bibliography.

582 The SCPP has been edited and published in Eck/Caballos/Fernández 1996; in 1999 a special issue (120.1) of the *American Journal of Philology* was dedicated to the inscription. Griffin 1997 and Damon/Takács 1999 provide good introductions.

583 Tacitus’ account of the trial is 3.8-19; on his representation, see Barnes 1998; Damon 1999.

584 As argued convincingly by Severy 2000 and Rowe 2002 (esp. 1-40); cf. Rowe 2002, 1: ‘The dossier affirms that what Augustus had established was the rule not of one man but of a dynastic house – a house that had a collective identity, in which women had public roles, and a house that promoted a series of young men as potential imperial successors. ... Most explicitly in retrospective funeral honours, they were universally recognized as dynastic successors.’

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for instance in phrasings such as *omnis spes futura paternae pro re publica stationis*.\textsuperscript{585} Moreover, they testify to the highly public role of the imperial family – here called *domus Augusta* for the first time in official documents – and its individual members, in particular the emperor’s mother Livia.\textsuperscript{586} They stress the loyalty of various constituents of Roman society towards the *domus*, and use the language of family obligation – for instance, the concept of *pietas* – to describe the relationships of the population to what has become a kind of state institution.\textsuperscript{587}

Contemporary material culture and literary production likewise celebrate the *domus Augusta*, stressing the dynastic nature of succession by displaying various generations of the imperial family together. Already under Augustus, members of the emperor’s family had figured prominently on monuments, for instance at Thespiae, where a group of statues seem to have represented Livia, the Elder Julia with Gaius and Lucius Caesar, and Agrippa with the Elder Agrippina in his arms.\textsuperscript{588}

During Tiberius’ rule, sanctuaries were created for the Julian gens, and statuary groups in the early years of his reign figure Tiberius together with Augustus, Livia, and Agrippina as the father and mother of Germanicus. The quote is from *SCPP* 126-130: *[sc. senatum] magnopere rogare et petere, ut [sc. Tiberium] omnem curam, quam in duos quondam filios suos partitus erat, ad eum, quem haberet, converteret, sperareq(ue) senatum eum, qui supersit, [t]anto maior[i] curae dis immortalibus fore, quanto magis intellegent, omnem spem futuram paternae pro r(e) p(ublica) stationis in uno repos[j]ta<m>.*

585 Tiberius as the father of Germanicus is mentioned at *TS* 11-12, 14; *SCPP* 32, 60, 124, 127, 154, 156; of Drusus at *SCPP* 32 and 127-129, *CIL* 6.31200 fragm. b/c col. 1 (the text of which is very fragmentary and highly speculative) 1, 4; *CIL* 6.31200 fragm. b/c col. 1 12. References to the fecundity of the imperial women are found at *SCPP* 116 (Livia having given birth to Tiberius), 139 (the many children of Germanicus and Agrippina). The quote is from *SCPP* 126-130: *[sc. senatum] magnopere rogare et petere, ut [sc. Tiberium] omnem curam, quam in duos quondam filios suos partitus erat, ad eum, quem haberet, converteret, sperareq(ue) senatum eum, qui supersit, [t]anto maior[i] curae dis immortalibus fore, quanto magis intellegent, omnem spem futuram paternae pro r(e) p(ublica) stationis in uno repos[j]ta<m>.*

586 Corbier 1994a; see Purcell 1986 and Kunst 2008 (esp. 239-261) on Livia’s public and powerful role, remarked upon very explicitly in *SCPP* 115-119. The *domus Augusta* is mentioned at *TS* 10 and 22; *SCPP* 33 and 161-162; see Saller 1984 on the concept of *domus*. Members of the imperial family, both living and deceased (excluding Tiberius, who is frequently named in his capacity of emperor) are mentioned in *TS* fragm. a 6-7 (Livia, Drusus the Younger, Antonia), 19-21 (Drusus the Elder, Antonia, Livilla, Claudius, Germanicus’ children), 27-28 (Drusus the Elder, Augustus), 30-31 (Augustus, Drusus the Elder); *TS* fragm. b. col. 1 5 (Gaius and Lucius Caesar), 7 (Gaius and Lucius Caesar), 9 (Augustus), 18 (Drusus); *TS* fragm. b. col. 3 4 (Augustus), 5-6 (Augustus); *TH* 2 (Drusus the Elder), 5 (Gaius and Lucius Caesar; also in 7, 25, 39, 41-43 and 46), 52 (Augustus), 60 (Augustus); *SCPP* 4 (Augustus), 32 (Drusus and Germanicus, as unnamed sons of Tiberius), 46 (Augustus), 52 (Augustus), 68 (Augustus), 86 (Augustus), 92 (Augustus), 115-119 (Livia), 127-129 (Drusus the Younger, as the unnamed son of Tiberius), 132-133 (Livia and Drusus the Younger), 137-151 (Agrippina, Antonia, Livilla, Augustus, Nero Caesar, Drusus Caesar [not named], Claudius, Livia); *CIL* 6.31200 fragm. b/c col. 1 10-11 (Germanicus and Drusus the Elder); *TI* fragm. a 5 (Germanicus).

587 Severy 2000.

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Drusus and Germanicus, while the emphasis later shifts towards Drusus and his two sons.\textsuperscript{589} Notably, very few dynastic monuments were erected after the death of Drusus, and those focus on (retrospective) commemoration rather than the advertisement of the future generations of successors.\textsuperscript{590} Several of the authors writing during the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius – notably Ovid, Valerius Maximus and Velleius Paterculus – also seem to conceive of the \textit{domus Augusta} as an imperial dynasty, and accord the house and its members – particularly Augustus, Livia, Tiberius, Drusus and Germanicus – a prominent position in their works.\textsuperscript{591} They speak of the emperorship in the same terms as the SCPP, as a (\textit{paterna}) \textit{statio}.\textsuperscript{592} On the imperial coinage, one of the chief media for imperial self-presentation, the dynastic tendencies are much less evident.\textsuperscript{593} Under Augustus, many of the members of the imperial family figured on coins, and the emperor particularly advertised Gaius and Lucius Caesar and Tiberius, his adopted sons and intended successors.\textsuperscript{594} For most of Tiberius’ reign, by contrast, the younger generations of the family are conspicuously absent. While Augustus appears on a large number of coins, and Tiberius is consistently named as \textit{divi Augusti filius}, Tiberius’ own sons do not feature on his coinage as long as Germanicus is alive, and Livia is only represented twice.\textsuperscript{595} After Germanicus’ death, Drusus is displayed on three coin types – constituting 20% of all Tiberian coin types in the years 22 and 23 – one of which also figures his new-

\textsuperscript{589} Flory 1996; Rose 1997, 22-31; Hurlet 1997, 511-531.
\textsuperscript{590} Rose 1997, 28-31.
\textsuperscript{591} Ovid: \textit{Tr.} 2.161-68, 2.219-220, 4.2.1-16; \textit{Pont.} 2.2.67-74, 2.8.1-4 and 29-34, 3.1.11-118 and 163-64, 3.3.87-88, 4.9.105-112, 4.13.25-33; \textit{Fast.} 1.10-12, 1.529-536; see Millar 1993 and Flory 1996. Vell. 2.124.2, 2.131.2; see Woodman 1977 \textit{ad loc.} Valerius Maximus names members of the imperial family in about fifty of his \textit{exempla}; see Wardle 2000 and Bloomer 1992, 204-229 on their role in Valerius’ work. As Bloomer 1992, 226-228 notes, Valerius consistently celebrates Augustus and Tiberius in terms of their family relations. Cf. also the references in Eck/Caballos/Fernández 1996, 240.
\textsuperscript{592} SCPP 129-130; Vell. 2.124.2, 2.131.2; Ov. \textit{Trist.} 2.219; Griffin 1997, 257. On the term \textit{statio} in relation to the imperial position, see Koestermann 1932.
\textsuperscript{593} On the display of kinship messages on imperial coinage see Claes 2013.
\textsuperscript{594} Although Tiberius is only represented from AD 10 onwards; Rose 1997, 20; Claes 2013, 146-147. The numbers are \textit{RIC I} \textsuperscript{f} \textit{Augustus} 198-199, 206-212, 404-405, 221-226, 235-241a,b, 244-248a,b, 423-424, 469-470 (from Claes 2013, 269).
\textsuperscript{595} Tiberius as son of Augustus: \textit{RIC I} \textsuperscript{f} \textit{Tiberius} 1-6, 8-12, 14-30, 32-36, 38-41, 44, 46-69. Tiberius together with Augustus: \textit{RIC I} \textsuperscript{f} \textit{Tiberius} 23-24, 49, 56-57, 62-63, 68-69. Augustus alone: \textit{RIC I} \textsuperscript{f} \textit{Tiberius} 70-83. Livia: \textit{RIC I} \textsuperscript{f} \textit{Tiberius} 50-51 (and perhaps 47). See also Claes 2013, 52, 83, 94-95. Thanks are due to Liesbeth Claes for providing me with these references.

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ly-born twin sons. On these coins, Drusus is denoted as grandson of Augustus and son of Tiberius, and is portrayed with an iconography similar to that which Tiberius received under Augustus, thereby clearly marking him out as successor to his father. After Drusus’ death, however, the Tiberian coinage no longer includes any descendants or prospective successors. The dynastic element, then, although strong in the period when Drusus was sole heir apparent, is on the whole less present in the imperial coinage than in the other sources. Individuals are represented on coins, but only scarcely, and there is no systematic propagation of the imperial family as a collective.

Taken together, the contemporary sources exhibit a strongly dynastic conception of the emperorship and thus of imperial succession, already during the reign of Tiberius. They devote much attention to the *domus Augusta* and to its most important members – Augustus, Livia, Tiberius, Drusus and Germanicus – and represent Tiberius’ two sons as his successors. Tacitus’ focus on the contemporary awareness of the dynastic nature of the succession during Tiberius’ principate, then, accords with imperial ideology and contemporary perceptions as expressed in a variety of Tiberian sources. However, as will be argued in the remainder of this chapter, Tacitus’ representation diverges from the ‘official’ picture in some important respects, most notably in the attention he devotes to Germanicus and his children, and in his depiction of various kinship ties. In particular, Tacitus’ version differs from the Tiberian evidence in the divisions he draws between the Augustan or ‘Julian’ side of the imperial family, and the Tiberian or ‘Claudian’ line, and in the implications this has for the authority of the Tacitean Tiberius, Germanicus and Agrippina (section 2.4.4).

### 2.1.3 EVOCATIONS OF DYNASTIC STRIFE AND CIVIL WAR

Tacitus does not just represent imperial succession as dynastic, however; he also

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596 RIC F Tiberius 42 (with his twins), 43, 45; see Claes 2013, 147-148, 160-162.
597 Claes 2013, 162.
598 See also Severy 2003, 213-231; Seager 2013; Hekster, forthcoming; Mlasowsky 1996 on Julio-Claudian succession ‘propaganda’. As touched upon already in the Introduction, this conflicts with Flaig’s (1992) insistence on the non-existence of a dynastic principle in imperial succession.
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endows the matter with various disturbing connotations. In the opening chapters of the *Annals*, he conjures up images of dynastic strife during Rome’s regal period and within the house of Atreus. Moreover, throughout the narrative, he uses the language of civil war to describe the intra-familial struggles for imperial power.

*Monarchy and intra-familial conflicts*

Monarchical struggles are first evoked in 1.5.3, narrating Augustus’ death and Tiberius’ accession. Many scholars have noted the similarities between Tacitus’ depiction of Livia’s behaviour and Livy’s narration of Tanaquil’s actions to secure the throne for her son Servius Tullius after the death of Tarquinius Priscus.599 In both cases, the mother conceals the death of her husband by closing off the palace and distributing reassuring messages, until she has made all necessary preparations to secure the succession of her son. The association with the contested reign of Rome’s sixth king continues in 1.7.6, where the formulation of Tiberius’ fear of Germanicus (*ex formidine, ne Germanicus … habere imperium quam exspectare mallet*) seems deliberately modelled on Livy’s phrase *qui habere quam sperare regnum mallet*, a rendering of Tullia’s exhortations of her husband Tarquinius Superbus to wrest power from his father-in-law Servius Tullius.600 This allusion not only generally evokes images of dynastic strife, it also brings up the question of legitimacy of power and its transmission through inheritance – an issue which, as will be seen, pervades the *Annals*

599 Liv. 1.39-4.1.41.7; similarities observed by Charlesworth 1927 (who doubts any deliberate allusion); Goodyear 1972 *ad loc.* (although he sees no added interpretative value in it); Martin 1981, 109-110; Bauman 1994 (who argues, not very convincingly, that Livy revised his Tanaquil-episode in the light of Livia’s behaviour); Ogilvie 1965, 163, who also discusses the influence of similar themes in Hellenistic history on Livy’s account. As is well-known, there are strong parallels between this episode and Tacitus’ depiction of the events surrounding the death of Claudius in *Ann.* 12.66-13.1, as discussed for instance by Charlesworth 1927; Martin 1955; Goodyear 1972 *ad loc.* (with many references); contra Shotter 1965. Aurelius Victor connects the deaths of Claudius and Tarquinius: *Caes.* 4.15: *ceterum funus, uti quondam in Prisco Tarquinio, diu occultatum, dum arte mulieris corrupti custodes aegrum simulant atque ab eo mandatum interim privigno, quem paulo ante in liberos asciverat, curam reipublicae.* Syme 1958, *passim* sees parallels with the accession of Hadrian (Goodyear 1972 *ad loc.* convincingly rejects this).

600 Liv. 1.47.2; observed by Koestermann 1963 and Goodyear 1972 *ad loc.*, but without further interpretation. There seem to be some similarities, nonetheless: in both cases, there is an elderly monarch (Tiberius/Servius Tullius), helped to the throne by the efforts of a woman (Livia/Tanaquil), but now – allegedly or actually – threatened by his ‘crown prince’. This heir apparent (Germanicus/Tarquinius Superbus) is connected to the ruler through kinship (as adopted son/son-in-law), has an overly ambitious wife (Agrippina/Tullia), and rouses fears/hopes not to be content with waiting for power.
as well. In Livy, Tullia entices her husband by pointing to his birthright to rule; Tarquinius complains to the Senate that Tullius acquired power unlawfully (*mortem indignam* and *occupasse*) and as a ‘woman’s gift’ (*muliebre donum*) rather than on the basis of ancestry or consensus; and to Tullius himself Tarquinius states that the son of a king is a more legitimate heir to the throne than a slave. These are themes which also occur in Tacitus’ Tiberian narrative, in which Agrippina claims certain rights on the basis of her descent from Augustus (4.52.2), the value of consanguineous connections to the previous emperor in general is discussed, Tiberius’ power is described as a woman’s *donum* by Livia (4.57.3), and Tiberius’ legitimacy is questioned and challenged in several ways (see also below, section 2.4). Moreover, the Livian echo draws a parallel between the two situations of potential contestation of the ruler’s position, the only modification being the prize of the rivalry: *regnum* is replaced by *imperium* in Tacitus’ version, which leads the reader to wonder whether the Principate really is so very different from kingship.

Furthermore, in the first ten chapters of the *Annals*, Tacitus evokes images of the royal οἶκος, especially the house of Atreus, as portrayed in Greek tragedy and in Senecan drama. The influence of drama, in particular tragedy, on Tacitus’ historiography has indeed often been recognized. Santoro l’Hoir mentions several resemblances which, taken together, very likely constitute deliberate allusions to the fortunes of the Atreids: general thematic links and concepts, specifically

601 1.47.4 (Tullia’s exhortations); 1.47.10 (Tarquinius’ speech to the senators); 1.48.2 (Tarquinius’ address to Tullius).
602 Santoro l’Hoir 2006, 33-70; Atreid associations are already noted by Syme 1958, 363, but not further discussed. Santoro l’Hoir focuses in particular on Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* (although she states that ‘the historian has filtered his Atreid vision through a Senecan lens’, 253; see 50-56 on Senecan language in Tacitus), but see the cautionary remarks by Ash in her CR review of the book on excluding other intertexts and influences.
603 Dramatic elements in Tacitus’ historiography are, for instance, ‘the dramatic prologue, swift development of a conflict, the heightening of tension towards the end of an ‘act’, sudden surprise and reversals of fortune … hints of foreboding by supernatural and other means’ (Walker 1960, 35-49), certain themes and plots (such as the circle of intracommunal/-familial violence which cannot be resolved), the specific use of time, dramatic irony, the use of character as a driving force behind the course of events, certain character types (such as the scheming *noverca*) and the language of acting and masking (*dissimulatio, species* etc.); see Galtier 2011; Aubrion 1985, 269-326; Walker 1960, 35-49; Wiseman 1994 on the close connection between drama and historiography, with the reaction of Flower 1995.
604 Such as the start of the narrative with the wife’s crime against the head of the house, and concepts like secrets, pretense, traps and ostensible moderation; Santoro l’Hoir 2006, 34-35.
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Aeschylean and Senecan vocabulary and imagery, reminiscences of Clytemnestra in Tacitus’ portrayal of Livia, inverted similarities in the verdict of the prudentes on Augustus’ life and deeds, and later in the hexad, echoes of Electra in Agrippina’s lamentations, and other thematic similarities. Moreover, Tacitus’ representation of the Julio-Claudian domus Caesarum in these first chapters of the work conjures up Aeschylus’ description of the Atreid oikos. Most obviously, in the parallel of Tacitus’ term domus regnatrix (1.4.3; a hapax) with Aeschylus’ οἶκος βασιλείου (Ag. 158). Furthermore, in the way the private house is set against the res publica/the πόλις, in the effect of the domestic situation on the state, and in the representation of both houses as falling or wrenched apart and as ‘saturated in the gore of its offspring, whose blood slakes the thirsts of murderous relatives’. The relationship between the two princes and adoptive brothers Drusus and Germanicus – which, as will be argued in section 2.2.2 below, is perceived in terms of rivalry and opposition – will have called to mind the fraternal discord between Atreus and Thyestes, treated in several tragedies, including Seneca’s Thyestes. These allusions to the history of the house of Atreus cannot have been intended as exact parallels, implying correspondences in particular events. Rather, they seem intended to conjure up the atmosphere and connotations of the Atreid dynasty, torn apart by the perpetual self-destructive conflicts between its members, and thereby bringing ruin on the state they govern – connotations which Tacitus’ audience is invited to connect to his portrayal of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. On a larger scale, these echoes may be seen to give the Annals a ‘subtle but compelling tragic undertone’ of repetition, escalation and deterioration. The theme of distorted and violent (mythical)

605 Such as similar contrasting pairs like household-state, parents-children, secrets-rumour, etc., language that evokes an ‘atmosphere of secrecy and innuendo’ (39), and the same kind of lexical repetition; Santoro l’Hoir 2006, 39-42.
606 Santoro l’Hoir 2006, 47-56.
609 Santoro l’Hoir 2006, 34-38; quote from 35.
610 See also Galtier 2011, 227-251 on ‘l’image d’une spirale meurtrière qui aspire progressivement tous les protagonistes’. An interesting suggestion is brought up in Santoro l’Hoir 2006, 254-255, of Tacitus having started the Annals with the death of Augustus to focus on the ancestral curse looming over the house as a result of his crimes against the domus – a theme very reminiscent of the ancestral curse on the Atreids. Interestingly, Suet. Tib. 61.3 records that Tiberius put to death a poet who had slandered Agamemnon in a tragedy, and Dio 59.19.1 has Agrippina the Elder refer to Tiberius as Agamemnon.
kinship relations, moreover, is a common one in Senecan drama, Flavian epic, and contemporary declamation – as such, Tacitus’ evocation of the family conflicts of Rome’s kings and the Atreids to reflect historical events fits into a wider tradition.\textsuperscript{612}

To conclude, at the crucial moment of the first transmission of imperial power – at which the Principate is seen to reveal its true nature – Tacitus evokes images of dynastic strife in Rome’s regal period, and of the royal house of Atreus destroying itself through intra-familial murder. Right from the start of the work, then, the Principate is associated with hereditary monarchy, issues of legitimacy, and bloody intra-familial conflicts – an impression which will recur throughout the narrative, and which foreshadows the crimes with which the members of the imperial family will eliminate each other in the generations to come.

\textit{The succession and civil war}

Next to these references to fights over the succession within the imperial family, there are also suggestions of violent civil conflicts running through the narrative in more indirect ways. As Keitel argues in her well-known article, Tacitus depicts the Principate in general, and the reigns of the Julio-Claudian emperors in particular, with the language and the themes of warfare, civil war and the urbs capta-motif: the Principate – the emperors as well as the nobiles – is represented as waging war on its citizens.\textsuperscript{613} The struggles over the succession, too, are repeatedly described in the language of civil war and the formation of factions within the imperial family.\textsuperscript{614} Augustus’ arrangements for the succession are considered by some indefinite focalizers as against the interests of the state.\textsuperscript{615} ‘The potential involvement of Livia contient en germe le drame suivant, et acquiert donc une ampleur qui déborde son propre cadre, pas ses conséquences. Tout est également lié [like in the Oresteia] dans le récit tacitéen, mais tout va dans le sens du pire.’

\textsuperscript{612} See, for instance, Bernstein 2008 on Flavian epic.

\textsuperscript{613} Keitel 1984; cf. Woodman 1988, 186-190 and Joseph 2012b, 187-189. Augustus’ reign is referred to as pax cruenta by his critics (1.10.4), and O’Gorman 1995, 119-120 notes how characters in the Histories refer to the Julio-Claudian period as saeva pax in 1.50.2: ‘Tacitus’ opus pace saevom [i.e. the Histories] looks to the future [Flavian] dynasty of Histories 5-12, just as the recentia saevae pacis exempla of 1.50 look to the past [Julio-Claudian] dynasty of the yet to be written Annals. The civil wars are framed by pax saeva, a portrayal of political stability in the same terms of Roman self-destruction as those employed to represent civil war.’

\textsuperscript{614} Keitel 1984, 314-315.

\textsuperscript{615} Keitel 1984, 315 n.23; 1.8.6: provisi etiam heredium in rem publicam optibus; 1.10.7: ne Tiberium quidem cartitate aut rei publicae cura successorem adsicetum. Although in rem publicam can without difficulty be interpreted as a neutral ‘for the state’, one gets a sense of deliberate ambiguity here, where, on a more hostile reading, in
in the deaths of Gaius and Lucius is described with words similar to those used for the suspicions of Augustus’ elimination of Hirtius and Pansa in his illegal rise to power (according to the prudentes). Tacitus reports that some people, during the last days of Augustus, feared that war would arise again after his death (1.4.2). The description of Tiberius becoming the sole heir and successor to Augustus after the elimination and deaths of his rival kinsmen in 1.3.3 recalls the depiction, just one chapter earlier, of Augustus’ rise to supreme power through the removal of other contenders in 1.2.1. People are depicted as predicting that Drusus and Germanicus will tear apart the state when fighting over the succession (1.4.5). In the picture of the imperial court’s loyalties being divided between Drusus and Germanicus (2.43.5-6), Tacitus uses the words divisus, discors and certamen. The (alleged) poisoning of Germanicus is described as a successful military campaign; Sejanus’ rise to power is compared with civil war; Sejanus repeatedly warns Tiberius that the ‘community was split as in civil war’, with people being members of Agrippina’s ‘faction’; the Tacitean Tiberius himself writes about the formation of factions within the imperial house; the usual equation of the well-being of the imperial

may imply ‘against the state’ (Furneaux 1896, Koestermann 1963 and Goodyear 1972 read in as ‘against’; on the other hand, Béranger 1960 prefers a more positive meaning, and also Woodman 2004 seems to read ‘for’). Particularly in the light of previous critical views on Augustus’ preparations for the succession and its consequences for the state – such as 1.3-4 – it is difficult to escape the impression that Augustus is turning the typical imperial virtue of providentia against the Republic, with his kinsmen as (military) resources. On Tacitus’ – very fragmentary and biased – representation of Augustus’ funeral see Koestermann 1961, 345, Goodyear 1972 ad loc. and Gowing 2005, 28-30.

616 1.3.1: L. Caesarem euntem ad Hispanienses exercitus, Gaium remeantem Armenia et vulnere invalidum mors fato propera vel novercae Liviae dolus abstulit; 1.10.2: caesis Hirtio et Pansa, sive hostis illos, seu Pansa venenum vulneri adfusum, sui milites Hirtium et machinator doli Caesar abstulerat; Keitel 1984, 314.
617 Koestermann 1961, 333.
618 3.17.2; see Woodman/Martin 1996, 181-182.
619 First, since the description of Sejanus in his introduction (4.1.3) is a strong echo of Sallust’s portrayal of Catiline (Cat. 5), thus comparing Sejanus and his deeds to Catiline and his conspiracy against the state; see Martin/Woodman 1989 ad loc.; Keitel 1984, 322-323. Moreover, see 4.1.3: parando regno and Martin/Woodman 1989 ad 4.2.2 on Sejanus’ battle for the principate.
620 4.17.3: instabat quippe Seianus incusabatque diductam civitatem ut civili bello: esse qui se partium Agrippinac vocent; cf. his or Tiberius’ fear that Agrippina’s quest for popularity with the Germanic legions was not directed against external enemies (1.69.3-4): Damon 2010a, 264.
621 4.40.2-3: de inimicitias primum Agrippinac, quas longe acrius arsuras, si matrimonium Liviae velat in partes domum Caesarum distraisset. sic quoque erumpere aemulationem feminarum, caeque discordia nepotes suos convelli.
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house with that of the state is turned on its head, and the fake Drusus Caesar is rumoured to attempt to invade Egypt or Syria with his father’s former legions (5.10.1-3). In addition, the dynastic struggles in several of Rome’s provinces may be seen as mirroring the strife in the centre, in particular the imperial family. As Damon observes, in several passages, Sejanus ‘reads a future civil war, gratuitously and self-servingly, into the behavior of his enemies in order to poison Tiberius’ mind against them’; the emperor, however, does not frame his accusations of Agrippina and Nero Caesar in terms of civil war. Germanicus in particular is associated with civil war – an element which indirectly threatens Tiberius’ position.

At the beginning of the Annals, then, Tacitus in various ways casts his following narrative of the Julio-Claudian reigns in strongly dynastic terms, and foreshadows the many intra-familial struggles and crimes to come in the arguments over the imperial succession. He inserts connotations of civil war and tragic undertones into his narrative, endowing the fight over the transmission of imperial power with a sense of violence, repetition and escalation. As will be seen, the first imperial succession, and all these features associated with it, will become a point of reference for the later successions in the Annals.

622 4.1.1: nonus Tiberio annus erat compositae rei publicae, florentis domus (nam Germanici mortem inter prospera ducebat) and 4.12.1, where the Senate and people domumque Germanici revirescere occulti laetabantur after Drusus’ death; Santoro l’Hoir 2006, 36-37. Perhaps one may even interpret the well-known Sallustian echo in 4.1.1 (Cat. 10.1, on the beginning of adversity for the Roman state after the elimination of the threat of Carthage) to imply that the death of Germanicus was similar, in the view of the Tacitean Tiberius, to the removal of such a formidable enemy as Carthage. Cf. 1.4.1: nulla in praesens formidine, dum Augustus aetate validus seque et domum et pacem sustentavit for the importance of the welfare of the emperor and the imperial family for the state.

623 Cf. Baxter 1972, 247; Tylawsky 2002, 258; see Keitel 1978 and Clark 2011 on the relevance of provincial matters as a reflection on domestic events. This topic is one of the main themes of Katie Low’s doctoral dissertation ‘The Mirror of Tacitus? Selves and others in the Tiberian Books of the ‘Annals’’, submitted in 2013 at the University of Oxford, which I unfortunately was unable to consult.

624 Damon 2010a, 264-265; as she notes, it is clearly stated in 5.3.2 that non arma, non rerum novarum studium, amores iuvenum et impudicitiam nepoti objectabat.

625 This is discussed in more detail below, section 2.2.4.
Following the images of dynastic strife and civil war in the opening chapters of the *Annals*, the matter of the succession to Tiberius is represented by Tacitus as a struggle between the emperor’s two sons Drusus and Germanicus and their respective families. Even if Tacitus and his readers know that neither of the men will eventually succeed, the succession issue revolves around them. Drusus and Germanicus are granted an ostensibly parallel treatment in the narrative, and are said to be on good terms with one another. This apparent harmony, however, is challenged in several ways: inequalities lurk between the parallel representations of the brothers, various groups and individuals construct an opposition between the two, Germanicus is much more prominent than Drusus in the narrative, and the former is consistently associated with threats to Tiberius’ position.

2.2 Tiberius’ successors: Germanicus and Drusus

Following the images of dynastic strife and civil war in the opening chapters of the *Annals*, the matter of the succession to Tiberius is represented by Tacitus as a struggle between the emperor’s two sons Drusus and Germanicus and their respective families. Even if Tacitus and his readers know that neither of the men will eventually succeed, the succession issue revolves around them. Drusus and Germanicus are granted an ostensibly parallel treatment in the narrative, and are said to be on good terms with one another. This apparent harmony, however, is challenged in several ways: inequalities lurk between the parallel representations of the brothers, various groups and individuals construct an opposition between the two, Germanicus is much more prominent than Drusus in the narrative, and the former is consistently associated with threats to Tiberius’ position.

2.2.1 GERMANICUS AND DRUSUS AS EQUAL SUCCESSORS

The question of the succession centres on Drusus and Germanicus. The two princes are given an ostensibly parallel treatment by Tacitus, which appears to accord quite well with their actual historical position under Tiberius. In terms of both the conferment of offices and powers and their visual representation in Rome and in the provinces, the historical Drusus and Germanicus seem to have been treated with equality by Tiberius.626 Their careers under Tiberius followed an almost iden-

626 Even if they may not have enjoyed an equal position under Augustus, who appears to have favoured Germanicus by granting him privileges and powers denied to Drusus: Bellemore 2013. See also Levick 1966,
tical path, with major steps such as the holding of a joint consulship with Tiberius and the grant of proconsular *imperium* bestowed on them at the same point in their lives. Moreover, there is no preference for one of them in dynastic monuments or imperial coinage (on which neither was displayed before Germanicus’ death). Tacitus also states that as long as Germanicus was alive, Tiberius did not make a formal choice for either of his sons to be his successor (3.56.3). In other passages, too, Tacitus indicates the equality in formal, public treatment accorded by Tiberius to Germanicus and Drusus. In addition, he repeatedly parallels the activities and careers of the two princes in his narrative.\(^{627}\)

*The parallel representation of Drusus and Germanicus*

Both princes are sent out to settle the mutinies arising after the death of Augustus – Drusus to Pannonia, Germanicus to Germany – and the narrations of their exploits are neatly juxtaposed, as are Tiberius’ praises of their achievements, creating a strong and deliberate parallelism.\(^{628}\) Tacitus has the emperor reflect on the advantages of dividing the tasks and having each of his two sons suppress one mutiny.\(^{629}\)

A similar pattern is found halfway through Book 2, where Tacitus’ account of Germanicus’ mission in the East is immediately followed by the dispatch of Drusus to
TIBERIUS’ SUCCESSORS: GERMANICUS AND DRUSUS

Illyricum, and Tiberius is said to consider ‘that he himself would be safer with each son holding legions’. Notably, Tacitus states that both men were ostensibly sent out to settle provincial disturbances, but that in both cases it was merely a pretext. Tiberius’ actual reasons for their assignments, he suggests, were to remove Germanicus from his loyal Germanic legions and expose him to danger, and to provide Drusus with some much-needed discipline, military training and an opportunity for gaining popularity with the soldiers. Some chapters later, the Senate votes oviations to both Drusus and Germanicus, and erects twin triumphal arches with images of the princes on both sides of the temple of Mars Ultor. Moreover, when justifying his request for imperium maius for Germanicus to settle matters in the East, the Tacitean Tiberius explains that he himself is too old and Drusus too young to undertake the mission (2.43.1). Again, whether or not we are to regard this motivation as fabricated, the Tacitean Tiberius does apparently feel the need to defend this special treatment of Germanicus and his departure from his usual pattern of conferring similar tasks and honours on both young men.

Concern for an equal treatment of both princes figures also earlier in Book 2. Germanicus is recalled from Germany by letters from Tiberius, on the grounds that the purpose of the campaign has been sufficiently achieved and enough losses had been suffered (2.26.2-5). When Germanicus asks for more time to complete his plans, Tiberius offers him a consulship, which would oblige him to come to Rome. He adds that, since Germany is the only place where military victories can now be won, Germanicus should leave enough material for glory to his brother Drusus, thereby appealing to Germanicus’ fraternal piety. Although Tacitus states that Germanicus interpreted this as an excuse for Tiberius to keep him from further vic-

630 2.44.1: seque tuiorem rebatur utroque filio legiones obtinente. Goodyear 1981 ad loc. rightly questions the historical accuracy of this motive; nevertheless, what is important here is that Tacitus ascribes these thoughts to Tiberius.

631 2.5.1: ceterum Tiberio haud ingratum accidit turbari res Orientis, ut ea specie Germanicum suetis legionibus abstraheret novisque provinciis impositum dolo simul et casibus obiectaret; 2.42.1: amoliri iuvenem specie honoris statuit struxitque causas aut forte oblatas arripuit; see Goodyear 1981 on both these passages for expositions of Tacitean bias, and ad 2.26.4 on the apparent contradiction. 2.44.1: Drusus in Illyricum missus est, ut suesecret militiae studia exe cutis pararet; simul iuvenem urbano luxu lascivientem melius in castris haber Tiberius ... rebatur.

632 2.64.1; see Rose 1997, 25.

tories out of envy, Tiberius is attributed with at least the public pretence of wanting to treat his sons equally. At 1.14.3, furthermore, Tacitus inserts an authorial remark to explain why the Senate decreed certain privileges to Germanicus but not to Drusus: he was consul designate and therefore present in Rome or at the debate. And when Drusus embarks upon a joint consulship with his father, Tacitus reminds the reader of Tiberius’ sharing this office with Germanicus three years before.

In several instances, Drusus and Germanicus are depicted as acting together. In 1.4.5 people fear that the two brothers will first jointly oppress the state, only to tear it apart when subsequently turning against each other. Their other collaborations are more peaceful: at the end of Book 1, they jointly present Rome with a gladiatorial show (1.76.3), and halfway through Book 2 they are portrayed as backing a relative of Germanicus’ together in the election of a substitute praetor (2.51.2). In Tiberius’ obituary, their deaths – mentioned together despite the interval of four years between them – form the end of one of the phases of Tiberius’ life. The young men are represented as getting along perfectly, despite the enmities between their relatives: ‘the brothers were exceptionally affectionate, and unshaken by the conflicts of their kin’. Germanicus, on his way to his Eastern command, stops by Dalmatia to pay a visit to Drusus (2.53.1), and Drusus is said to treat Germanicus’ children well after the death of their father (4.4.1). The praise for this *patria benevolentia* is bestowed on Drusus by Tiberius, but is confirmed by Tacitus through an authorial remark, which also draws attention to the rareness of concord in positions of high power: ‘although it is precarious for powerfulness and harmony to exist in the same place, Drusus was regarded as being level with the juveniles, or at least not adverse to them’.

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634 2.26.5: *haud cunctatus est ultra Germanicus, quamquam fingi ea seque per invidiam parto iam decori abstrahi intelleget*. See Goodyear ad loc.; Koestermann 1957; Seager 1972, chapter 4; Wiedemann 1996a, 209-210 for the historical interpretation of Tiberius’ recall of Germanicus, which can convincingly be argued to have made good sense, and does not need to be attributed to envy.

635 3.31.1: *sequentur Tiberi quartus, Drusi secundus consulatus, patris atque filii collegio insignis. nam bienno ante Germanici cum Tiberio idem honor neque patruo laetus neque natura tam conexus fuerat.*


638 2.43.6: *sed fratres egregie concordes et proximorum certaminibus inconcussi.*

639 4.4.1: *addidit orationem Caesar multa cum laude filii sui quod patria benevolentia in fratris liberos foret. nam Drusus, quamquam arduum sit eodem loci potentiam et concordiam esse, aequus adulscensibus aut certe non adver-
Parallel inequalities
The juxtaposition of and parallels between Drusus and Germanicus are especially pronounced in the second half of Book 2, where both brothers carry out their provincial commands. It is also in this section, however, that the hints of inequality become discernible. The princes may be friends and both initially successful in performing their corresponding tasks, being awarded joint honours by the Senate for their victories, but it is precisely Germanicus’ eastern mission which will result in a decisive difference between the two. While on his mission, Germanicus will die, leading to the definitive promotion of Drusus as Tiberius’ successor, and the increasingly open friction between the families of Drusus and Germanicus. This latent tension between their parity and harmony in life, and their ultimate inequality due to Germanicus’ death, is reflected in the narratives of their deaths and funerals as well. Also in this context, the brothers seem at first sight to have similar fates: both are suspected to have been victims of poisoning (2.69.3 and 4.8.1), Drusus is decreed funeral honours similar to those of Germanicus (increased only through adulation; 4.9.2), and the equestrian Clutorius Priscus is stated to have written poems about the deaths of both men (3.49.1). However, these superficial similarities only have the effect of throwing the contrasts between the two situations even more into relief. Tacitus remarks that Drusus received an elaborate funeral procession with imagines stretching back to the founder of the gens Iulia, Aeneas (4.9.2), reminding the reader of people’s complaints of Germanicus being denied such an honour (2.73.1 and 3.5.1-2). The mention of the funeral laudation pronounced by Tiberius for his biological son (4.12.1) marks a contrast with the (alleged) absence of a similar tribute for his adoptive son some years before (3.5.1-2). And two short references to Drusus’ ovatio framing the events in the aftermath of Germanicus’ death emphasize that Germanicus never got to celebrate his honour.640 The dramatic contrast is intensified by what seems to be a deliberate distortion of chronology in the episode of the aftermath of Germanicus’ death: at the beginning of the narrative year 20, Tacitus juxtaposes Germanicus’ burial in Rome with the trial of Cn. Piso, which epigraphic evidence places several months later, and frames these events by a double reference to Drusus’ ovatio.641

640 3.11.1 (postponement of the honour in view of Germanicus’ death); 3.19.3 (celebration).

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Moreover, in Book 3, the parallelism of Drusus and Germanicus acquires a more sinister shade. While much of Book 2 is devoted to the events leading up to the death of Germanicus, so in Book 3 there are repeated foreshadowings of Drusus’ imminent fate, narrated at the beginning of Book 4. As briefly touched upon above, at the mention of Drusus’ joint consulship with his father (3.31.1, AD 21), Tacitus inserts a flashback to Germanicus’ sharing of the office with Tiberius at the beginning of his fatal mission in the East (2.53.1, AD 18). On the one hand, he draws attention to the difference between the occasions: the joint consulship of father and son was *insignis* precisely because the combination of uncle and nephew three years earlier had been ‘neither welcome to his uncle nor so connected in respect of birth’ – the bond between Tiberius and Drusus was closer both in blood and affection. On the other hand, although Tacitus – contrary to Dio – draws no explicit comparison between the fortunes of the two men, he nevertheless ‘invites the readers to read ominously between the lines’ and to anticipate a similar premature end for Drusus. The narrative of Drusus’ consular year is concluded with the case of Clutorius Priscus, who had anticipated Drusus’ death with a eulogizing poem (3.49.1). Similarly, there are dark hints of the future when Tiberius requests the *tribunicia potestas* for Drusus some chapters later (3.56). It is precisely Drusus’ status as Tiberius’ sole and obvious successor which will cause his ruin at the hands of Sejanus, and the reference to Germanicus’ death in the phrase *incolumi Germanico integrum inter duos iudicium tenuisset* (3.56.3) may be interpreted as foreshadowing a notice of the death of his mother, Vipsania. These two items together have the appearance of an end-of-year section and, when linked to the formal conclusion which precedes (19.2), suggest to the reader that a momentous episode and a narrative year have come to an end simultaneously. The effect is dramatic: the avenging of Germanicus draws a line under everything that has gone before, in the same way as the return of his ashes prevented the year’s narrative from opening in the customary manner with the consuls’ names.  

642 Woodman/Martin 1996, 7-11 observe the recurrence of the theme of ‘fathers and sons’ throughout Book 3.

643 Woodman/Martin 1996, 5; Dio 57.20.1-2 reports that ‘when Tiberius held the consulship with Drusus, men immediately began to prophesy destruction for Drusus from this very circumstance. For not one of the men who had ever been consul with Tiberius failed to meet a violent death; but in the first place there was Quintilius Varus, and next Gnaeus Piso, and then Germanicus himself, all of whom died violent and miserable deaths. Tiberius was evidently doomed to exert some fatal influence throughout his life; at all events, not only Drusus, his colleague at this time, but also Sejanus, who later shared the office with him, came to destruction.’

644 As Woodman/Martin 1996, 5 remark, Tacitus – unlike Dio, who places the story immediately after Drusus’ taking up the consulship with Tiberius, but does not connect the events – ‘makes explicit mention of the possibility that Drusus, like his brother, might die *(3.49.1: si extinctus foret).*
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that of Drusus.  

In the narrative, then, Drusus and Germanicus are presented as a harmonious fraternal pair, being treated equally – at least in public – by Tiberius; and this impression is reinforced by Tacitus’ parallel descriptions of the two princes. However, this seeming equality – the artificiality of which is hinted at in several passages – casts a shadow on the narrative, by prefiguring an early death for Drusus and highlighting Tiberius’ preference for his natural son to the detriment of Germanicus. The fraternal piety of Drusus and Germanicus, furthermore, is not inherited by their sons: only shortly after Drusus’ death, Drusus Caesar is induced by Sejanus to betray his brother Nero (4.60), and Caligula will remove his cousin Tiberius Gemellus, as predicted by the Tacitean Tiberius (6.46.4).

2.2.2 THE OPPOSITION BETWEEN (THE HOUSES OF) DRUSUS AND GERMANICUS

Further pressure on, or questions about, the fraternal concord between the two princes is brought about by Tacitus’ reports of public opinion, which perceives and constructs a strong opposition between Drusus and Germanicus and their families. Although they are represented as egregie concordes by Tacitus, everyone else in the narrative positions the brothers and their domus against one another.  

In fact, the enmity between the two is felt to be so strong that they are seen as having their own separate domus, even though formally, both men are still subject to Tiberius’ patria potestas and are part of his domus. Tacitus conveys this perceived opposition by relating rumours (through indefinite focalization) and heightening the contrasts between the fates of the two brothers through narrative techniques. Tacitus expresses surprise at Tiberius’ adoption of Germanicus, since he already had a son, and he reports rumours of people fearing that the presence of two princes would lead to disputes over the succession.  

645 Note that Drusus is made to use a similar wording in his complaints about the growing influence of Sejanus: crebro querens incolami filio adiutorem imperii alium vocari (4.7.1).
647 See Ross 1973 passim and Levick 1975 on factions within the imperial family.
648 1.3.5: at hercule Germanicum, Druso ortum, octo apud Rhenum legionibus imposuit adscirique per adoptionem a Tiberio iussit, quamquam esset in domo Tiberii filius iuvenis, sed quo pluribus munimentis insisteret. Although
apparent brings about a division of loyalty within the imperial court (\textit{divisa et discors aula}): the majority favours Germanicus (on the basis of Tiberius' dislike of him, the splendour of his mother's line, and Agrippina's fecundity and reputation), while Tiberius prefers Drusus because he was his biological son.\textsuperscript{649} These divided preferences – the wide support for Germanicus, Tiberius' dislike of him, and the emperor's preference for Drusus – run as threads throughout the narrative and induce some characters to assume hostility between the brothers as well. After the death of Germanicus, for instance, Cn. Piso expects Drusus to be well-disposed towards him, mistakenly hoping that Drusus would not so much lament the loss of his brother as be glad with the removal of a rival (3.8.1). He is proved wrong by the prince himself, however – the two brothers were on good terms; the (concealed) opposition which Tacitus describes as a \textit{certamen} is that between their kinsmen (2.43.6).

This (perceived) rivalry persists after Germanicus' death, when people's sympathies are transferred from the individual heirs apparent to encompass their whole \textit{domus}. Again, that the people are depicted as thinking of them in terms of two separate families, up to the point of distinguishing houses within the imperial \textit{domus}, and continue to do so even after their deaths, indicates the strength of the sense of rivalry between two factions Tacitus wants to convey. Tacitus reports that Tiberius is elated at the birth of Drusus' twins, but that the people consider the growth of Tacitus' exclamation \textit{at hercule} may, strictly speaking, refer to the inclusion of Germanicus in Augustus' dynastic arrangements, despite Livia's influence (so Furneaux 1893 and Goodyear 1972 \textit{ad loc.}), the addition of the \textit{quamquam}-phrase must be taken to indicate that the adoption of another son into Tiberius' household was considered unusual by Tacitus. 1.4.5: [\textit{Tiberium} serviendum ... duobusque adolescentibus, qui rem publicam interim premant quandoque distrahan]; see above, note 559.

\textsuperscript{649} 2.43.5-6: \textit{divisa namque et discors aula erat tacitis in Drusum aut Germanicum studiis. Tiberius ut proprium et sui sanguinis Drusum fovebat: Germanico alienatio patrui amore apud ceteros auxerat, et quia claritudine materni generis anteibat, avum M. Antonium, avunculum Augustum ferens. contra Druso praevelit eques Romanus Pomponius Atticus dedecere Claudiorum imagines videbat: et coniunx Germanici Agrippina fecunditate ac fama Liviam uxorem Drusi praecellebat. Goodyear 1981 \textit{ad loc.}, justly remarks that this is Tacitus' inference, since it cannot have been public knowledge if the preferences of the court were really expressed in \textit{tacita studia}. Pelling 2012, 297-298 observes that the passage on the preferences of the court is tellingly preceded (in 2.42) by the tale of Arche-laus, king of Cappadocia, paying a fatal price for his opportunistically backing of Gaius Caesar, the 'rising star' of the imperial family, at the expense of Tiberius when the latter was in Rhodes; '[t]he Roman court had evidently been just as calculating then [under Augustus, in 2.42] as we shall see them now [under Tiberius, in 2.43]; and just as preoccupied with the succession, and just as astray' (72). Moreover, the explicit mention of Augustus and Mark Antony – opponents in the recent civil wars – as Germanicus' ancestors in the context of his alleged competition with Drusus 'allow[s] some hints of earlier, much more destructive rivalries' (Pelling 2012, 298).
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Drusus’ family as further pressure on Germanicus’ house, which had so recently been afflicted with the death of its head (2.84.1). The dramatic contrast between the (losses in the) house of Germanicus and (the gains in) that of Drusus is enhanced by the phrasing of the notice and its placement. Literally, it is Drusus personally who, ‘strengthened by his children’ (auctus liberis Drusus ... urgeret), puts more pressure on the house of his brother – an even harsher image than if the birth itself had caused a blow. Moreover, the birth notice is placed immediately after the description of the honours voted to the dead prince – recenti adhuc maestitia – but its timing is misleading: as all commentators note, Tacitus has deliberately advanced the birth of the twins with some years to heighten the contrast between the two domus.650 Tiberius, whom Tacitus states to be generally hostile towards the domus of Germanicus, regards the latter’s death as a success for his own house.651 After the death of Drusus, however, it is Germanicus’ house which is considered to be on the rise (4.12.1).

At several points in the narrative stories of, or allusions to, less harmonious sibling pairs – involving fraternal strife and even fratricide – invite comparisons with the suspected opposition between Germanicus and Drusus. Romulus and Remus are an obvious point of comparison, as are Atreus and Thyestes, especially considering the evocations of the tragic depiction of the house of Atreus at the start of the Annals (see section 2.1.3).652 Furthermore, in the narrative of Germanicus’ campaigns in Germany, Tacitus recounts a violent exchange between the brothers Arminius and Flavus on opposite sides of the river Visurgis (2.9-10). The anecdote is mentioned in no other ancient source; and whereas this does not necessarily mean it is invented, it is notable that Tacitus recounts it, and devotes two whole chapters to it.653 Scholars have often observed the notable resemblances between Germanicus and Arminius in the Annals: both are often associated with their families, are very popular, are associated with the (more heroic) past, are seen as trying to re-

650 See, most recently, Goodyear 1981, 438, with references.
651 4.17.2: Tiberius haud umquam domui Germanici mitis (localizer: Tacitus); 4.1.1: [AD 23] nonus Tiberio annus erat compositae rei publicae, florentis domus (nam Germanici mortem inter prospera ducebat) (Tacitus as well).
652 On fraternal rivalry, fratricide and its connection with civil war, see Bannon 1997, 149-173 (esp. 158-173 on Romulus and Remus, whose relation represents the ‘two poles of fraternal symbolism’: fraternal cooperation and fratricide), and 174-188 on fraternal rivalry within the imperial family; Wiseman 1995, ch. 9 on the role of the myth of Remus in literature.
store _libertas_, find death through the guile of their kinsmen, are disliked by a jealous uncle, and are ‘treated with something like the same narrative rhythm’ by Tacitus.\(^654\) The contrast and hostility between Arminius and his brother may evoke a more sinister view on the relations and differences between Germanicus and Drusus. Arminius, a formidable enemy of Rome, described by Tacitus as _liberator haud dubie Germaniae_ (2.88.2), may be likened to Germanicus, whom people describe as one of the men who _populum Romanum aequo iure complecti reddita libertate agitaverint_ (2.82.2), and as hated by the emperor on account of that. Arminius’ brother Flavus, on the other hand, is a loyal soldier among the troops of Germanicus, obeying imperial rule, just like Drusus faithfully carries out the commands of his father, the emperor. In fact, Tacitus has antedated the notice of Arminius’ death, placing it at the end of Book 3 (2.88, AD 19) rather than at its proper place in (it is assumed) AD 21, probably to make it coincide with the death of his counterpart Germanicus.\(^655\)

The (perceived) rivalry between the two sides within the imperial family is acknowledged even by the Tacitean Tiberius, who expresses his concern about the hostile emulation between Agrippina and Livilla, which he fears will wrench apart even his grandsons.\(^656\) This is exactly what will happen in the (narrative) end: in the intra-familial struggle over the succession to Tiberius, Drusus Caesar will conspire with Sejanus to remove his own brother (and therefore rival) Nero (4.60.3), while Caligula will murder his cousin Tiberius Gemellus to obtain sole imperial power and authority, as predicted by Tiberius himself (6.46.4). When narrating Drusus Caesar’s betrayal of his brother Nero, Tacitus mentions the _solita fratribus odia_ as one of his motives (4.60.3) – the adjective _solita_ hardly promises improvement for future generations of imperial brothers.\(^657\) Tacitus, in fact, represents the opposi-

\(^{654}\) Pelling 2012, 306-309 conveniently recapitulates and gives references (quote from 308). On Tacitus using the narration of foreign events to reflect upon the situation or occurrences in Rome, notably dynastic struggles and intrigues, see e.g. Keitel 1978; Gowing 1990; Clark 2011.


\(^{656}\) 4.40.3: _simplicius acturum_ [Tiberius responds to Sejanus’ request to marry Livilla], _de inimiciis prim- um Agrippinae, quas longe acrius arsuras si matrimonium Liviae velut in partes domum Caesarum distraxisset. sic quoque erumpere aemulationem feminarum, caeque discordia nepotes suos convelli: quid si intendatur certamen taliconiugio? Note the quick succession of words referring to the competition: _inimiciis, in partes ... distraxisset, aemulationem, discordia, convelli, certamen_; the terms _discordia_ and _certamen_ had also been used by Tacitus in his authorial description of the divided loyalties of the imperial court at 2.43.

\(^{657}\) Similar references to fraternal strife are found in 13.17.1: _antiquas fratrum discordias et insociabile regnum_ (in reference to Nero’s murder of his brother and possible rival for the throne, Britannicus) and 15.2.1: _contra
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tion between (the houses of) Drusus and Germanicus, and their competition over
the succession, as being perpetuated by their remaining descendants until the very
last moments of Tiberius’ life. At the end of the Tiberian narrative, when the old
emperor hesitates between his two grandsons for the transmission of his power, the
two contenders for the throne are designated not by their own names – Tiberius
Gemellus and Gaius Caligula – but with reference to, or as the reincarnations of,
their fathers: they are Druso genitus and Germanici filius.658 The struggle over the
succession seems to be a never-ending, repeated process, in which the identities of
the individuals involved cease to matter in the face of the long-standing conflicts in
which they are engaged.

2.2.3 THE PROMINENCE OF GERMANICUS

The apparent equality between Drusus and Germanicus in the Annals is, however,
called into question by the greater narrative prominence of Germanicus. Despite
the equal public treatment and the parallelism in the descriptions of the two succes-
sion candidates, the narrative of the first three Books is obviously focused on Ger-
manicus: the amount of text dedicated to him is much greater than that devoted to
Drusus, people’s feelings for Germanicus are stated to be motivations for particular
decisions or as the cause of certain events, and he seems to be valued much more
positively than Drusus by the main constituents of society: the people, the Senate,
and the military. Mentions of Drusus, by contrast, are often omitted, and Tacitus
reports more criticism of him than of his adoptive brother. Tacitus employs his full
array of narratological and literary techniques – from rhythm, distortions of chro-
nology, flashbacks and foreshadowings, to significant juxtaposition and the use of
indefinite focalization to report public opinion – to make Germanicus the centre of
attention in the first three Books, both before and after his death.

658 Ross 1973, 222, moreover, sees this as implying that Caligula’s reign will exhibit (negative) traits inherit-
ed from his father Germanicus. Suet. Tib. 76 calls them Gaiaum ex Germanico et Tiberium ex Druso nepotes, also
drawing attention to their fathers, but not ignoring their own names.
TIBERIUS

Narrative prominence

As regards Germanicus’ quantitative predominance, Tacitus dedicates many more chapters to (events relating to) Germanicus and his house than to Drusus.\textsuperscript{659} Germanicus’ military campaigns are narrated in 70 chapters; those of Drusus in only 12, and his activities as consul in AD 21 in an additional 9, making for a total of 21 chapters for Drusus’ occupations.\textsuperscript{660} Germanicus’ death and its aftermath (including the trial of Cn. Piso) take up 31 chapters, while that of Drusus is accorded only 7.\textsuperscript{661} Moreover, some 20 chapters in Books 2 to 6 are devoted to events regarding, and accusations brought against, the friends and relatives of Germanicus and Agrippina after the former’s death.\textsuperscript{662} The fate of Drusus’ family and friends is not treated at such length at all after he has passed away; for instance, the death notice of one of his twin sons only takes up one sentence, which is even shared with another obituary notice.\textsuperscript{663} Germanicus’ actions, then, are treated at greater length than Drusus’, and cause Tacitus to slow down the narrative pace. In fact, Germanicus receives almost as much attention (in terms of space) as Tiberius in the first Books, and is the dominant speaker in the first two Books.\textsuperscript{664} The narrative years 15 and 18 are almost completely devoted to Germanicus, even though Drusus is consul in AD 15.\textsuperscript{665}

Furthermore, Germanicus dominates the first half of the Tiberian hexad in other ways than just the amount of text dedicated to him and his family. Whereas the

\textsuperscript{659} Even though the chapter divisions are not original, the number of chapters still provides a reasonable indication of the relative space allotted to different events; cf. Martin 1990, 1513 n.44. I have only taken account of passages which cover more than two paragraphs of a chapter.

\textsuperscript{660} Germanicus: 1.33-1.45 (13); 1.48-1.51 (4); 1.55-1.71 (17); 2.5-2.26 (22); 2.41.2-2.42.1 (1); 2.53-2.61 (9); 2.69-2.71 (3). Drusus’ campaigns: 1.24-1.30 (7); 2.44-2.46 (3); 2.6-2.63 (2). Drusus’ senatorial business: 3.31 (1); 3.33-3.37 (5); 3.56-3.57 (2); 3.59 (1). For each mutiny, I have left out the starting chapters describing the events before arrival of the princes.

\textsuperscript{661} Germanicus: 2.72-2.83 (12); 3.1-3.19 (19). Drusus: 4.3 (1); 4.7-4.12 (6).

\textsuperscript{662} 3.29 (1); 4.12.2-4 (1); 4.17-4.20 (4); 4.52-4.54 (3); 4.59.3-4.60.3 (1); 4.68-4.71.3 (4); 5.3-5.4 (2); 5.10 (1); 6.23.2-6.25 (3).

\textsuperscript{663} 4.15.2; Sejanus’ wish to marry Livilla is treated in two chapters (4.39-40). Livilla’s role may have been larger in the original text, but most of Book 5, comprising much of the years 29-31 and narrating Sejanus’ downfall and Livilla’s execution as a result of that, is no longer extant.

\textsuperscript{664} Martin 1981, 107 on the prominence of Germanicus vs. that of Tiberius. Woodman/Martin 1996 ad 3.6.1: Tiberius speaks most frequently in Book 1, but always briefly and in oratio obliqua, while Germanicus holds a long address in direct speech (1.42-43). In Book 2, Germanicus speaks more often than Tiberius and again has the longest speech in oratio recta.

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Pannonian mutiny is stated by Tacitus to have erupted from licence and greed only, the outbreak of the Germanic mutiny is also connected to an additional cause: the soldiers’ wish that Germanicus usurp imperial power. Tiberius’ feelings for Germanicus – more specifically, fear, dislike and envy of him – are also one of the main motives for several of the emperor’s actions in the first two Books, such as his hesitation to formally assume imperial power, or his decision to recall Germanicus from Germany and dispatch him to the East. The succession issue, one of the major threads running through the Tiberian hexad, is strongly linked to Germanicus and his family; most of the major episodes of the hexad are related to them; and they also frequently figure in the opening chapters of the narrative years. In fact, at the start of Book 3, Tacitus even breaks with the annalistic convention of opening a narrative year with the mention of the consuls, to focus attention on Agrippina’s return to Italy with the ashes of Germanicus, and increase the dramatic impact of the episode.

By contrast, Drusus, and events relating to him, are repeatedly omitted from the narrative: he is not named in Tacitus’ description of Augustus’ succession arrangements in 1.3.5 (whereas Germanicus is); Tacitus does not record that Drusus delivered a funeral laudation for Augustus (while Suetonius and Dio do); Dio and Suetonius have Drusus figure as Tiberius’ aid in the first senatorial meeting after Augustus’ death, but Tacitus does not mention him. When explaining Tiberius’

666 1.16.1: hic rerum urbanarum statua erat, cum Pannonicas legiones seditio incessit, nullis novis causis, nisi quod mutatus princeps licentiam turbarum et ex civili bello spem praemiorum ostendebat; 1.31.1: isdem ferme diebus isdem causis Germanicae legiones turbatae, quanto plures, tanto violentius, et magna spe fore ut Germanicus Caesar imperium alterius pati nequiret daretque se legionibus vi sua cuncta tracturis.
667 E.g. 1.7.6 (fear of Germanicus makes Tiberius delay his assumption of imperial power); 2.5.1 (Tiberius uses the unstable situation in the East to endanger Germanicus and separate him from this military might in Germany); 2.26.5 (Germanicus interprets Tiberius’ recall of him as arising from invidia); 2.43.4 (Piso thinks Tiberius sends him to Syria to check Germanicus); 2.82.1-2 (people think that Tiberius has sent out Germanicus and Piso to the East to have Germanicus removed). Koestermann 1963 ad 2.5.1, Sage 1982-1983 and Martin 1981, 141 draw attention to Tacitus’ exaggeration of the role of Germanicus as a motivation for Tiberius.
668 Walker 1960, 16-20; of the seven major episodes in the Tiberian Books, five concern Germanicus. Ginsburg 1981, 23-27 notes that the prominent first chapters of narrative years are often devoted to Germanicus and his relatives.
669 The consuls in office are only referred to in 3.2.3, and not even in the traditional formula with the ablative absolute ‘XX YY consulibus’, but as subjects of a regular sentence; see above, note 641.
670 Suet. Aug. 100.3; Dio S6.34.4 (see Swan 2004 ad loc.).
671 Dio S6.33.1 (cf. S6.32.1a); Suet. Tib. 23.
dislike of Asinius Gallus, Tacitus only brings up the latter’s marriage to Vipsania, whereas Dio adds that Gallus also claimed Drusus as his son;\textsuperscript{672} Suetonius mentions Tiberius’ reliance on Drusus in the period before the accusation of Libo Drusus, while Tacitus does not.\textsuperscript{673} Tacitus gives Germanicus a chapter-long introduction at the moment when he first actively appears in the narrative (1.33), whereas Drusus receives no such presentation or background sketch in 1.24, when he is first acting. Tacitus’ treatment of Germanicus’ handling of the Germanic mutiny is cast in more poetic and pathetic language than his description of Drusus’ management of the situation.\textsuperscript{674} The events surrounding Germanicus’ death are discussed not just at greater length, but also in much more detail than those relating to that of Drusus;\textsuperscript{675} Germanicus is accorded several death-bed speeches in 2.71-72, but Drusus’ last words are not reported, and he is not even given an obituary. Drusus’ setting off for Illyricum in 3.7.1 almost goes unnoticed because Tacitus immediately remarks that the people’s minds were occupied with Piso.\textsuperscript{676} Germanicus, as said, speaks often, at length, and in \textit{oratio recta}, whereas Drusus is mostly accorded short remarks, all in \textit{oratio obliqua}, and fewer in number, even though he features in the narrative for longer than Germanicus.\textsuperscript{677} Tacitus reports Germanicus’ thoughts and feelings at several points in the narrative, but he hardly focalizes internal deliberations through Drusus;\textsuperscript{678} and the SCPP names Drusus immediately after Tiberius in the \textit{gratiarum

\begin{footnotes}
\itemastr 672 Dio 57.2.7.
\itemastr 673 1.28.2; Suet. Tib. 25.3.
\itemastr 675 Walker 1960, 128-129; ‘There are no elaborate preparations, no passages of reflection, no complex motives, no rhetoric, no poetic language, no emotional metaphors’ in the case of Drusus’ death (128).
\itemastr 676 Likewise, the reference to his return and postponement of his ovation in 3.11.1 is a brief aside to the main narrative – Woodman 2004 even places it between parentheses in his translation.
\itemastr 677 Germanicus speaks (or briefer utterances by him are recorded) at 1.34.4-35.1 (in \textit{oratio obliqua}), 1.35.4 (\textit{obliqua}), 1.39.6 (\textit{obliqua}), 1.42.1-43.4 (\textit{oratio recta}), 1.45.2 (\textit{obliqua}), 1.48.1 (\textit{obliqua}), 1.49.2 (\textit{obliqua}), 2.8.1 (\textit{obliqua}), 2.14.1-4 (\textit{obliqua}), 2.71.1-4 (\textit{recta}), 2.72.1 (\textit{obliqua}). Drusus speaks in 1.25.3 (in \textit{obliqua}, though strictly speaking reading out a letter from Tiberius rather than speaking in his own name), 1.26.1 (\textit{obliqua}), 1.29.1 (\textit{obliqua}), 3.34.6 (\textit{obliqua}), 4.7.1-2 (\textit{obliqua}). At several points where Tacitus could have elaborated on what Drusus was thinking, writing or saying, he does not, e.g. during the mutinies or his campaign in Illyricum (where he does often report Germanicus’ deliberations), at the birth of his twins in 2.84, his senatorial measures in 3.36.4, 3.59.2 (a letter from Drusus to the Senate).
\itemastr 678 Germanicus’ focalization of thoughts and feelings: 1.33.1, 1.41.3, 1.61.1, 1.65.2, 1.71.3, 2.5.2-4, 2.12.2-13.1, 2.14.1, 2.20.1, 2.22.1, 2.26.5, 2.53.2, 2.54.1, 2.55.3, 2.57.2, 2.59.1, 2.69.1, 2.69.3, 2.70.1. Drusus: 1.28.3, 1.29.4, 1.76.3, 4.3.2.
\end{footnotes}
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actio, while Tacitus only inserts him much later in the list of names, after Livia, Antonia and Agrippina in 3.18.3.679

Moreover, Germanicus is clearly presented as the more widely popular of the two. Germanicus’ death causes massive grief among all layers of society – and even necessitates the Tacitean Tiberius to issue an edict urging people to restrain their mourning (3.6) – while Drusus’ decease elicits more limited sorrow.680 Indeed, people are so sad about Germanicus’ passing away that they completely forget to flatter Tiberius, while they only pretend to mourn for Drusus, but secretly delight in the recuperation of the house of Germanicus.681 Honours are given to Germanicus ‘corresponding to the strength of each man’s love for Germanicus’ (2.83.1) – indicating the genuinely favourable feelings for the prince. To Drusus are decreed only ‘the same as for Germanicus, with numerous additions (as later sycophancy usually loves to do)’ (4.9.2) – Germanicus sets the standard, and no popular feelings about Drusus are mentioned, except for the ingenuity of the sorrow implicit in the sycophancy. Drusus’ grant of tribunician power elicits sycophancy and allegations of arrogance from the Senate (3.57-59), while the privileges accorded to Nero Caesar cause widespread joy (3.29.3). Tacitus repeatedly reports positive rumours or favourable (public) opinions with respect to Germanicus, but does so less often for Drusus.682 In particular, various focalizers, at several points in the narrative, connect Germanicus to imperial power, imagine what he will be like as emperor, and associate him with hope, spes. This is not particularly unexpected, considering his status as heir apparent to Tiberius, but it is remarkable that such imperial expectations are never attached to Drusus.683 Indeed, people are represented as equating the fate

680 Grief over Germanicus’ death: e.g. 2.75.1, 2.82-84 (where the people even begin a iustitium before it has been ordered by the Senate or magistrates), 3.1-2, 3.4-5, 3.40.3; cf. Versnel 1980. Drusus’ death: 4.8.2; 4.9.1.
681 Absence of sycophancy: 3.2.3; 3.4.1. Pretence of grief for Drusus: 4.8.2; 4.12.1.
682 Praise for Germanicus: 1.7.6 (focalizers: the people), 1.33.2 (the people), 2.13.1 (Germanicus’ soldiers), 2.41.3 (the people), 2.43.5 (the imperial court), 2.73.1-3 (the people), 3.4.1 (the people). Criticism of Germanicus: 1.40.1 (omnes), 1.52.1 (Tiberius), 1.62.2 (Tiberius), 1.78.2 (Tacitus), 2.8.2 (Tacitus), 2.55.1-2 (Cn. Piso). As has been noted (e.g. Goodyear 1972, 240 and 1981, 66-67; Pelling 2012, 282), Tacitus rarely reports explicitly negative judgments or criticism on Germanicus, even when it could be considered ‘called for’. Praise for Drusus: 1.52.3 (Tiberius), 2.62.1 (authorial remark), 3.31.3-4 (senators/Tacitus?), 3.37.1-2 (senators), 3.56.3-4 (Tiberius), 4.4.1 (Tiberius + Tacitus). Negative assessment of Drusus: 1.76.3-4 (the people and Tiberius), 2.43.6 (the imperial court), 2.44.1 (Tiberius), 3.5.2 (the people), 3.8.2 (rumours/Tacitus), 3.59.2-4 (senators).
683 1.7.6 (Tiberius), 1.31.3 (the Germanic legions), 1.33.2 (the people), 1.34.1 (Germanicus), 1.35.3
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of Germanicus with that of the state, while such a connection is not made in the case of Drusus. Germanicus is, moreover, compared by the populace with various great men of the past: Alexander the Great, his father Drusus, and Marcellus – but Drusus is only associated with the bad practices of his father Tiberius.

Germanicus in other sources

The figure of Germanicus elicits from Tacitus the use of several narratological and literary devices: flashbacks to other great men, foreshadowings of his own and others’ fate, temporal displacements of events, the slowing down of narrative rhythm to describe his actions at greater length, the use of colourful language, significant juxtaposition with events and persons, and the use of a variety of focalizers to report opinions from different groups and individuals. All in all, the impression conveyed by Tacitus, notwithstanding his explicit claim of equal treatment by Tiberius, is that Germanicus is considered the obvious and favoured successor by the people, the Senate, the army and the court, while the only supporter of Drusus as heir apparent of his father Tiberius. Moreover, by giving so much more information about Germanicus, regularly providing insight into his thoughts and character, as well as overviews of popular opinion about him, the reader becomes much more familiar and involved with him than with Drusus, resulting in a greater sense of sympathy for Germanicus and his family.

The prominence of Germanicus in the Annals may to some extent be considered to be in line with the historical situation. Augustus’ clearly preferential treatment of Germanicus (in comparison with Drusus) in the last decades of his reign, as well as the enforced adoption of Germanicus by Tiberius, very probably indicated Augustus’ wish that Germanicus was to succeed to Tiberius. During Tiberius’ reign, Germanicus seems to have had a significant role in politics and military affairs. However, his overbearing prominence in the Tacitean narrative cannot be in keeping with historical reality. Moreover, Tacitus’ focus on Germanicus and his sons as potential successors to Tiberius diverges from the official documents issued

Germanicus legions), 2.73.3 (people in Antioch), 3.4.1 (soldiers, magistrates and people).
684 3.4.1: populus per tribus concidisse rem publicam, nihil spei reliquum clamitabant, countered by Tiberius in an edict in 3.6.3: principes mortales, rem publicam aeternam esse.
685 Alexander: 2.71.1-2, Marcellus: 2.41.3, Drusus the Elder: 1.33.2, 2.41.3, 2.82.2, Tiberius: 3.59.4.
686 Bellemore 2013 on Augustus’ promotion of Germanicus.
687 Martin 1990, 1519.
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during Tiberius’ rule, which do not make a distinction in treatment between Drusus and Germanicus, much less give the latter a position of priority. As mentioned before (section 2.1.2), neither Drusus nor Germanicus figure on imperial coinage before AD 19, and up to that time, there are no clear preferences for one or the other in imperial monuments either, while the SCPP states that Tiberius had divided his attention equally between his two sons. The picture only changes after Germanicus’ death, when Drusus and his twins receive more attention both on coins and in monuments, in contrast to Tacitus’ almost exclusive focus on Germanicus’ sons. Also some literary sources, such as Ovid and Velleius, place the two brothers on a par, or even pay more attention to Drusus.

Tacitus, then, plays up the role of Germanicus in the Tiberian hexad. This accords well with the literary tradition, which preserves a very positive image of Germanicus as ‘arguably the most popular crown prince in the history of the Roman Empire’. Also in Suetonius and Dio, Germanicus is immensely popular, and is seen to embody the state and to be considered the rightful successor to Tiberius. The esteem in which the historical Germanicus was held by all layers of the population, and the vast impact of his death and the trial of Piso upon society, is reflected in such documents as the TS/TH and the SCPP, with their long list of honours and their praise for the restraint in mourning observed by various members of the imperial family, suggesting that there had been problems of excessive grief. The

688 See above, note 585.
689 E.g. Ov. Fast. 1.10-12, Ex.P. 2.2.83-84 (references from Woodman 2006, 310); Velleius’ account features a ‘low profile [for] Germanicus, and the unmistakable, if muted, unfavourable comparison between him and Drusus, the son of Tiberius’ (Millar 1993, 5).
690 Quote from Edwards 2012b, 399.
691 The popularity of Germanicus is referred to, and the positive tradition about him discernible in e.g. Suet. Tib. 25.2, 52.3; Suet. Cal. 1-6 (cf. 6.2 on the people crying out salva Roma, salva patria, salus est Germanicus after a report of his recovery); Dio 56.24.7 (with Boissevain 1955 and Swan 2004 ad loc. on the placing), 57.3.1, 57.5.1, 57.6.2 (‘though Germanicus might have obtained the imperial power – for he had the good will of absolutely all the Romans as well as of their subjects – he refused it’), 57.18.6-8 (‘although on several occasions he might have obtained the imperial power, with the free consent not only of the soldiers but of the people and Senate as well, he refused to do so’), 58.8.2.
692 SCPP 132-151; this is also implied in the edict Tiberius is made to circulate in 3.6, warning people to limit their grief. Cf. Griffin 1997, 260: ‘Above all, the published inscription vindicates Tacitus’ interpretation of the importance of Germanicus and the events surrounding his death. Many readers have felt that the historian exaggerates the importance of the dashing and impetuous prince to create a foil to the morose and gloomy emperor. The Tabula Siarensis and the present inscription leave us in no doubt that these events convulsed Rome
favourable literary tradition on Germanicus, while certainly grounded in a genuine historical popularity, will also have been aided posthumously by the celebration of his memory during the reign of his son Caligula, and the publication of the memoirs of his daughter Agrippina the Younger. The prominence of Germanicus in Tacitus’ account then, partially reflects the historical and literary situation, sketches the public opinion at that time, and helps to explain certain events, such as the mistrust of the Tacitean Tiberius, the mass hysteria in Rome after Germanicus’ death, and the farce that the trial of Piso is suggested to be. The Tacitean Germanicus, moreover, fulfils several purposes in the *Annals*, which may further explain his narrative prominence. As will be treated more in detail below (section 2.3.2), he functions as a foil to Tiberius, exhibiting those traits which the emperor is depicted as lacking; he is the ancestor of Caligula, Agrippina the Younger and Nero, foreshadowing the traits and (mis)deeds of his descendants; and he embodies particular values which Tacitus suggests are incompatible with the world of the Principate. As a result of all these narrative, historical and literary factors, Germanicus’ prominence in Books 1 to 3 is enhanced by Tacitus, contradicting the ostensible equality with his brother Drusus.

### 2.2.4 GERMANICUS’ THREATENING CONNOTATIONS

Tacitus presents Germanicus as the preferred future successor to his adoptive father, and as the dominant figure in the first half of the Tiberian hexad, next to the emperor. But that is not the only way in which he is portrayed in the *Annals*. Right from the start of the Tiberian narrative, Germanicus is also presented as a challenge and had serious repercussions in the provinces and armies, evoking the spectre of civil war.'

693 However, as will be seen below (2.3.2), Tacitus also diverges from the tradition in treating Germanicus rather more critically than most other sources. On the literary tradition on Germanicus, see Martin 1981, 105-106 and 117-118; Wiedemann 1996a, 208; Levick 1999a, 221; Hurley 1989; Tacitus refers to the memoirs of Agrippina as a source in 4.53.2 as commentarii Agrippinae filiae … vitam suam et casus suorum posteris memoravit. Caligula advertised his father on his coinage: *RIC* I Gaius 11-12, 17-18, 25-26, 35, 43, 50, 57 (from Claes 2013, 269); Rose 1997, 32-38 on other media.

694 On the importance of sketching public opinion to explain the course of events see Shotter 1968 and Damon 1999; further Shatzman 1974 and Gibson 1998 on rumours becoming causes of events; Flaig 2003 on the role of rumours in Nero’s downfall. Cf. Pelling 2012, 305: ‘people were keen on Germanicus, and that is itself an important historical fact’.
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to the current power and authority of Tiberius. He is associated by various focalizers with hope, the emperorship and sole rule, is perceived by Tiberius as a threat to his position, and endowed by Tacitus with connotations of civil war. Immediately at his first appearance in the narrative, Tacitus’ report of Germanicus’ adoption by Tiberius – and thus his designation as future successor – is accompanied by the mention of his installation over eight Rhine legions.695 His military command is referred to again some chapters later, when Tiberius, hesitant about officially assuming imperial power, is said to fear that Germanicus might use this substantial military force and his popularity with the people to seize the emperorship: ‘the principal reason [of Tiberius’ reluctance] was alarm lest Germanicus – who wielded so many legions, untold allied auxiliaries, and remarkable goodwill among the people – should prefer to hold rather than to wait for command.’696 At a crucial moment of the new reign – uncertainty about the establishment of Tiberius as official successor to Augustus – Tacitus introduces Germanicus, the widespread support he holds among various groups, and the threat he is considered by Tiberius to pose to his power.697

Germanicus reappears next in a critical episode of Tiberius’ principate, the simultaneous mutinies of the legions in Germany and Pannonia. After narrating Drusus’ quelling of the rebellion in Pannonia, Tacitus introduces the story of the Rhine mutiny with the phrase ‘during the course of almost the same days, and from the same causes, the Germanic legions were disrupted’, but he adds two factors which make this revolt more serious: ‘all the more violently, given their greater numbers, and with high hopes that Germanicus Caesar would be unable to suffer the command of another and would entrust himself to the legions, who would handle everything by their own force’.698 The references to Germanicus’ military might in 1.3.5 and 1.7.6, then, may be seen to foreshadow the Germanic legions’ hopes that Germanicus would usurp imperial power with their aid. Those wishes are repeated two chapters later, when similar hopes of Germanicus being ‘in charge of affairs’ are

695 1.3.5: at hercule Germanicum, Druso ortum, octo apud Rhenum legionibus imposuit adscirique per adoptionem a Tiberio iussit [sc. Augustus].
696 1.7.6: causa praecipua ex formidine, ne Germanicus, in cuius manu tot legiones, immensa sociorum auxilia, mirus apud populum favor, habere imperium quam exceptare mallet; a similar phrasing is found in Suet. Tib. 25.3.
698 1.31.1, esp. magna spe fore ut Germanicus Caesar imperium alterius pati nequiret dareteque se legionibus vi sua cuncta tracturis.
attributed to the people. Two chapters after that, the soldiers’ readiness to help Germanicus seize power is referred to again, this time coupled with their demands that he pay out the legacy bequeathed to them by Augustus. Suetoniuss and Dio also mention the legions’ wish that Germanicus assume imperial power, while Velleius significantly does not attach the mutiny in any way to the person of Germanicus, perhaps precisely because Germanicus’ popularity was a delicate issue.

Both Tacitus and the Tacitean Germanicus himself – in line with what Suetoniuss and Dio report – explicitly state that Germanicus remained loyal to Tiberius despite attempts by others to convince him to seize power; this is probably historically correct. Nevertheless, Tacitus deliberately calls this loyalty into question by the strong overtones of civil war which he inserts in his depiction of the Germanic mutiny. As has often been noted, Tacitus opens his account of the Pannonian mutiny with words strongly reminiscent of the opening of the narrative of the Histories and with a reference to civil war, thus immediately associating the rebellions with civil conflicts. This association is strengthened by explicit comparisons, uttered

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699 1.33.2: quique Drusi magna apud populum Romanum memoria, credebaturque, si rerum potius fores, libertatem redditurus; unde in Germanicum favor et spes eadem.

700 1.35.3: fuere etiam qui legatam a divo Augusto pecuniam reposcerent, faustis in Germanicum ominibus; et si vellet imperium, promptos ostentavere. This last passage may indicate the soldiers’ perception of Germanicus as the legitimate successor to Augustus in two further ways: by considering him to be the rightful heir to Augustus’ property (since they demand their share in the legacy from him rather than from Tiberius; Shotter 1968, 200-201, but see Goodyear 1972 ad loc. for a brief discussion), and by greeting him with fausta omina (‘particularly in place at the beginning of a reign or of a ‘coup d’état’, but also appropriate at any time for addressing of or reference to the princeps’ (Goodyear 1972 ad loc.).

701 Suet. Tib. 25.2; Dio 57.5.1; Vell. 2.125 (with Woodman 1977 ad loc.); see Sage 1982-1983.

702 Germanicus’ loyalty is mentioned twice at the beginning of the narration of the Germanic mutiny: 1.34.1: sed Germanicus quanto summae spes propri, tanto impensus pro Tiberio niti; seque et proximos et Belgarum civitates in verba eius adigit (focalizer: Tacitus); in 1.35.4 Germanicus reacts strongly, quasi scelere contaminaretur, to the soldiers’ proposal to back his bid for power, by jumping off the tribunal and almost killing himself with his own sword, moriturum potius quam fidem exuerat clamitans. Suet. Cal. 1.1 and Dio 57.6.2, 57.18.8 also mention Germanicus’ loyalty to Tiberius; see Wiedemann 1996a, 208 and Levick 1999a, 148 on the improbability of Germanicus and his family presenting a threat to Tiberius. Baxter 1972 investigates Germanicus’ resemblance to Aeneas, among other things in the context of his pietas.

703 1.16.1: hic rerum urbanarum status erat, cum Pannonicas legiones seditio incessit, nullis novis causis, nisi quod mutatus princeps licentiam turbarum et ex civili bello spem praemiorum ostendebat; Hist. 1.11.1: hic fuit rerum Romanarum status, cum Servius Galba iterum Titus Vinius consules inchoavere annum sibi ultimum, rei publicae prope supremum.
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by various individuals fearing that the mutinies will end in civil conflict.704 Furthermore, Germanicus’ long speech in oratio recta to the troops (1.42-43) conjures up the spectre of civil war, since the two examples Germanicus names for his own conduct – speeches pronounced to mutinous soldiers by Caesar and Augustus (1.42.3) – took place during the civil wars that these men were waging against their opponents.705 In the end, Germanicus’ (intended) measures to punish the rebellious legions are so violent that he causes internal strife worse than any civil war before.706

By describing the mutiny as a civil war, with Germanicus as its desired leader, Tacitus represents the latter as an indirect challenge to Tiberius.707 This may also be part of the reason why Tacitus magnifies the mutinies so much in comparison to both their actual historical significance, and their treatment in the other ancient sources.708

704 1.19.3: si tamen tenderent in pace temptare quae ne civilium quidem bellorum victores expostulaverint (focalizer: Junius Blaesus, commander of the Pannonian legions; cf. Hist. 1.18.3: tamquam usurpatam etiam in pace donativi necessitatem bello perdidissent); 1.36.2: si auxilia et socii adversum abscendentes legiones armarentur, civile bellum suscipi (Germanicus and his advisers); 1.43.3: eluant hanc maculam irasque civiles in exitium hostibus vertant (Germanicus); 1.49.1: diversa omnium, quae unquam accidere, civilium armorum facies (Tacitus). Cf. Ross 1973, 219, stating that civil war is the ‘spectre that Tacitus has devised as the ultimate result of Germanicus’ handling of the Germanic mutiny’; Woodman 2006, arguing for furor or madness as the main metaphor of Tacitus’ depiction of both mutinies; Keitel 1984, 318 n.27 on characters in the mutinies exhibiting motives resembling those in situations of civil war.

705 See Goodyear 1972 ad loc. for the identifications.

706 1.45.2: Caesar arma classem socios demittere Rheno parat, si imperium detrectetur, bello certaturus; 1.48.1: Germanicus sends a letter to the commander of the mutinous legions stating that venire se valida manu ac, ni supplicium in malos praesumant, usurum promisca caede (‘indiscriminate slaughter’); the result is described vividly in 1.49.1-2.

707 Wardle 1997, moreover, proposes the interesting idea that the opening words of Germanicus’ speech may be intended as an allusion to the Kaisereid, the oath of loyalty sworn to Tiberius and his family not long before. This would reinforce the ambiguous impression Tacitus sketches of Germanicus: outwardly explicitly loyal to Tiberius, even referring to the oath taken by the soldiers he is addressing, but performing actions which can be perceived as highly threatening.

708 Cf. Keitel 1984, 318 n.27: ‘While I would not reject other explanations for the lavish scale Tacitus devotes to the mutinies … he does also thereby create a background of violent instability that undermines the careful plans of Augustus, Livia, and Tiberius for the succession as related in the chapters immediately preceding’; Devillers 1993, 231-232. On the relatively minor threat to the stability posed by the mutinies, see Wiedemann 1996a, 207-209; Dio devotes only two chapters to it (57.4-5), and they are briefly mentioned in Suet. Cal. 9 and 48.1. Other reasons that have been adduced for Tacitus’ extended treatment are the introduction of the army as a factor of importance in the succession (cf. Pelling 2012, 293; Martin 1990, 1519) and the opportunity for Tacitus ‘to deploy all his resources of style in a type of narrative very congenial to him … [with] pictorial
In the rest of the narrative, the Tacitean Germanicus is also endowed with threatening connotations. He is explicitly connected to the two main opponents in the recent civil wars – his grandfathers Augustus and Mark Antony – and is even described as visiting Actium to view the camps of his two ancestors. At different moments Germanicus acts against the directions of Tiberius, for instance in burying the bones of the fallen Romans in the Teutoburg forest (1.61-62), and in entering Egypt without permission from the emperor and interfering with the grain supply (2.59). He is believed to have wanted to restore freedom to the Roman people, and to have been murdered by Tiberius on account of that. Many of the actions for which Cn. Piso and his wife Plancina would later be accused of corrupting the army and stirring up mutinies and civil war are reminiscent of the activities undertaken by Germanicus and Agrippina during Germanicus’ campaigns, casting the latter’s behaviour in a somewhat doubtful light.

709 2.43.5: [Germanicus] claritum mater<ni> generis anteibat [Drusum], avum M. Antonium, avunculum Augustum ferens; 2.53.2: simul sinus Actiaca victoria inclutos et sacratas ab Augusto manubias castraque Antonii cum recordatione maiorum suorum adiit. namque ei, ut memoravi, avunculus Augustus, avus Antonius erant, magnaque illic imago tristium laetorumque; in both passages, Mark Antony and Augustus are mentioned together as ancestors of Germanicus; as Kraus 2009, 112 observes, Germanicus ‘has civil war in his genes’ from both sides; cf. Koestermann 1958, 339 on the place. O’Gorman 2000, 48-49 discusses Germanicus’ resemblance to Augustus both in their character and in their connection with civil war.

710 Cf. Pelling 2012, 295-296; on 1.61-62 see Pagán 1999; cf. Pagán 1999, 313: ‘Germanicus’ continual desire to transgress boundaries on the periphery of the Roman world – geographical and moral – poses a threat to the stability of Rome.’ In 2.59.2-3, Tacitus highlights the importance of Egypt to Rome and Augustus’ measures to prevent it from becoming a power base for opponents. In addition, Maaik Leemreize pointed out to me the associations of Egypt with civil wars and persons seeking sole power (Caesar, Mark Antony, Pompey, Cornelius Gallus, Vespasian). Gissel 2001, 293-296 links Germanicus’ visit to Egypt to Alexander the Great. Kelly 2010 sees Germanicus’ travels in Egypt in the context of the ‘mutability of fortunes’ (235) and of ‘a complicated meditation on the rise and fall of tyranny’ (236) through the interplay between the hope invested in Germanicus and the decay of the large monuments of the Egyptian kings.

711 2.82.1-2, where he is compared with his father Drusus the Elder, and Tacitus alludes to the rumours that the latter had been poisoned by Augustus (Suet. Claud. 1.5).

712 E.g. building a stong personal relationship with their soldiers through individual interaction and finan-
TIBERIUS’ SUCCESSORS: GERMANICUS AND DRUSUS

associated with kingship, for instance when he is crowned by the Nabatean king during his mission in the East, or at his funeral in Antioch, when people compare him to Alexander the Great and speculate about Germanicus’ qualities as sole ruler and king.\footnote{In the comparison with Alexander in 2.73, Germanicus comes out the better, and people wonder what he would have been like as an emperor (2.73.3: *si solus arbiter rerum, si iure et nomine regio fisset*). On Germanicus as an Alexander-figure, see Aalders 1961; Gissel 2001. Gissel 2001, 289 draws attention to 2.57 on Germanicus’ crowning.} Allusions to Sallust indirectly liken Germanicus to another young and popular prince who had been adopted by his reigning uncle, but who had turned out as a dangerous and ruthless enemy to Rome: Jugurtha.\footnote{E.g. at 3.4.2: *studia hominum accensa in Agrippinam* and *Jug. 6.3: studia Numidarum in Iugurtham accensa* (Koestermann 1963 *ad loc*). In addition, several themes in Tacitus’ portrayal of Germanicus and his relationship to Tiberius are reminiscent of that between Jugurtha and Micipsa in Sall. *Jug. 6-7*, such as the adoption of a nephew despite the presence of (younger) biological sons (as in *Ann. 1.3.5*), the beauty and popularity of the adopted son (at various points in the *Annals*), the father sending him off on a military campaign to expose him to danger (2.5.1).} Tacitus, then, despite his own claims and the tradition of Germanicus’ loyalty to Tiberius, makes the military support for Germanicus, the possibility of autocracy on his part, and the association of himself and other members of his family with (previous) civil wars run as a thread through the narrative. This starts in the chapter describing Tiberius’ rise to power and becomes most prominent in what is represented as the first major challenge to Tiberius’ position, the mutinies of the Rhine legions. As Kraus pointedly observes, ‘Germanicus is … brought into the narrative in contexts that consistently remind us that, even with Augustus safely cremated and Tiberius in charge, there is always the next emperor to reckon with.’\footnote{Kraus 2009, 108; we may add ‘as well as his wife and children’. Gowing 2010 draws attention to the impact of the late-republican civil wars on the formative years of Tiberius’ life as a reason for the emperor’s anxiety about civil war, which is reflected in the ‘caution and reluctance’ which Valerius Maximus and Velleius Paterculus – both contemporary authors ‘with an eye toward securing imperial favor’ (252) – employ when writing about the theme.} As Pelling and Rutland suggest, Germanicus and Agrippina may be represented as naively playing with forces larger than they can handle and which will later prove destructive.\footnote{Pelling 2012, 296: ‘Germanicus and Agrippina may themselves be presented as achingly innocent of any...
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Tacitus is much more explicit in asserting Germanicus’ loyalty towards Tiberius than Dio, thereby heightening all the more the contrast between Germanicus good intentions and the threatening impression he creates. But even if Germanicus and Agrippina are loyal to Tiberius and unaware of the challenges they create to his position, the threat they may pose looms continuously in the background through connotations, allusions, and the reader’s knowledge that their offspring will wreak havoc on the state.

To summarize, Tacitus presents Drusus and Germanicus as ostensibly equal successors by repeatedly paralleling them and drawing attention to their equal public treatment by Tiberius. The rest of the narrative, however, far from bears out this apparent parity: Germanicus’ narrative prominence is much greater than that of Drusus’, he is widely seen as the only or best successor to Tiberius, while people in the narrative construct an opposition between the houses of the two brothers. In addition to being perceived as the sole heir apparent (and thereby as eclipsing the emperor’s biological son), the Tacitean Germanicus is endowed with connotations that are highly threatening to Tiberius. Germanicus, then, is the character who dominates the first half of the Tiberian hexad together with the emperor, but he is also presented as a continuous challenge to the latter, much more so in Tacitus than in the other sources.

disloyalty, even perhaps of any malice against Tiberius, but they presage very sinister themes indeed. ... brilliant figures, but ones that unleash or foster forces that may eventually be destructive to the states they build, when those forces recur with other, lesser figures.’ and Rutland 1987, 161: ‘The young man was eager, ambitious, and often acted from the most praiseworthy of motives. His actions, nevertheless, as those of a possible successor to the Principate, create a more ominous impression’; cf. Kraus 2009, 112.

717 Koestermann 1963 ad 1.35.4.
2.3 Criteria for succession

Germanicus is portrayed by Tacitus as the obvious successor – or even replacement – to Tiberius, while Drusus takes second place. This section investigates the grounds for these expectations by examining the qualities that are believed to make a man *capax imperii* in the eyes of Tacitus’ characters, and the way in which Tacitus indirectly conveys his (highly critical) verdict on these criteria. Tacitus’ depiction of the succession issue, I argue, suggests that the criteria which are commonly employed by the Senate, people and the military for assessing an individual’s suitability for the emperorship are not necessarily related to the candidate’s actual ability to govern the Empire. While Tiberius’ succession to Augustus and Drusus’ future succession to his father, as well as these men’s characters, are described in mostly negative terms, the narrative itself indirectly shows them as acting rather effectively. By contrast, the widespread popularity of Germanicus is implied by Tacitus to be based on erroneous criteria. As the Tacitean Tiberius’ thoughts on the succession and the recurring appearances of the four so-called *capaces imperii* illustrate, there are other possible criteria for the emperorship than those proposed by the characters in the narrative, but they are not employed.

2.3.1 TIBERIUS AS SUCCESSOR TO AUGUSTUS

Although this chapter is concerned with the succession to Tiberius, it will be expedient to start with an examination of Tiberius’ own succession to Augustus as narrated at the start of the work. First, because both the opening chapters of the *Annals* and Tiberius’ succession can be regarded as programmatic for the whole work:
the themes outlined in the first chapters will recur throughout the narrative, and Tiberius’ succession will constitute a point of reference for later successions in the *Annals*. Second, because Tiberius’ position as emperor is depicted as continually challenged throughout the hexad, and comments on (the grounds of) his succession play a role in this. Last, because the Tacitean Tiberius’ own perception of his succession matters to his attitude towards his own potential successors.

*Augustus’ choice of Tiberius as his successor*

Tacitus’ narrative, through several different focalizers, provides various reasons for Tiberius’ succession to Augustus, all entirely negative – Augustus’ wish to enhance his own reputation by choosing a bad successor, the lack of other candidates, and Livia’s intrigues – rather than attributing it to factors which may appear more likely, such as Tiberius’ capacities or a well thought-out decision by Augustus. One of the most explicit statements on the motives for Tiberius’ succession is mentioned at 1.10, where Augustus is said to have considered adopting Tiberius out of a desire for posthumous glory. In a report of the discussion of Augustus’ life and deeds, anonymous *prudentes* are represented as saying that Augustus chose Tiberius not out of personal affection for him, nor out of care for the state – i.e. on the basis of Tiberius’ qualities which would make him a good emperor – but because of a wish for greater personal glory deriving from the (posthumous) comparison with the arrogant and cruel successor he knew Tiberius would turn out to be. This interpretation of Tiberius’ succession is conveyed through indefinite focalization, in a chapter which reports critical rumours about Augustus and highlights Augustus’ selfishness, hypocrisy and conscious destruction of the *res publica*. Its hostile tone is therefore hardly surprising, and the reader will be wary of taking this statement at face value.

718 On the programmatic nature of the first chapters of the work, see Martin 1990, 1500-1513, calling them ‘crucial for setting the tone of the whole of Tiberius’ reign’ (1502), and above, section 2.1.1. Tiberius’ succession to Augustus is evoked at the point of Nero’s succession to Claudius; see below, Chapter 3.

719 1.10.7: *ne Tiberium quidem caritate aut rei publicae cura successorem adscitum, sed quoniam adrogantiam saevitiamque eius introspexerit, comparatione deterrima sibi gloriam quaesivisse.*

720 This passage forms part of a set of two chapters (1.9 and 1.10), where unnamed *prudentes* are presented as giving thematically and verbally corresponding positive (1.9) and negative (1.10) assessments of Augustus’ life and deeds. See Goodyear 1972 *ad loc.* and Koestermann 1961, 349-350 on similarities with Dio’s account and the possibility of a common source; Davis 1999 on conflicting evaluations of Augustus’ reign. Prior to the remark on Augustus’ adoption of Tiberius, Augustus’ critics discuss his rise to power through violence, deception and a desire for domination.
– even if it should not be disqualified immediately, given that Tacitus designates the focalizers as prudentes, and thus attaches some value to their ability to interpret matters, contrary to the vana which are discussed by the multitude.\textsuperscript{721} What is notable is that Tacitus does not refute the story or provide an alternative explanation for Tiberius’ adoption, neither immediately before – in the preceding favourable assessment of Augustus’ career in 1.9 – nor after recounting the rumour.\textsuperscript{722} In fact, although he does not explicitly endorse the statement, he does indirectly corroborate it with an authorial confirmation of Augustus’ low opinion of Tiberius, placed directly after the rumour, and introduced by etenim (‘and indeed’).\textsuperscript{723} Furthermore, just two chapters before, Tacitus had reported rumours insinuating that Augustus’ arrangements for the succession were made to his own advantage, and against the interests of the state.\textsuperscript{724} All this has an inescapable effect on the reader. Tacitus does not himself voice the idea of a deterrima comparatio, nor approve of it or repeat it later in the narrative; but he does not contradict it at any point either, and through his arrangement of material and addition of circumstantial detail succeeds irrevocably in conveying the impression of Augustus selfishly leaving the state with the worst possible successor, selected only on the basis of his cruelty – this clearly casts

\textsuperscript{721} 1.9.1-3: multus hinc ipso de Augusto sermo, plerisque vana mirantibus … at apud prudentes vita eius varie extollebatur arguebatur; Syme 1958, 432, Koestermann 1961, 348-351 and Shotter 1967a. Martin 1990, 1511 observes pointedly that the facts classified as vana by Tacitus are precisely those details that Augustus proudly proclaims in his own Res Gestae.

\textsuperscript{722} Considering that 1.10 forms a counterpart to 1.9 and treats many of the same themes, often directly responding to its positive representations with a less favourable interpretation, the absence of any positive statement on Augustus’ choice for Tiberius in 1.9 to balance the negative interpretation of 1.10 is all the more remarkable. See Damon 1999, 155-161 on another cogent example of Tacitus influencing the reader’s perception by not discrediting hostile rumours.

\textsuperscript{723} 1.10.7: etenim Augustus paucis ante annis, cum Tiberio tribuniciam potestatem a patribus rursum postularet, quamquam honorar oratione, quaedam de habitu cultuque et institutis eius iecerat, quae velut excusando exprobraret; cf. Ryberg 1942, esp. 389 on such forms of innuendo. The credibility of Augustus’ alleged negative motivations is furthermore enhanced by the generally more convincing appearance of the hostile assessment of Augustus’ career in 1.10 vis-à-vis the preceding chapter: 1.9 is very apologetic in nature, and its overly strong denial of any selfish motivations or unlawful measures on the part of Augustus only has the effect of lending more credibility to the opposite explanations in 1.10, which are described at greater length, in more powerful language, and in a more emphatic, last position (Goodyear 1972 ad loc.; Davis 1999; Hausmann 2009, 13-29). Davis 1999, 4 also observes that the negative assessment is convincing because it is based on Augustus’ own favourable representation or interpretation of his deeds in the Res Gestae).

\textsuperscript{724} 1.8.6, discussed above, note 615.
Tiberius in a very negative light.\textsuperscript{725}

Other explanations for Tiberius’ succession are provided elsewhere in the narrative. When relating the arrangements made by Augustus for the succession in chapter 1.3, Tacitus first describes how the emperor built up his ‘buttresses for his domination’ (1.3.1) by endowing several male relatives with honours and powers. After two long sentences detailing the construction of Augustus’ \textit{subsidia}, it only takes one compact sentence to eliminate all the others and make Tiberius the sole survivor: one by one, Augustus’ potential successors pass away, leaving only Tiberius, in whose direction everything starts to incline.\textsuperscript{726} The structure and phrasing suggest that Tiberius is a kind of last resort, becoming the only possible successor after all the \textit{subsidia} carefully built up by Augustus have fallen to pieces, either through fate, or through the scheming of his mother Livia.\textsuperscript{727} Livia is repeatedly connected to Tiberius’ succession to Augustus: she is said to have convinced her husband Augustus to adopt his stepson, and to have eliminated Tiberius’ rivals. Tacitus mentions her responsibility for advancing Tiberius very early in the narrative, when he – in his authorial voice – accuses her of the deaths of Gaius and Lucius Caesar, the banishment of Agrippa Postumus, and the promotion of Tiberius.\textsuperscript{728} It is true that Tacitus,

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\textsuperscript{725} Comparable attribution of a wish for posthumous glory on Augustus’ part may be seen in his advice to Tiberius not to extend the Empire any further, with the (Tacitean?) addition ‘whether in dread or through resentment being uncertain’ (1.11.4: \textit{consilium coercendi intra terminos imperii, incertum metu an per invidiam}) and in Tacitus’ comment about Augustus’ legacies being aimed at ‘glory among posterity’ (1.8.2: \textit{tertio gradu primores civitatis scripserat, plerosque invisos sibi, sed iactantia gloriaque ad posteros}); these instances make the attribution of the same motive in his selection of a successor more credible. Woodman 2006, 329 n.75 notes that ‘the words \textit{comparatione deterrima} ... seem designed to remind readers ... that it was conventional to greet each new princeps with a \textit{comparatio} in which he would be compared favourably with his predecessor(s) but which Tacitus has pointedly omitted.’

\textsuperscript{726} 1.3.5: \textit{ut Agrippa vita concessit, Lucium Caesarem euntem ad Hispanienses exercitus, Gaium remeantem Armenia et vulnere invalidum mors fato propera vel novercae Liviae dolus abstulit Drusoque pridem extincto Nero solus et privignis erat, illuc cuncta vergere: filius, collega imperii, consors tribuniciae potestatis adsumitur omnisque per exercitus ostentatur.}

\textsuperscript{727} Koestermann 1963 \textit{ad loc}. Koestermann 1961, 333 draws attention to the added insinuations of crime through the resemblance of this sentence to the description of Augustus’ rise through the elimination of his rivals in 1.2.1.

\textsuperscript{728} 1.3.3-4: \textit{Lucium Caesarem euntem ad Hispaniensis exercitus, Gaium remeantem Armenia et vulnere invalidum mors fato propera vel novercae Liviae dolus abstulit Drusoque pridem extincto Nero solus et privignis erat, illuc cuncta vergere: filius, collega imperii, consors tribuniciae potestatis adsumitur omnisque per exercitus ostentatur, non obscuris, ut ante, matris artibus, sed palam hortatu. nam senem Augustum devinxerat adeo, uti nepotem unicum, Agrippam Postumum, in insulam Planasiam proicicerit, rudem sano bonarum artium et robere corporis stolide...}
while acknowledging Livia’s part in Agrippa’s removal – as implied in the indicative *devinxerat* –, does not mention her alleged complicity in the deaths of Gaius and Lucius as a fact: strictly speaking, it is presented as an alternative to a natural death (*mors fato propera vel novercae Liviae dolus*), and thus only insinuation.\(^{729}\) Some sentences later, however, Tacitus contrasts her open support for Tiberius after the adoption (1.3.3: *palam hortatu*) with the *obscrae matris artes* of before (*ut antea*). Whether the following sentence on the banishment of Agrippa is an explanation (cf. the *nam*) of the former or the latter, nevertheless the references to Livia’s ‘dark practices’ also has the effect of strengthening the earlier allegations about Livia’s role in the deaths of Gaius and Lucius. This is even more so since she is described as a *noverca* there, calling to mind all the negative connotations that Romans attached to stepmothers;\(^{730}\) and the other terms used for her activities – *dolus, obscrae artes, devincire*, the characterization of Augustus as a helpless *senex* – strengthen the impression of crime on Livia’s part.\(^{731}\) Since she is not connected to these events by the other ancient sources, the insinuation of Livia’s meddling in these cases must be considered Tacitean.\(^{732}\)

ferocem, nullius tamen flagitii compertum.

729 Note that the same expression is used later in the *Annals* (4.1.2: *Tiberium … devinxit*) to describe Sejanus’ control over Tiberius.

730 On the Roman perceptions of stepmothers and the stereotype of the wicked *noverca*, so common in declamation, see Noy 1991; Watson 1995. On the influence of this image of the *saev a noverca* on Tacitus’ portrayal of Livia, see Watson 1995, 176-192; Barrett 2001. Tacitus also insinuates that Livia cherishes stepmotherly hatred for Agrippa Postumus (1.6.2), Agrippina (1.33.3) and in fact the whole of the *domus Caesarum* (1.10.5); see Barrett 2001 for the formally incorrect use of the term.

731 Ryberg 1942, 389-390, citing also 3.19.3 and 4.71.4 as substantiations of what Tacitus has initially presented as rumour; Watson 1995, 180-181, also drawing attention to Tacitus’ chronological imprecision to enhance the outrage. Moreover, as Goodyear 1972 *ad loc.* remarks, the last, more emphatic position of the alternatives (either a natural death, or Livia’s *dolus*) makes the second more probable; see also Whitehead 1979 and Develin 1983 on alternative explanations. Later in the narrative, Livia is also accused of hatred and crimes against Germanicus and Agrippina, two other possible threats to Tiberius’ position: e.g. 1.33.1-3, 2.43.4, 2.82.1, 3.3, 3.17.2.

732 Suetonius does not connect Livia with Agrippa’s banishment in any way (*Aug. 65.1* and 65.4; his violent behaviour as motive) or the deaths of Gaius and Lucius (*Aug. 65.1*). Dio also attributes the banishment to (what we may presume to be) Augustan initiative because of his conduct, although he does mention that Agrippa ‘spoke ill of Livia as a stepmother’ (Dio 55.32.1); he states that Gaius and Lucius died of a wound and a sudden illness respectively, but that there were suspicions of Livia, because their deaths happened to coincide with Tiberius’ return from Rhodes (55.106-10). Velleius ascribes Gaius’ death to a wound and Lucius’ to nothing in particular (2.102.2-3); of Agrippa he merely writes that he deserved his end because of his madness.
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Two chapters later, Livia is again hinted to have been involved in her son’s rise to the throne, this time by closing off the palace and controlling reports during Augustus’ final illness, until Tiberius is ready to assume power.\textsuperscript{733} The next step in the elimination of possible rivals to Tiberius is the execution of Agrippa Postumus on Planasia, soon after Tiberius’ accession (1.6.1). Although Tacitus has Tiberius pretend that Augustus had ordered the murder, this was deemed incredible at that time; Tacitus himself considers it more probable that Tiberius and Livia had given the orders, the former out of fear, the latter out of stepmotherly hatred.\textsuperscript{734} The strong similarities between these two episodes and Tacitus’ later depiction of the Younger Agrippina’s murder of her husband Claudius and her preparations for the succession of her son Nero (12.66-13.1) ‘invest the accession of Tiberius with the same air of questionable legitimacy that attended Nero’s accession and ... stress how Tiberius, in just the same way as Nero, owed his position to the machinations of the emperor’s widow’.\textsuperscript{735} Livia’s efforts to obtain power for her son are also referred to some chapters later, in Tacitus’ description of Tiberius’ hesitation to assume imperial power. Tacitus assigns his reluctance to three reasons, all of them connected to Tiberius’ uncertainty about his acceptance as an emperor: fear of a usurpation by Germanicus, a desire to probe into the minds of the senators, and his wish ‘that he should be seen to have been summoned and chosen by the state rather and depravity (2.112.7).

\textsuperscript{733} 1.5.3-4; see Koestermann 1963 \textit{ad loc.}; Goodyear 1972 \textit{ad loc.}; Watson 1995, 181-184.

\textsuperscript{734} 1.6.1-2: \textit{nihil de ea re Tiberius apud senatum disseruit: patris iussa simulabat, quibus praescripsisset tribuno custodiae adposito, ne cunctaretur Agrippam morte adficere, quandoque ipse supremum diem explevisset. multa sine dubbio saevaque Augustus de moribus adulescentis questus, ut exitium eius senatus consulto sanciretur, perfecerat; ceterum in nullius aemque suorem necem duravit, neque mortem nepoti pro securitate privigni inlatam credibile erat. proprius vero Tiberium ac Liviam, illum metu, hanc novercalibus odio, suscepti et invisii iuvenes caedem festinavisse. Goodyear 1972 \textit{ad loc.}: ‘credibile erat’ indicates what was thought at the time, \textit{proprius vero} the author’s own opinion’. Suetonius (\textit{Tib.} 22) states that it is unclear whether Augustus or Livia gave the orders, and – in the latter case – whether Tiberius knew or not. Dio (57.3.5-6) names Tiberius as solely responsible, but remarks that he let people freely invent stories which imputed blame to Augustus, Livia or the guarding centurion. See Goodyear 1972, 128-129 for comparisons of these accounts and the issue of common sources; Woodman 1995 on Livia’s guilt and Tiberius’ ignorance in the matter; Watson 1995, 185 on Livia’s portrayal, and 186-191 on her role in the deaths of Germanicus and Agrippina; Hausmann 2009, 66-80 on Tacitus’ depiction of Livia.

\textsuperscript{735} Martin 1955, 124; on the parallels see also Charlesworth 1927; Goodyear 1972 \textit{ad loc.} (with many references); contra Shotter 1965. Martin 1955, 124 suggests that the Tiberius-episode has been modelled on the Claudian one with regard to content/facts, while the Claudius-episode borrows the language from the Tiberian one. See Keitel 1981 on further parallels between Tacitus’ depictions of Tiberius and Claudius.
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than to have crept in through wifely intrigue and an elderly adoption’.\(^{736}\) What constitutes the *uxorius ambitus* – and to what extent it is related to the *senilis adoptio* – remains vague, but it is clear that Tiberius is represented as doubting the legitimacy of his rise to power, exhibiting uneasiness at the role of his mother in the process.\(^{737}\) Livia is indeed, later in the narrative, credited with having persuaded Augustus to adopt Tiberius. Remarkably enough, however, this is only mentioned for the first time halfway Book 4, in the context of Tiberius’ retirement to Campania in 26. Tacitus gives three possible reasons for this that have been transmitted in his sources, the last being Tiberius’ strained relationship with his mother.\(^{738}\) According to the rumours, she was the one to have convinced Augustus to adopt Tiberius instead of Germanicus – apparently Augustus’ original plan – and consequently she kept reminding her son of this and asking him to be compensated for it.\(^{739}\) Whatever its truthfulness, the story of Augustus initially intending to adopt Germanicus rather than Tiberius was apparently more widely known: it is also mentioned by Suetonius, although without the element of Livia’s scheming.\(^{740}\)

736 1.7.7: *dabat et famae, ut vocatus electusque potius a re publica videretur quam per uxorium ambitum et senili adoptione inrepsisse*; see Woodman 1998c on this episode.
737 Cf. 1.59.5, where Arminius mockingly calls Tiberius *ille delectus Tiberius*, in reference to 1.7.7, and Dio 57.3.3.
738 4.57.1-3: *causam abscessus quamquam secutus plurimos auctorum ... erant qui crederent ... traditur etiam.*
739 4.57.3: *traditur etiam matris impotentia extrusum, quam dominationis sociam aspernavatut neque depellere poterat, cum dominationem ipsum donum eius accepsisset. nam dubitaverat Augustus Germanicum, sororis nepotem et cunctis laudatum, rei Romanae imponere, sed precibus uxoris evictus Tiberio Germanicum, sibi Tiberium adscivit. idque Augusta exprobrabat, reposcebat*; note the use of the indicative mood, which suggests that Tacitus presents this story on his own authority, rather than relating it with subjunctives, as a tale told by others, without taking responsibility for it. Suet. *Tib.* 50.2-51.2 also attributes Tiberius’ retirement mainly to his enmity towards his mother, who claimed an equal share in his rule, but here does not mention specifically her influence in Tiberius’ adoption. Again, there are parallels with Agrippina the Younger’s role in securing Nero’s succession: 13.13.4 and 13.14.2-3.
740 Suet. *Cal.* 4. Dio merely mentions that Augustus commended Germanicus to the Senate (56.26.2), that there were rumours that Livia had obtained the imperial power for Tiberius against Augustus’ will (57.3.3) and that Livia herself claimed that she had made Tiberius emperor (57.12.3). Nevertheless, it remains astonishing that Tacitus chooses to mention Augustus’ plans concerning Germanicus in Book 4 for the first time, rather than in the beginning of the *Annals*, since it would have provided a forceful ground for Tiberius’ suspicions of Germanicus, and would have added substance to Tacitus’ earlier hints of Livia’s influence on Tiberius succession: Koestermann 1963 *ad loc.*; see also Koestermann 1961 on Livia’s prominence in the opening chapters of the *Annals*. I cannot provide an adequate explanation for the postponement of the argument; still, passage 4.57.3 does again emphasize the dynastic nature of Augustus’ arrangements for the succession, as represented by Tacitus. First, because it links succession (*rei Romanae imponere*) to adoption (*adscivit*); and second, be-
Livia’s double influence on Tiberius’ succession – by promoting her son and eliminating his rivals – and the harmful consequences of this are also hinted at by the unnamed prudentes in 1.10, who refer to her as gravis in rem publicam mater, gravis domui Caesarum noverca (1.10.5). Her continuing influence on Tiberius as a result of this may be read into the rumours, reported earlier, that ‘there was his mother, with her womanly unruliness: his enslavement to the female would be compulsory’ if Tiberius were to become emperor. Notably, the rumour discusses not just Tiberius’ subordination to his mother, but continues by speculating about his two sons, who would burden and tear apart the state while fighting over the succession (1.4.5) – Tiberius, then, is depicted as almost powerless with regard to his own accession and the transmission of his power after his own death: for the former, he is indebted to his mother, and control of the latter lies with his sons. As touched upon briefly several times, Tacitus’ portrayal of Tiberius’ and Livia’s roles in the succession are highly reminiscent of those of the Tacitean Claudius and Agrippina the Younger later in the Annals. It is possible that Tacitus had Agrippina’s criminal behaviour and overbearing influence on Claudius and Nero in mind when writing about Livia’s control over Augustus and Tiberius, although he is much more indirect in the case of Livia, attributing most stories to rumours. Perhaps by alluding to Agrippina’s more obvious crimes, he intends to create an impression of similar

cause Germanicus’ kinship connection seems to be one of the reasons for Augustus’ plan. Since it has become more than sufficiently clear from the previous four Books that Germanicus was both Augustus’ great-nephew and cunctis laudatus, this information is not necessary to identify Germanicus. Rather, it must serve as an authorial explanation for Augustus’ intention of designating Germanicus as his successor: he was a relative of his, and he was very popular.

741 Explaned by Goodyear (1972 ad loc.) as ‘as a mother Livia proved a bane to the state by securing Tiberius’ accession, as a stepmother to the gens Iulia by securing the deaths of Gaius and Lucius’. cf. Gillespie 2012, 60-67, esp. 64: ‘Tacitus’ use of anaphora and asyndeton joins the phrases intimately, requiring readers to regard Livia’s roles as gravis mother and stepmother as parallel.’ See also Rutland 1978, 17-22 on Livia.

742 1.4.5: accedere matrem muliebri impotentia: servienda feminae. As Santoro l’Hoir 2006, 10 notes: ‘muliebris impotentia connotes female appropriation of legitimate male prerogatives, including political power and the art of eloquence; the expression, as Tacitus employs it, also embraces the rhetorically related transgressions of adultery, poisoning, seduction, and magic’, thereby again casting Livia’s interference in the succession in a negative light. Note that Agrippina the Younger is likewise connected to muliebris impotentia (12.57.2). On Livia’s powerful position, see e.g. 1.13.6, 1.14.1-2 (cf. Suet. Tib. 50.2 and Dio 57.12.4-5 on the same anecdote), 2.34.2, 3.15.1, 3.17.1, 3.17.4, 3.64.2, 4.12.4, 4.21.1; Purcell 1986 and Kunst 2008 (esp. 239-261), and the passage in the SCPP 115-119; on the relationship between Livia and Tiberius, see Gillespie 2012, 67-77.
wickedness.\textsuperscript{743} At the same time, Tiberius’ accession and rule are indirectly likened to those of Nero – evidently to the detriment of the former.\textsuperscript{744}

To summarize, Tacitus casts Tiberius’ succession to Augustus predominantly in negative terms: Augustus chose him to make himself look better, Livia convinced her husband to adopt Tiberius even though he originally intended otherwise, or Tiberius only obtained power because of the demise of all the other, preferred candidates. In all cases, this succession is connected to crime and illegitimacy, with the suggestion of Tiberius usurping a position not rightfully his. Moreover, as noted above (section 2.2.4), Tiberius’ accession is accompanied by the threat posed by Germanicus as a possible contender for power. Only in 1.4 can we discern any positive reasons which Augustus might have had for his choice of Tiberius: indefinite focalizers, discussing the possible successors to Augustus, concede that Tiberius is ‘mature in years and proved in war’, although they immediately add that he was also savage and haughty.\textsuperscript{745} Suetonius offers a different take on Augustus’ designation of Tiberius as his successor, relating some stories about Augustus’ low opinion of Tiberius, but in the end dismissing them by deliberately and extensively countering insinuations of such a deterrima comparatio.\textsuperscript{746} Velleius, too, emphasizes that Augustus had the interests of the state at heart in his adoption of Tiberius.\textsuperscript{747} Dio leans more towards Tacitus’ interpretation, in mentioning Livia’s influence on her son’s
succession and Tiberius’ resentment at this, and in reporting rumours very similar to the motive of a *detrimenta comparatio*.\(^{748}\) The historical Augustus’ real motives for his choice of Tiberius are, of course, impossible to recover, but the idea of such a *detrimenta comparatio* as the overriding motive in Augustus’ choice of Tiberius as his successor appears rather implausible, and must have seemed so to Tacitus as well.\(^{749}\) When Augustus died Tiberius was effectively the only qualified individual to take over the emperor’s tasks: having held two consulships and conducted several successful military campaigns, he was a highly experienced general and administrator with a thorough knowledge of the workings of senatorial politics and the imperial court; he had the right age and two mature sons; he was in possession of a combination of powers – the *tribunicia potestas* and *imperium proconsulare maius* – which made him the most powerful man in the state; through his adoption by Augustus, he held control over the *domus Augusta* and its members, clients and vast material resources; and in the years before his adoptive father’s death, he had been actively promoted by Augustus, up to the point of being designated his *collega imperii*.\(^{750}\) In AD 14, there was no man who could put forward a better claim on the emperorship.\(^{751}\) Tacitus cannot have been unaware of this, and will have known the explanations for Tiberius’ succession provided in the other literary sources; that he chose to depict Tiberius’ succession to Augustus in such negative terms is therefore highly significant.

\(^{748}\) Dio 56.45.3 on Augustus wanting to enhance his own glory (interpreted by Swan 2004 ad loc. as ‘a mark of his superiority’); 57.12.3 on Livia’s claims to have made Tiberius emperor, without any specifications as to the means; 57.3.3 mentions Tiberius’ vexation at rumours circulating about Livia securing the throne for him against the will of Augustus, and Tiberius’ dislike of his mother (note that this is also in the context of Tiberius’ reluctance to take up his power); and 57.12.6 states that Tiberius withdrew to Campania to be away from her.
\(^{749}\) No mention is made of the adoption or Tiberius’ designation as successor in the *Res Gestae*, although Augustus hints at it through formulations such as *Ti. Neronem ... qui tum mihi privignus erat* (RG 27; 30). Nevertheless, there might have been an ‘official’ version of Augustus’ motives for adopting Tiberius – mentioned in Velleius and Suetonius, and probably publicly by Augustus himself – as well as a more hostile tradition, which is cited by Tacitus in the form of rumours, and responded to by Suetonius (cf. Goodyear 1972 ad loc.).
\(^{750}\) Levick 1999a, chapters 3 and 4; Instinsky 1966; Timpe 1962, 33-38; Hurlet 1997, 141-162; Pettinger 2012, 49. Historically, the idea that Augustus would have chosen a bad successor to enhance his own reputation makes little sense; if anything, it would have harmed his reputation more than enhanced it; Goodyear 1972 ad loc. calls it a ‘highly improbable allegation’.
\(^{751}\) Pettinger 2012 discusses the resistance against Tiberius’ succession, but this contestation regards the system of the Principate in general (Pettinger argues that Drusus Libo and his supporters tried to restore the Republic), not Tiberius’ position as successor.
The characterization of Tiberius

The negative portrayal of Tiberius does not end with his accession: throughout the first hexad, the emperor is often characterized in a very critical and unappealing way, even if, on closer inspection, he appears rather capable. Much has been written on the Tacitean Tiberius, and it is not my aim to repeat all the arguments here or include a detailed study of his characterization; rather, I would like to point out some of the main characteristics as they emerge from Tacitus’ representation, and contrast them with Tiberius’ actual behaviour in the narrative, to highlight the discrepancy between the emperor’s image and deeds – a procedure which will also be employed for the two succession candidates. Tiberius is arguably the most conspicuous and elaborately portrayed character in the *Annals*, looming large in the whole of the hexad, even in episodes which do not centre on him, or even involve him at all. Indeed, Tiberius’ striking presence, even if often in the background, contrasts sharply with Claudius’ near-absence from many of the events revolving around him. As Walker states, “The succession-debate has established Tiberius as the central figure, a position which he never loses, despite the strong claims of Sejanus and Gemanicus on the reader’s attention. If he is not present in the major episodes, he is constantly appearing in the minor ones; and he is the subject of constant reference, both direct and oblique. His influence is traced in events which seem quite independent of him.”

Tiberius is also one of the most complex figures in Tacitus’ narrative, eliciting

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752 On Tacitus’ depiction of Tiberius, see in particular Pippidi 1944, 25-87 (together with the review by Balsdon 1946) and Griffin 1995; further Harrer 1920; Marsh 1931, Seager 1976 and Levick 1999a *passim*; Goodyear 1972, 37-40; Baar 1990; Koestermann 1963, 2.8-22; Syme 1958, 420-434; Ash 2013; Klingner 1969; Syme 1974; Morello 2006; Damon 2010b.

753 Walker 1960, 17-18, drawing attention to Tiberius’ non-involvement in many of the episodes narrated: much military and senatorial business is carried out by others such as his sons or Sejanus, while Tiberius himself spends a large part of his principate away from Rome; nevertheless, he appears omnipresent. Walker 1960, 17-22 even names the character of Tiberius as one of the three main strands of the Tiberian narrative, alongside the conflict for the succession and the operation of the *maiestas* law. Tiberius is also one of the few characters treated by Tacitus to be allotted an individual style of speaking: Martin 1981, 232; on Tiberius’ speeches and his portrayal through those, see Miller 1968, noting that one third of the dramatic speech in *Annals* 1 to 6 is given to Tiberius; Aubin 1985, 568-573; Sinclair 1995, 79-116; Wharton 1997.

754 See Keitel 1981 on Tacitus contrasting these two around the themes of knowledge/ignorance and control/passivity.

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divergent interpretations from modern scholars – but also from Tacitus himself. It is clear that on first sight, even if Tacitus does mention several of the emperor’s creditable deeds and traits, Tiberius is depicted almost entirely negatively, through a combination of direct critical comment (by Tacitus or focalizers in the narrative), extended treatment of contemptible deeds, the omission (or only very brief treatment) of praiseworthy actions, motives and evaluations, and the qualification and negative interpretation of admirable deeds (for instance through juxtaposition with less laudable acts).

Tiberius’ chief characteristic is without doubt that of disimulatio: of concealing his true nature and thoughts, and pretending different motives for his actions. This is not a Tacitean peculiarity: this trait is attributed to the emperor also in the other sources, and must have been part of the literary tradition by the time Tacitus came to write the Annals. But Tacitus goes further than other ancient accounts in making dissimulation the main theme of his whole Tiberian narrative, which is characterized by ubiquitous rumours and an atmosphere of se-

756 Ryberg 1942, esp. 385: ‘He does not fail to mention the emperor’s praiseworthy deeds, which can be taken out of their context and gathered into a very creditable record. But the motives are either passed over in silence, with no comment on their significance as to the emperor’s character, or, more often, they are in some way stultified by the context’; Woodman/Martin 1996, 319 (‘it is of course one of the features of Tiberius’ presentation that, no matter what he does, he cannot escape criticism’) and ad 3.4.7; Pippidi 1944, 39-44; Martin 1981, 229; Walker 1960, 82-157; Griffin 1995 passim. See also Walker 1960, 217-218 and Dunkle 1971 on the image of Tiberius as a tyrant; Brüere 1954, 176 notes the many similarities between Tacitus’ Tiberius and Domitian as portrayed by the Younger Pliny in his Panegyricus; Syme 1958, 422 on the influence of Domitian on Tacitus’ portrayal of Tiberius. On the sources of the Tiberian hexad and the negative literary tradition about Tiberius, see Borzsák 1970, 280-283; Syme 1958, 271-303 and app. 36-41; Martin 1981, 199-213; Sage 1990, 997-1017.

757 Tiberius’ disimulatio is referred to at 1.4.4, 1.5, 1.7.3-7, 1.11, 1.24.1, 1.33.1-2, 1.47.3, 1.52.2, 2.5.1, 2.26.5, 2.28.2, 2.29.2, 2.40.3, 2.42.1-3, 2.43.4, 2.44.2, 2.77.3, 3.3, 3.11.2, 3.14.3, 3.22.2, 3.31.2, 3.51.1, 3.60.1, 3.64.1-2, 4.1.2, 4.4.2, 4.19.2, 4.30.2, 4.40, 4.52.3, 4.53.3, 4.54.2, 4.57.1, 4.60.2, 4.71.3, 4.74.1, 5.1.3, 5.2.1, 5.3.2-3, 6.1.1, 6.2.4, 6.13.2, 6.15.2, 6.20.2-2101, 6.23.1, 6.24.3, 6.38.3, 6.46.5, 6.50; terms like species, imago, (dis)simulare, obtegere, praetendere, praetexere, quasi, tamquam, falsus and occulta are used frequently; Aubrion 1985, 175, 181-187, 192; Pippidi 1944 passim (calling it Tiberius’ ‘vertu maîtresse’, 48); Griffin 1995; Koestermann 1961, 341; cf. Santoro l’Hoir 2006, 23, 83-97; Baar 1990, 146-150; Aubrion 1985, 184 calls Tiberius ‘le symbole de l’hypocrisie mise au service de l’absolutisme’. The paragraph of Tiberius’ obituary at 6.51.3 is often interpreted as describing the gradual disclosure of Tiberius’ character, in particular his previously hidden vices, as a result of the removal of constraints in the form of close associates; but see Woodman 1989 for a different view.

758 Balsdon 1946, 168-169 (against Pippidi 1944, 66-87); Syme 1958, 421-423; this view is followed by most modern scholars.
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crecy and pretense.759 Tacitus matches his portrayal of the emperor and his age by an indirect writing style, full of innuendo – as has been noted, his style is much more suggestive in the Tiberian hexad than in the later Books of the Annals.760 Statements and imputations are often oblique, made through rumours and other kinds of indefinite focalization, or through the use of alternative explanations.761 Tacitus’ entire representation of Tiberius’ principate may be seen to match his characterization of the emperor himself.762 Other recurrent character traits of the Tacitean Tiberius are a fear, suspicion and dislike of Germanicus (along with a general tendency towards invidia), savagery, pride or arrogance, and lust.763 These characteristics are focalized through several different individuals and groups, including Tacitus as narrator, so they are represented as being shared by the greater part of society.

However, when studying the emperor’s representation more closely, Tiberius actually seems to do quite well. As mentioned before, Tacitus reports several instances of laudable behaviour and character traits, even if he often seems to dis-

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759 E.g. Koestermann 1961, 341; Griffin 1995; Baar 1990, 146-150 on dissimulatio not being a major thread in Suetonius’ and Dio’ portrait of Tiberius.
760 See in particular Ryberg 1942; further Walker 1960, 137, 158; Aubrion 1985, 167-8; Sinclair 1995, 63; Santoro L’Hoir 2006, 42-43. Santoro L’Hoir 2006, 50 speaks of ‘the pervasive ambiguity of Tacitus’ Tiberian narrative’. See also Ahl 1984 on suggestion, and Bartsch 1994 on innuendo and doublespeak as characteristic feature of the literature of Tacitus’ age.
761 Ryberg 1942; Pippidi 1944, 39-50; Ries 1969; Sullivan 1976; Whitehead 1979; Develin 1983; Sinclair 1991. This can be interpreted in different (not necessarily mutually exclusive) ways, for instance as an attempt on the part of ‘Tacitus the artist to produce an impression for which Tacitus the historian is not willing to take the responsibility’ (Ryberg 1942, 384; also Walker 1960, 158-161), or to adequately represent the state of the times: an atmosphere in which the truth is veiled, rumours are rife, there is a gap between appearance and reality, and public reputation is important – an atmosphere which could itself become the cause of events (e.g. Shotter 1989, 12-13; Damon 1999; Shotter 1968; O’Gorman 2000; see also Shatzman 1974 and Gibson 1998 on rumours as causes of events in Tacitus).
762 Cf. Daitz 1960, 47: ‘Tacitus chose his weapons to suit the literary terrain. Innuendo then must be interpreted primarily as a literary, and not an historical device.’
763 Dislike/fear/mistrust of Germanicus: 1.7.6, 1.33.1-2, 1.52.1, 1.62.2, 1.69.3-5, 2.5.1-2, 2.22.1, 2.26.5, 2.42.1, 2.43.4-5, 2.55.6, 2.59.2, 2.72.1, 2.77.3, 2.82.1-2, 3.3, 3.4.2, 3.5, 3.10.2, 3.11.2, 3.16.1, 3.17.2, 3.31.1, 4.1.1, 4.12.3, 4.17.2, 4.18-20, 4.52.2, 4.70.4, 5.3, 5.5, 6.7.2, 6.23.2-25.3, 6.40.5, 6.51.3; cf. Baar 1990, 19-31, 116-133. Savagery: 1.4.3, 1.10.7, 1.53.3, 1.72.2, 1.72.4, 2.32.4, 3.38, 3.51.2, 4.1.1, 4.42.3, 4.52.4, 4.57.1, 5.3.1-3, 5.5.1, 6.1.1-2, 6.6.1-2, 6.7.2, 6.10.2, 6.18.2, 6.19.2-3, 6.21.1-2, 6.23.2-25.3, 6.38.1-3, 6.39.2, 6.40.2, 6.51.3; cf. Baar 1990, 86-109. Pride/arrogance: 1.4.3, 1.8.5, 1.10.7, 1.33.2, 1.72.4, 2.37.1, 2.84.1, 3.59.4, 5.5.1, 6.13.2, 6.25.3, 6.46.2; cf. Baar 1990, 42-50. Lusts: 1.4.4, 3.37.2, 4.57.1, 6.1.1-2, 6.6.1-2, 6.46.5, 6.51.3; cf. Baar 1990, 69-75. invidia is attributed to him at 1.14.2, 1.80.2, 2.22.1, 2.26.5, 4.70.3, 3.16.2.
credit them immediately afterwards.\textsuperscript{764} In other cases, the following narrative itself shows Tiberius’ previous decisions or views to have been sensible.\textsuperscript{765} The secretive emperor is often depicted as seeing through others’ deception, and as displaying a keen insight into politics and reality.\textsuperscript{766} At times, Tacitus invites the reader to compare hostile views on Tiberius focalized by others (often unnamed groups) with statements in his own, narratorial voice, or the emperor’s actual behaviour as demonstrated through the narration of his deeds, suggesting that the rumours are unfair.\textsuperscript{767} Through the ostensibly critical portrayal, glimpses of a more favourable view on Tiberius – even admiration, as some scholars contend – on the part of Tacitus emerge.\textsuperscript{768} This accords with the line taken by most modern biographers, who describe the emperor as a generally capable administrator, albeit with some (grave) flaws.\textsuperscript{769} Griffin and Pelling interpret the Tacitean Tiberius as a kind of embodiment of the political system, or even the whole world, of the Principate, with Tiberius’ hypocrisy exemplifying the falsity of the Principate.\textsuperscript{770} Tacitus’ Tiberius, then, on a closer reading appears to be quite \textit{capax imperii}, but through reporting hostile

\textsuperscript{764} Passages in which Tiberius is seen to behave rather well: 1.47, 1.62.2, 1.72.1, 1.73?, 1.75.1, 1.75.2-4, 1.78.2, 2.26.2-5, 2.34.3, 2.36.4, 2.38, 2.47.2, 2.48, 2.49, 2.50, 2.86.2, 2.87, 2.88.1, 3.8.1, 3.12, 3.18.1, 3.22.4, 3.24.4, 3.28.4, 3.44.4, 3.47, 3.52.3, 3.56.1, 3.59.2, 3.60.3, 3.69.2-5, 3.72.2, 3.72.4, 3.74.4, 3.76.2, 4.6, 4.7.1, 4.11.1, 4.13.1-2, 4.15.2, 4.30.1, 4.31.2, 4.37-38, 4.55.2, 4.64.1, 6.2-5, 6.3.4, 6.5.2, 6.13.1, 6.15, 6.17.3, 6.32.3-4, 6.38.3, 6.45.1-2, 6.46.1.

\textsuperscript{765} For instance in his sending out his two sons to quell the mutinies rather than to go in person, in his recall of Germanicus from Germany, his censure of Germanicus’ burial of Varus’ soldiers who fell victim to Arminius’ troops, and of his entry of Egypt without permission; see Shotter 1968 \textit{passim}; Pelling 2012, 301-303; Koester-mann 1958, 350-351.


\textsuperscript{767} Cf. Pelling 2012, 290-291; Pelling 2010.

\textsuperscript{768} Syme 1958, 429, speaking of Tacitus’ ‘literary or artistic infatuation’ with the emperor; Martin 1990, 1522-1523, 1528; Griffin 1995; Woodman 1998c on a more favourable interpretation of Tacitus’ depiction of Tiberius’ accession; cf. Martin 1981, 118: ‘[T]he dissembling Tiberius is not a Tacitean invention. It is not surprising that, in spite of a natural bent towards scepticism, Tacitus accepted from the written tradition at his disposal much that seemed to emphasize or illustrate Tiberius’ deviousness. What is really surprising is the amount of evidence he records that makes it possible for us to come to a more balanced judgment on Tiberius.’

\textsuperscript{769} E.g. Seager 1972; Levick 1999a.

\textsuperscript{770} Pelling 2012, 302-306; Griffin 1995. By contrast, Woodman 1995 argues for interpreting Tiberius as a powerless victim of people around him (such as Livia and Sejanus); cf. 267: ‘The picture is that of an out-of-touch ruler, who is ignorant of the realities of power and compelled to rely on the advice of an influential adviser’.

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public opinion and impopular measures, and employing all kinds of insinuations, Tacitus suggests that he was in fact considered the opposite by the majority of the population.

2.3.2 GERMANICUS’ UNJUSTIFIED POPULARITY

By contrast, the man whom everyone in the narrative seems to regard as the best possible leader, Germanicus, is implied by Tacitus not to be so capable at all. In the first three Books, Tacitus creates a discrepancy between Germanicus’ image (in public opinion and the literary tradition), represented by Tacitus through various focalizers, and the reality (according to Tacitus) of the ineffectiveness of his actions, as conveyed indirectly by the narrative.

Germanicus’ widespread popularity and his characterization

As touched upon in the previous section, Tacitus’ Germanicus is very popular with various groups in society, who express their wish that he assume imperial power. Tacitus repeatedly uses terms such as favor and studia to denote the widespread enthusiasm felt for, and sought by, Germanicus, and sometimes his wife Agrippina, who is a significant factor in his popularity. Germanicus’ popularity derives from several features, such as his friendly and mild nature, expressed in the recurring attributes comitas, mansuetudo and clementia. Partly, it springs from his being the

771 1.31.1 (Germanic legions), 1.33.2 (the people), 1.35.3 (Germanic legions), 2.43.5-6 (the imperial court), 2.73.3 (the people).

772 Various focalizers draw attention to Germanicus’ popularity: 1.7.6: mirus apud populum favor (Tiberius), 1.33.2: favor et spes (Tacitus), 1.41.2: ad concilianda vulgi studia (Tacitus), 1.52.1: quod largiendis pecuniis et misione festinata favorem militum quaesitum, bellica quoque Germanici gloria angebatur (Tiberius), 1.69.4 <studia> militum quaecri (Tiberius, with reference to Agrippina), 2.41.3: favorem vulgi … plebis studiis … populi Romani amores (the people, with reference to Drusus and Marcellus, with whom Germanicus is compared); 2.59.1: multaque in vulgus grata (Tacitus), 3.4.2: studia honorum accensa in Agrippinam (Tacitus on Agrippina); 4.12.3: subnixam popularibus studiis (Sejanus on Agrippina), 4.57.3: cunctis laudatum (Augustus?); cf. 1.71.3.

773 Germanicus is credited with comitas in 1.33.2 (by Tacitus, probably; it may also be a report of people’s opinion), 1.71.3 (Tacitus), 2.13.1 (Germanicus’ soldiers), 2.55.1 (by Piso) and 2.72.2 (Tacitus or public opinion); with mansuetudo in 2.55.3 (by Tacitus) and 2.72.2 (Tacitus or public opinion); with clementia in 1.58.5 (Tacitus), 2.57.2 (Tacitus) and 2.73.3 (people); with tolerance in 2.13.1 (his soldiers) and 2.57.4 (Tacitus); furthermore, he is called mitis in 2.73.2 by the people. Suet. Cal. 3.1-3 and Dio 57.18.6-8 also stress his mildness and friendliness.
son of the esteemed Drusus the Elder, whose popularity and *civile ingenium* Germanicus inherits.774 Like his father, he possesses charms and *decus* – good looks or dignity.775 His descent from Drusus, whom people remembered – rightly or not – both as a great commander and as the champion of liberty, generates goodwill for Germanicus, but also hopes and expectations, both military and civilian.776 Apart from his descent from his biological father Drusus the Elder, Germanicus’ maternal lineage – reaching back to Augustus and Mark Antony – is emphasized.777 Moreover, his marriage to the granddaughter of Augustus, Agrippina the Elder, is a source of popularity, as are her fecundity and chastity, and their many children, which feature repeatedly in the narrative. On the other hand, Germanicus’ popularity reflects on his spouse and children before and after his death.778 Last, the fact that Tiberius dislikes Germanicus is said to have been an additional reason for people

774  The causal connection is made explicit in 1.33.2: *Drusi magna apud populum Romanum memoria, credebaturque, si rerum potitius, libertatem redditorus; unde in Germanicum favor et spes eadem. Germanicus’ civile ingenium: 1.33.2 (Tacitus) and 2.82.2 (popular rumours).

775  2.13.1 (his soldiers), 2.73.2 (people in Antioch); cf. Suet. Cal. 3.1 and Dio 57.18.6; and Vell. 2.97.2-3 on Drusus the Elder’s beauty. Note that later in the narrative, Germanicus’ son Nero Caesar is said to possess the *modestia* and *forma* worthy of a princeps vir (4.15.3) – terms which are also used of Germanicus in 2.73.1-3 (i.e. *formam, corpore decoro et medicum voluptatem*). Germanicus’ grandson Nero is, furthermore, also praised for his beauty in Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis* (e.g. at 4.30-32), particularly in contrast to Claudius’ aged features. And Tacitus also draws attention to the role which the ‘chance advantages of a lofty physique and a handsome appearance’ (15.48.3) have in producing popularity for C. Piso, conspirator against Nero later in the *Annals*. In the *Histories*, moreover, Tacitus had represented Titus as being considered *capax imperii* partly on the basis of his looks (*Hist. 2.1.2; see above, section 1.3.1 for more similarities between Titus and Germanicus), while Galba was ridiculed for his old physique (1.7.3).

776  Hope, *spes*, is in fact a word associated frequently with Germanicus in the narrative: 1.31.1 (by the Germanic legions); 1.33.2 (Tacitus), with the clear indication that the hope sprang from his descent from Drusus; 1.34.1 (Tacitus); 1.71.3 (Tacitus); 2.43.4 (Piso); 2.49.2 (Tacitus); 2.71.1 (Tacitus); 2.71.2 (Germanicus); 3.4.1 (the people); cf. O’Gorman 2000, 48. *Spes* is a term that is often used in the context of hopes for obtaining imperial power, e.g. in connection with Sejanus (3.29.4, 4.3.3, 4.7.2, 4.39.2, 4.39.3, 4.68.3), Agrippina (4.12.1, 6.25.1), Drusus Caesar (4.60.2, 6.10.2, the latter referring to the false Drusus Caesar) and Caligula (6.50.5).

777  1.42.3 (by Germanicus); 1.43.3 (Germanicus); 2.43.5 (the court/Tacitus); 2.73.2 (people); 4.57.3 (Augustus/Tacitus); see more elaborately below, section 3.4.

778  1.33.1-3 (Tacitus); 1.40.3 (Agrippina); 1.41.2 (Germanic legions); 1.42.1 (Germanicus); 1.44.1 (Germanic legions); 1.69.4 (Tiberius); 2.41.3 (Tacitus); 2.43.6 (Tacitus); 2.71.4 (Germanicus); 2.73.2 (people); 3.4.2 (people); 4.12.3 (Sejanus); 4.15.3 (senators); 4.53.1 (Agrippina); 6.46.1 (Tacitus); see below, section 2.4.2. Agrippina is even, surprisingly, prominently included in the formal introduction of Germanicus in the narrative; Ross 1973, 213. Even in the Claudian and Neronian Books, Germanicus’ popularity is still a valuable asset for his descendants: 11.11.2-12.1 and 12.2.3, and cf. Suet. Cal. 13.

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at the imperial court to support him (2.43.5). Germanicus’ popularity as the future successor to Tiberius, then, seems to be based mainly on who he is – his character and his ancestors such as the Elder Drusus, Augustus and Agrippina – but not so much on his own capacities or achievements.779 His military exploits are only rarely praised by characters in the narrative, whereas references to his political actions or influence are absent.780 Moreover, remarks and positive evaluations of Germanicus are focalized through different groups – the Senate, the people, the military, the imperial court – indicating that his popularity was very widespread.

The Tacitean Germanicus is in many ways portrayed as the opposite of his adoptive father Tiberius; at the same time, he is credited with several features with which his biological father Drusus the Elder, and his great-uncle Augustus are associated.781 For instance, Germanicus is mild, tolerant and friendly, free from resentment, while Tiberius is grisly and savage, and exhibits *invidia* towards others. The attribute of *comitas* is almost exclusively reserved for Germanicus in the Tiberian hexad: Germanicus is credited with it five times; Tiberius twice, but in both cases it is clear that it is feigned or displayed with ulterior motives; Drusus is once advised to display it, but turns it down resolutely and is stated to have a *promptum ad asperiora ingenium*; and both Vonones and Augustus are said to be *comis* or behave *comiter*.782 Whereas Tiberius is described as haughty and arrogant, it is the absence of arrogance which is noted in the case of Germanicus.783 Germanicus is believed to have a *civile ingenium* and is associated with freedom, whereas Tiberius’ *civilitas* is deliberately denied by Tacitus’ treatment of certain actions of the emperor that might have shown him as *civilis*; and the attribution of *superbia* to Tiberius further portrays him as the opposite of *civilis*.784 Augustus is also connected to *civilitas* in

779  Cf. Devillers 1993, 240-241. This is perhaps why the Tacitean Tiberius considers the *favor* shown to Germanicus as *mirus* (1.7.6), as not being based on any real achievements.
780  In 2.73.2 people comment that *neque minus proeliatorem, etiam si tementias aferit praepeditusque sit percussas tot victoriis Germanias servitio premere. quod si solus arbiter rerum, si iure et nomine regio fuisset, tanto promptius adsecuturum gloriam militiae*. However, this is only remarked after their praise for his gentle character and fecund marriage. Dio states that Germanicus became popular already during Augustus’ reign because he acted as advocate for many people (56.24.7 and 56.26.1), but this is not mentioned by Tacitus.
782  The passages are, respectively: 3.8.1 (Tacitus) and 6.50.1 (Tacitus); 1.29.3-4 (Tacitus); 2.2.4 (Tacitus); 1.76.4 (rumours).
783  1.33.2 (Tacitus); 2.72.2 (Tacitus).
784  Martin 1990, 1523; on *civilitas* and *comitas*, Germanicus’ qualities, as the attributes of a good emperor,
the *Annals*, as is Germanicus’ father Drusus the Elder. Germanicus is praised for his good looks and charms, but Tiberius is rumoured to be ashamed of his appalling appearance (4.57.2). Germanicus’ harmonious and fertile marriage stands out against Tiberius’ inclination towards unnatural lusts, and his open impulsiveness and emotionalism makes for a stark contrast with the emperor’s studied dissimulation. The difference between the two men is particularly clear in the context of kinship relations: whereas Germanicus’ reputation profits immensely from – is even to a large extent dependent upon – his ancestors, wife and children, Tiberius’ relationships with his relatives are more problematic, and do not redound to his popularity. As a result of these contrasts, the Tacitean Germanicus has often been interpreted as a foil to the emperor, highlighting the unpleasant sides of Tiberius by way of his own dazzling character.

**Germanicus’ idealized incompetence**

Although the contrasting characterizations of Germanicus and Tiberius certainly function to enhance both portrayals, it is not a matter of simply blackening Tiberius and whitewashing Germanicus. Rather, the comparison and the resulting differences draw attention to each man’s suitability for the emperorship. Whereas at first sight Germanicus appears as a popular and charming, somewhat republican-style hero, a more detailed examination of his behaviour and achievements as described in the narrative shows that Tacitus does not portray him as acting very efficiently, particularly during the mutinies. As several scholars note, ‘Germanicus’ impulsiveness, ineffectiveness, and sheer incompetence, in face of the mutiny and otherwise, are unequivocally and abundantly revealed in Tacitus’ narrative’.

and the opposite of *superbia* and *arrogantia*, Tiberius’ features, see Wallace-Hadrill 1982.

785 O’Gorman 2000, 49-50 draws attention to Augustus’ *civilitas* in the *Annals*; cf. Pelling 2012, 305 n.48. Velleius 2.97.2-3 calls Drusus the Elder civil, mild and beautiful and Suet. Cl. 1.4 also mentions Drusus’ *civils animus*.

786 Shotter 1968, 201. Although Germanicus himself does at times dissimulate, e.g. at 2.57.1-3 and 2.59.1; Aubrion 1985, 188 and Borzsák 1970, 285-286. Agrippina the Elder is called *simulationum nescia* at 4.54.1.

787 This is the subject of the next section (section 2.4).


789 Quote from Goodyear 1972, 240; the paradox is outlined by Pelling 2012, 289: ‘by his own deployment of detail, Tacitus encourages the reader to dwell on the most questionable actions [of Germanicus], and in that sense Germanicus clearly does invite appraisal. Yet Tacitus’ appraisal seems oddly positive, or at least strangely indirect in its negative elements’. Much has been written on Tacitus’ characterization of Germanicus and his
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handling of the mutiny in Germany involves histrionics, unsuccessful pretence, bribes, chaos and a lack of authority – not particularly the conduct of a capable general. Germanicus, for instances, tries unsuccessfully to placate the soldiers by forging a letter, which is immediately recognized as a fake (1.37.1); he threatens to kill himself (1.35.4-5); pays them money from his own funds (1.37.1-2); after restoring order among some legions, he passively allows the soldiers to dismiss and butcher any of their comrades and superiors whom they consider to be guilty, gladly relieving himself of the saevitia and invidia caused by his own lack of discipline, and shifting it onto the shoulders of his soldiers (1.44.2-5); he threatens to inflict ‘indiscriminate slaughter’ among the fifth and twenty-first legions if they do not restore their loyalty, and this ends in a chaotic massacre (1.48-49), but then weeps when he sees them slaughtering each other (1.49.2). The qualities which people love in the prince – such as his comitas and civilitas – actually do sometimes cause major problems in action. He does slightly better in his Germanic and Eastern campaigns later in Book 1 and Book 2, but there too, Tiberius’ criticisms at 2.26.2-5 and 2.59.2 are not unfounded.

behaviour during the mutinies and the Germanic campaigns and therefore my aim here is not to conduct a new analysis; rather I will make use of the many careful observations in e.g. Shotter 1968; Borzsák 1969 and 1970; Ross 1973; Rutland 1987; Pelling 2012; Devillers 1993; Fulkerson 2006; Williams 2009. Whereas earlier studies tended to interpret Tacitus’ portrayal of Germanicus as idealised and uncritical, Shotter 1968 has paved the way for a more nuanced assessment of his depiction. I generally agree with the interpretations and arguments put forward by Shotter 1968, Rutland 1987 and Pelling 2012, and will therefore cite them most often. As Borzsák 1970, 284 observes, even Germanicus himself acknowledges that he cannot live up to the examples of Caesar and Augustus (1.42.3).

791 Rutland 1987; Pelling 2012; he is indeed also (correctly, it seems, on the basis of the preceding narrative) criticized by unspecified omnes for his mollia consulta in 1.40.1. Ash 2012, 25, discussing Pelling 2012, stresses the importance of context: ‘Germanicus’ spontaneity and comitas, the very traits which lead him to give so weak a lead in the mutinies in Annals 1, are precisely the ones which enable him to function so constructively in the east, where showmanship and theatricality often get results.’ Fulkerson 2006 sees the Germanic mutiny in terms of a competition in the arousal of emotions between Germanicus and the mutinous soldiers, hence the difficulties in gaining control over them.
792 Shotter 1968, 200-204; Rutland 1987, 162-164; Devillers 1993, 232-238; Pelling 2012, 294 on his ability to improve; Koestermann 1957 and 1958 in detail about Germanicus’ exploits in Germany and the East. Cf. Goodyear’s puzzlement: ‘this picture of Germanicus tramping about by day and night and threatening to drown himself in a few inches of water or throw himself off non-existent cliffs may well seem to us downright ridiculous. Would it have seemed otherwise to a Roman? Is such the behaviour Romans expected of a hero? I can offer no adequate answer, and only repeat what I have earlier suggested … that [Tacitus’] characterization
There is, then, an apparent tension in the *Annals* between the generally favourable portrait of Germanicus as conveyed by the views of various focalizers, and his arguable incompetence arising from Tacitus’ narrative of his actions.\(^\text{793}\) This tension comprises a more critical evaluation of Germanicus: while the prince may appear as the perfect general and future emperor, Tacitus suggests that he may actually be much less *capax imperii* than his adoptive father, who is so widely criticized. Moreover, as noted in the previous section (2.2.4), Tacitus – in contrast to the other ancient sources – endows Germanicus’ behaviour during the mutinies with threatening connotations, with the result that the reader feels more understanding for the Tacitean Tiberius’ distrust of Germanicus and Agrippina. At this point, Tacitus diverges notably from other sources such as Suetonius and Dio, who report Germanicus’ widespread popularity without many qualifications, as well as Tiberius’ suspicion and dislike of Germanicus without any hint that it might be justified, thus casting Tiberius as simply an evil detractor of the beloved and ideal prince. Tacitus, however, is more nuanced: while conveying the then existing public enthusiasm for Germanicus, he also indicates the dangerous connotations and the implicit threats he incorporates; and while reporting criticism of Tiberius, he also repeatedly proves him right through his narration of events.\(^\text{794}\) Both Germanicus and Tiberius are more complex characters in Tacitus than in the other sources, the Tacitean Germanicus being valued less unequivocally positively, and Tiberius becoming a much more understandable figure.\(^\text{795}\) Moreover, this nuance allows for indirect reflection on the criteria employed by various focalizers in their judgments about suitability for the emperorship. Germanicus’ assets – his ancestry, mildness and charms – turn out to be irrelevant criteria for assessing his competence, whereas Tiberius’ more unattractive features may be considered to have little bearing on

\(^\text{793}\) Cf. Pelling 2012, 305 on Tacitus not reporting explicit negative assessments on Germanicus, but proceeding more indirectly to qualify his perfect image: ‘Tacitus has done enough in the narrative itself to suggest the necessary qualifications; there is no negative view because there was no similar strand of unpopularity.’

\(^\text{794}\) Cf. Shotter 1968; Borzsák 1970.

\(^\text{795}\) Cf. Pelling 2012, 302: ‘Tacitus is ... going out of his way to ensure that the insight of Tiberius, along with some reservations about Germanicus, should be sensed’ and 290-291: ‘There may be something in the view that we are supposed to contrast popular perceptions of Germanicus with the more dismal reality – just as often the converse is true with Tiberius, that malicious *rumores* are not a crude form of innuendo against the *princeps*, but rather invite the reader to consider the gulf between the malicious comment and the reality. With Tiberius we often sense unjustified unpopularity; here we would have a form of unjustified popularity.’
his ability to rule. Ultimately, this also amounts to an indirect condemnation of the majority of the population for their uncritical devotion to Germanicus and their hostility towards Tiberius.

This tension between appearance and reality, and its implications for the evaluation of the characters in the narrative, can further be interpreted on a higher level: not just as regards the emperorship itself, but with reference to the imperial world at large. As Pelling notes, Tacitus describes Germanicus’ character and behaviour in such a way as to make him a kind of personification of the older world of the Republic, out of touch with the realities and requirements of the Principate.796 And in the whole narrative, Germanicus is repeatedly connected to the past, for instance through rumours comparing him with predecessors, his own desire to visit historical places in the East, or his emulation of famous republican generals.797 Tiberius, on the other hand, is characterized by Tacitus in such a way as to embody the new Principate, through his character, decisions and his reliance on Augustan precedent.798 Through his characterization of these two men, then, Tacitus indirectly portrays Germanicus as attractive, but unfit for the world of the Principate; Tiberius, on the other hand, is depicted as suiting the times much better, despite his unpleasant features. As both Rutland and Pelling conclude, Germanicus’ intentions may be good and his qualities laudable in general, but in the circumstances of imperial Rome with all its concomitants – the character of Tiberius, the behaviour of the imperial Senate, the atmosphere of secrecy and dissimulation – Germanicus is misfitted and outmatched.799 As such, he is one of several characters used by the his-

796 Pelling 2012, suggesting that ‘we should … think of the whole world in which Germanicus moves, his style of fighting, leadership, and politics, as a contrast to the world and atmosphere of the principate, so devious and complex, so subtle and unsavory. Germanicus and his style serve as a sort of alternative, which helps to highlight what is distinctive about the principate itself.’ (292). O’Gorman 2000 ch. 3 discusses the interplay between past, present and future in connection with Germanicus and Agrippina; see also Gingras 1992 on Germanicus representing the Republic.
797 Pelling 2012, 298-300 lists several instances; see also Ash 2010b, 226-230; Shannon 2011 on intertextual parallels between Tacitus’ Germanicus and Livius’ Cossus.
798 See above, section 2.3.1. William’s suggestion (2009) that Germanicus embodies the Principate with its paradoxes and challenges, both for ruler and ruled, is interesting, but I am more convinced by the arguments of Pelling 2012. Devillers 2012b sees Tacitus’ description of Germanicus’ actions as a way to reflect on particular characteristics of the Principate and of imperial historiography.
799 Pelling 2012, 303-304: ‘Just as Tacitus can regard the principate as a regrettable necessity … so he can regard Germanicus rather as he regards the past, particularly the republican past: nostalgically attractive, brilliant, the sort of thing it is good to write about … but out of touch with the real needs of the modern world.'
tarian to invite reflections on the Principate as a system. The Tacitean Germanicus exhibits similarities to various other Tacitean figures, such as Cn. Piso and Arminius in the *Annals*, or Galba in the *Histories*. These individuals also seem to belong to a different time, and are, in the end, no match for characters like Tiberius, Otho or Sejanus, who understand the changed realities better, and know how to exploit this insight. The break between Books 3 and 4 may be taken to indirectly mirror this difference. As has been observed, Germanicus and Sejanus have parallel functions in the narrative of the *Annals*, in the sense that they serve as the major foils to Tiberius – Germanicus in the first three Books, Sejanus in Book 4 to 6. The end of Book 3 does not just conclude the ‘era of Germanicus’, but also exemplifies the demise of the last remnants of the Republic through the obituary notice and description of the splendid funeral of one of the most illustrious members of that world, Junia (3.76).

With the death of this last representative of the republican world, the new men of the imperial era take over: Book 4 opens with the rise of Sejanus. Furthermore, through his portrayal of Germanicus, Tacitus may be considered to contemplate the importance of chance in assigning posthumous reputations to individuals. As Borzsák remarks with regard to the parallel narrative functions of Germanicus and Arminius, ‘Am Ende der Lebenswege der beiden Helden, als Tiberius introduces many of the themes of the principate, both the distaste and the sense of reality. In the same way, Germanicus helps us to grasp the alternative, with his style of politics and his style of war. Brilliant, yes, but brilliantly anachronistic.’

800 Pelling 2012, 296 and 311-312 observes similarities between Germanicus and Piso as well as with Arminius; Borzsák 1970, 289-291 notes that, like Germanicus’, Arminius’ characterization is also ambiguous. As touched upon at various points in the previous chapter, the Tacitean Galba and Germanicus are linked to one another through their shared trait of ‘outdatedness’ and their contrasting expressions of this feature. Whereas Galba is strict, hierarchical, frugal, old and unattractive, and dissociated from any kind of *comitas*, Germanicus is affable and mild, young and good-looking, cultivates a personal relationship with his soldiers, has difficulties with preserving discipline (up to the point of power reversals such as in 1.49.4; cf. Woodman 2006, 257 and Pelling 2012, 283-284 n.5, 287 n.11 on Germanicus following rather than leading his soldiers), and hands out money from his private funds (1.37.1, 1.71.2, 2.26.1). Whereas Galba bravely offered his neck to his murderers, Germanicus threatens to plunge a sword into his own chest (1.35.4); and while Germanicus tries to shift the responsibility and *odium* for his shameful negligence onto his soldiers (1.44.3), Galba is blamed for the misdeeds of his advisers (1.6.1). See Santoro l’Hoir 2006, 96-97 on similarities between Germanicus and his brother Claudius.

802 Cf. Gingras 1992, 256: ‘The obituaryes contained in Book 3, then, were chosen with an eye to illustrating the Book’s central theme – the death of Republican *libertas* and the rise of a new society and new modes of obtaining power and position through *servitium* and *obsequium.*’
sich das Schicksal des Arminius erfüllte, läßt Tacitus den Leser erahnen, daß auch die auf Germanicus gesetzten Hoffnungen bloß *Illusionen* waren: im Besitze der Macht wäre auch die angebetete ‘Lichtgestalt’ zu einem Verräter der Freiheit geworden’. The high expectations attached to Germanicus, together with his premature death, encourage contemplation on how Germanicus would have turned out if he had lived long enough to succeed Tiberius. Indeed, various people are represented as speculating about this (e.g. in 2.73.3) and, as argued, Tacitus may be seen to contribute his own view on Germanicus’ capacities. However, on a broader view, his Germanicus raises important questions with regard to the deservedness or otherwise of reputations, and invites the reader to participate in some counterfactual thinking. Galba had been considered *omnium consensu capax imperii*, but he conclusively disproved that reputation by actually becoming emperor. What about Germanicus, who evidently was also considered an ideal future emperor: would he have managed to maintain his standing if he had been exposed to the difficulties of governing an Empire? Tacitus, as always, does not provide definite answers, but he does use his Germanicus to draw attention to various issues and questions which deeply concern him in all of his works.

### 2.3.3 DRUSUS’ SECOND PLACE

The Tacitean Drusus the Younger, contrary to his adoptive brother, does not enjoy popular favour, because he is less appealing, and because people’s dislike of his father Tiberius reflects badly on him. Through the narration of his actions, he is shown as rather efficient in dealing with the military and the Senate, but his reputation as successor does not profit from that.

*Drusus’ character*

In the *Annals*, Drusus the Younger is not as generally esteemed as his adoptive brother: terms like *favor* or *studia* are seldom used with regard to him, and he is criticized as often as he is praised – by contrast, for Germanicus, praise far outweighs censure, both in amount and in quality.’ As long as Germanicus is alive, his sole

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804  Praise for Drusus: 1.52.3 (Tiberius); 2.62.1 (authorial remark); 3.31.3-4 (senators/Tacitus); 3.37.1-2
adherent seems to be his own father, and Tiberius appears to favour Drusus mostly because he is his biological son.\textsuperscript{805} In public, however, when requesting tribunician power for Drusus, Tiberius adduces his age, experience – both military and civil –, behaviour and family life as justifications (3.56.3-4). Tacitus also credits him with an inborn nobility (1.29.1: \textit{nobilitate ingenita}) and agrees with Tiberius that Drusus behaved in a friendly way towards Germanicus’ children after the latter’s death (4.4.1, treated above, section 2.2.1). No other positive features are mentioned explicitly, but Tacitus does remark on the main reason for Drusus’ inferiority to Germanicus in popularity, in the view of the imperial court: his kinship relations. The princes officially have the same father, but Drusus’ equestrian maternal ancestry is considered embarrassing – especially when compared to the links with Augustus and Mark Antony of which Germanicus’ mother could boast – and his wife Livilla is surpassed by Germanicus’ spouse Agrippina in fecundity and fame (2.43.5-6).\textsuperscript{806} Moreover, Drusus’ relationship with Tiberius poses problems: whereas Germanicus had profited from Tiberius’ dislike of him – 2.43.5: \textit{Germanico alienatio patrui amorem apud ceteros auxerat} – Drusus experiences the disadvantages of his close connection with his father. He is charged with similar vices as Tiberius: \textit{adrogantia}, \textit{superbia}, a pretence of \textit{moderatio}, and \textit{saevitia}, while Germanicus is emphatically acquitted from those attributes – he is mild and affable, and escapes arrogance (2.72.2).\textsuperscript{807} Even Tiberius’ paternal affection for Drusus is questioned by rumours of the emperor’s involvement in his death (4.10-11), and by criticisms on Tiberius’ suspected lack of grief (4.8.2-9.1). Other criticisms of Drusus concern his harshness, which expresses itself in a roughness in speaking, strict measures during the

\begin{enumerate}
\item (senators); 3.56.3-4 (Tiberius); 4.4.1 (Tiberius + Tacitus). Negative assessment of Drusus: 1.76.3-4 (the people and Tiberius); 2.43.6 (the imperial court); 2.44.1 (Tiberius); 3.5.2 (the people); 3.8.2 (rumours/Tacitus); 3.59.2-4 (senators).
\item \textit{2.43.5: Tiberius ut proprium et sui sanguinis Drusum fovebat}; Tiberius also praises Drusus (1.52.3; 3.56.3) more earnestly than Germanicus (1.52.2); but cf. Suet. \textit{Tib. 52.1} on the absence of Tiberius’ affection for Drusus.
\item On the importance of imperial women in providing dynastic legitimacy, see Corbier 1995; also the next section (2.4) on kinship.
\item Arrogance, haughtiness, feigned modesty: 3.59.2-4: \textit{rectitatae et Drusi epistulae, quamquam ad modestiam flexae, pro superbissimis accipiantur. huc decidisse cuncta, ut ne iuvenis quidem tanto honore accepto adiret urbis deos, ingredetur senatum, auspicia saltem gentile apud solum inciperet. bellum scilicet, aut diverso terrarum distineri, litora et lacus Campaniae cum maxime peragrantem. sic imbui rectorem generis humani, id primum e paternis consiliis discere. sane gravaretur aspectum civium senex imperator fessamque aetatem et actos labores praetenderet: Druso quod nisi ex adrogantia impedimentum?}; cruelty: 1.76.4.
\end{enumerate}
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Pannonian mutiny, and delight at the bloodshed during gladiatorial shows.\textsuperscript{808} He is repeatedly represented as young, and once as unskilful due to his youth, even though he is only about three years younger than Germanicus.\textsuperscript{809} Moreover, Drusus is connected with (excessive) luxury.\textsuperscript{810}

Clearly, he is not considered the charming hero which his adoptive brother is portrayed to be; Tacitus even reports rumours that Tiberius wanted Drusus to show his saevitia to disgust the people (1.76.4). Tacitus explicitly states (\textit{non crediderim}) that he finds this hard to believe; on the contrary, he shows Tiberius trying to have Drusus gain favour – \textit{favor} and \textit{studia}, just like Germanicus had – and a good reputation with various groups. He sends Drusus to Illyricum to win the goodwill of the soldiers, presumably to balance Germanicus’ popularity with the military, and asks the latter to leave his brother some material for glory in Germany.\textsuperscript{811} In fact, many of the focalizers in the narrative seem to judge Drusus according to standards set by Germanicus: affability, charm, distinguished ancestry. It is notable that most of the negative assessments of Drusus as reported by Tacitus are situated in the part

\textsuperscript{808}  1.29.1: \textit{rudis dicendi} (focalizer: Tacitus); 1.29.4: \textit{promptum ad asperiora ingenium Druso erat} (Tacitus; with the note in Pelling 2012, 294, n.28; this is the passage where Drusus explicitly rejects an approach of comitas – his brother’s style); 1.76.3-4: \textit{quamquam vili sanguine nimis gaudens; quod in vulgus formidolosum et pater arguisse dicebatur … non crediderim ad ostentandam saevitiam movendique populi offensiones concessam filio materiem [sc. Tiberio], quamquam id quoque dictum est} (the people/rumours). He also has something of a temper: 4.3.2: \textit{animo commetior}. Cf. Dio 57.13.1-2 on Drusus’ cruelty and 57.14.9 on his temper; in the following chapter, he reports Drusus’ love of drinking and actors.

809  Woodman/Martin 1996 ad 3.8.2, who also note that Drusus’ youth is often contrasted with Tiberius’ age; 3.8.2: \textit{incallidus alioqui et facilis inuenta} (vs. the senilibus artibus of his father); 3.31.2: \textit{iuveni} (vs. Tiberius’ \textit{fmandae valitudini}); 3.37.2: \textit{iuvene}; 3.56.3: \textit{adulescentis}; 3.59.3: \textit{iuvenis} (vs. Tiberius as \textit{senex imperator}); 4.10.2: \textit{iuveniliter} (vs. \textit{senex} Tiberius). A similar rhetoric can be discerned in the frequent portrayal of Britannicus, only three years Nero’s junior, in terms related to youth; see the next chapter, section 3.1.4.

810  He is explicitly charged with it in 2.44.1 (by Tiberius) and 3.37.2 (the Senate); cf. Suet. Tib. 52.1. Moreover, as Woodman/Martin 1996 note, ‘more recently Drusus had presided over the meeting of the Senate in which \textit{luxus} had figured prominently (3.33.2) and he had been instrumental in the defeat of Caecina’s restrictive proposals (3.34.6), and his depiction at 3.8.2 (\textit{incallidus alioqui et facilis inuenta}) evokes Sallust’s description of Sulla (Jug. 95.3: \textit{callidus et amicitia facilis}) in a passage where the latter is portrayed as luxurious; this connection is reinforced by Drusus’ intervention in a senatorial dispute involving L. Sulla at 3.31.3-4 (Woodman/Martin 1996 ad 3.37.2).

811  2.44.1: \textit{Drusus in Illyricum missus est, ut sueseret militiae studiaque exercitus pararet}; that this is a reaction to Germanicus’ popularity is suggested by the similar phrasing of 2.5.1: \textit{Tibero haud ingratum accidit turbari res Orientis, ut ea species Germanicum suetis legionibus abstraheret} and the frequent references to the \textit{studia} in favour of Germanicus. Tiberius’ request that Germanicus \textit{relinqueret materiem Drusi fratri gloriae} (2.26.4), though interpreted by Germanicus as a pretext (2.26.5), may well be sincere.
of the narrative which is firmly dominated by Germanicus, i.e. before the end of the trial of Piso (3.19); after this, he relates only one instance of criticism. Similarly, four of the six occasions where Drusus is praised are located in the post-Germanic narrative period. It appears, then, that Germanicus takes the limelight as long as he is alive (either physically, or in the minds of people in the period of mourning and during Piso’s trial), while Drusus’ star only starts to rise when he is no longer forced to stand in his brother’s shadow.

**Drusus’ achievements in the narrative**

When examining Tacitus’ representation of Drusus’ conduct in the Pannonian mutinies, he comes off rather well, especially in comparison with the performance of Germanicus in the Germanic mutinies. He is harsh and severe, but – as the narrative shows – succeeds in imposing discipline and well-ordered punishment, unlike his brother.\(^812\) He is capable of turning opportunities offered by chance to his advantage, is satisfied with his achievements, and is praised by Tacitus for his military exploits in Germany.\(^813\) Furthermore, when Tiberius retires to Campania in AD 21, Tacitus names as one of the possible motives that he wanted Drusus to fulfill his consular duties on his own, probably to acquire the support of the Senate.\(^814\) And indeed, already the next sentence illustrates how Drusus managed to acquire goodwill by intervening in a personal dispute in the Senate.\(^815\) The following chapters, too, show him acting efficiently in senatorial dealings and thereby gaining popularity, up to the point that the Senate credits Drusus with one of Tiberius’ initiatives, and praises his appearances and behaviour as mitigating his father’s absence.\(^816\)

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\(^813\) 1.28.3: *utendum inclinatione ca Caesar et quae casus obtulerat in sapientiam vertenda ratus*; he shows the same ability at 3.31.3: *ae forte parva res magnum ad certamen progressa praebuat iuveni materiem apiscendi favoris.* He is content with the quelling of the mutiny: 1.30.5: *et Drusus non expectato legatorum regressu, quia praesentia satis consererant, in urbem redit.* cf. Germanicus’ dissatisfaction with his results and his unwillingness to return to Rome, desirous of greater victories (2.26.2-5); 2.62.1: *haud leve decus Drusus quaesivit inliciens Germanos ad discordias.*

\(^814\) 3.31.2: *Tiberius quasi firmandae valitudini in Campaniam concessit, longam et continuum absentiam paulatim meditans, sive ut amoto patre Drusus munia consulatus solus implet.* As Woodman/Martin 1996 *ad loc.* remark, it is the latter alternative which is borne out in the following narrative.

\(^815\) 3.31.3: *materiem apiscendi favoris.*

\(^816\) 3.31.2-4; 3.34.6; 3.36.4; 3.37.1-2; cf. Woodman/Martin 1996, 274-277 (‘[t]he narrative is punctuated by the successful interventions of Drusus’, 277). 3.37.2: *utramque in laudem Drusi tra-chē-batur: ab eo in urbe, inter coctus et sermones hominum obversante, secreta patris mitigari;* see Woodman/Martin 1996 *ad loc.* for a detailed
from the middle of Book 3 onwards, when the ‘era of Germanicus’ is closed, Drusus becomes more prominent and appreciated: he is allowed more narrative space, his actions are mentioned more often, and he receives more praise – the Senate even condones his tendency towards luxury (3.37.2). As Woodman and Martin remark, with Germanicus gone, ‘Drusus ... seems to be portrayed as having inherited the mantle of the approachable Germanicus’. 817 This popularity does not last too long, however. In the next year, when Tiberius requests the tribunician power for Drusus (3.56), the Senate’s reaction to this grant is not very welcoming: the celebrations proposed are said to derive from anticipation and sycophancy (3.57.1), while the senators’ genuine reaction – mentioned somewhat later – is a long complaint about Drusus’ arrogance in not returning to Rome to officially assume his new power (3.59.2-4). At Drusus’ funeral, the Senate and people only simulate grief, while secretly delighting in what they considered to be a success for the house of Germanicus (4.12.1). 818 Moreover, while the second half of Book 3 depicts Drusus as gradually ‘emancipating’ himself from his father and being favourably contrasted with him, it also, in the end, shows him as being alienated from Tiberius, when he complains about the growing influence of Sejanus with Tiberius at the expense of his own son. 819

All in all, Drusus appears to be portrayed as everything that Germanicus is not – and as not nearly attaining an equal level of popularity as imperial successor as his adoptive brother. Whereas Germanicus is mild, charming and friendly and wholly different from Tiberius, Drusus is harsher – but also more efficient, like his father. There seems to be a difference between the contexts in which the two brothers are

analysis.

817 Woodman/Martin 1996, 316. Playing up Drusus may also be a way to enhance the drama of his approaching early death.

818 In addition, the Senate’s disregard of Drusus’ tendency towards luxury may have more to do with their own less than exemplary behaviour in this respect; cf. for instance 2.33.

819 On Drusus and Tiberius in Book 3, and the more general theme of the interaction between fathers and sons in this Book which forms the background for their relationship, see the observations of Woodman/Martin 1996, 7-11, 274-277 and 316-317; Drusus is favourably contrasted with Tiberius in 3.37.2 (see Woodman/Martin’s 1996 note on interpretation), and in 4.7.1-2, Drusus crebro querens incolumi filio adiutorem imperii alium vocari. et quantum superesse, ut collega dicatur? Cf. Woodman/Martin 1996, 8-9: ‘Yet Drusus’ progress towards independence serves merely to underline paradoxically the extent to which he had learned from his father’s example. ... the lesson Drusus learns from his father’s repeated example is the avoidance of his public responsibilities in the capital’.
depicted: whereas Drusus is seen in action more elaborately in a senatorial, civil sphere, Germanicus is mainly portrayed as conducting military campaigns and interacting with soldiers, and is never represented as speaking in the Senate. Tiberius, however, seems to want to try to make Drusus more like his brother, by sending him to acquire military favour, and by emphasizing, in his request for *tribunicia potestas*, Drusus’ wife and children – precisely one of the main assets of Germanicus. Indeed, it has been observed that Drusus is not unlike Germanicus in some respects, for instance in his openness, but, more importantly, in Tacitus’ implicit reservations in considering Drusus suited to the world of the Principate and to the emperorship in particular: in the end, Drusus is outmatched by someone more appropriate to imperial politics, Sejanus.

### 2.3.4 THE INVISIBLE SUCCESSORS: TIBERIUS GEMELLUS, CALIGULA, AND CLAUDIUS

As argued in the previous section (2.1.2), Germanicus and Drusus are widely perceived as heirs apparent in the narrative, and it is mainly around them that the question of the succession revolves – even if they will never actually become emperor. After both of them have died (in 19 and 23 respectively), the expectations and popularity in the *Annals* shift to Germanicus’ sons Nero and Drusus Caesar, who are often mentioned together, but who will also pass away before Tiberius does.

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820 Drusus and the Senate: 3.22.4; 3.31.2-4; 3.34.6; 3.36.4; 3.37.2; 3.56.1-4; 3.59.2-4; 4.4.1; Drusus and military activities: 1.24-30 (mutinies); 1.52.3 (praise from Tiberius); 2.44-46 (Drusus sent to Illyricum); 2.62-64 (Drusus in Germany); 3.7.1 (Drusus to Illyricum); 3.11.1 (Drusus returns from Illyricum and postpones his ovation); 3.19.3 (Drusus’ ovation); in 3.59.3-4, the senators ridicule Drusus’ military occupations (see note in Woodman/Martin 1996 ad loc.); moreover, the references to Drusus’ military activities are much shorter than, and are always put in the shade by, those of Germanicus. Of course, Germanicus was away in the East during his year as consul (AD 18) which limited his opportunities for conducting senatorial business; but in 2.41.2 Tacitus states that Germanicus celebrated his Germanic triumph in June, and he is still present in Rome at 2.51, so he did spend some time in the city.

821 Pelling 2012, 298 and n.34; Drusus is very open in his enmity towards Sejanus (e.g. 3.8.1, 4.3.2 and 4.7), unlike his father, who hides his dislike of Germanicus; cf. Woodman/Martin 1996, 10: ‘the voice of the Senate at 3.59.3 makes the very real point that a powerful but irresponsible Drusus might not have been in the best interest of the *res publica*’; see also idem, 274-275 on the chapters in AD 21 exploring what might have happened if Drusus had turned out sole ruler.

822 E.g. 4.8.3-5 (when Tiberius entrusts both to the Senate, notably calling them *Germanici liberi* but com-
their deaths (in 29 and 33) the succession question becomes much less important in the narrative. Tiberius’ two grandsons, who will be named as joint heirs in Tiberius’ will, and who will actually succeed to his position, hardly receive any attention. Drusus’ son Tiberius Gemellus barely comes into play as potential successor, and Germanicus’ last surviving son Caligula is not very prominent either. This may partly be a matter of age and public advancement: around the time of Drusus’ death, both Nero and Drusus Caesar were already legally adults, and they held several public and religious offices in the years before their declaration as public enemies. Gemellus was much younger than the children of Germanicus and only assumed the toga virilis after Tiberius’ death; Caligula, although not significantly younger than his brothers, is not recorded as having made many public appearances until AD 30, when he was transferred to Capri and allowed to take the toga of manhood there at a rather late age. There were, therefore, not many public appearances to write about, and there may not have been much information available on the private activities of Gemellus and Caligula under the reign of Tiberius. Moreover, the historical Tiberius himself does not seem to have promoted either of them as his intended successor: he never issued coins for Germanicus’ or Drusus’ sons, although the birth of Drusus’ twins was celebrated on one coin, and the production of dynastic monuments dwindles noticeably after the death of Drusus.

Nevertheless, Tacitus’ hindsight would have allowed him to foreshadow their future succession to Tiberius to a greater extent than he actually does. In addition to the passages mentioned above (note 823), which hint at Caligula’s later hypocrisy, the only clear reference to the future course of the succession is at the very end completely disregarding their brother Caligula), 4.17.1 (when priests honour Drusus and Nero together), 4.60.2-3 (Drusus conspiring against Nero).

823 Caligula is briefly mentioned several times (1.42.2, 1.44.1, 1.69.4, 5.1.4; there are more mentions, but these are not relevant for the issue) and more extensively at 6.20.1 (on his accompanying of Tiberius on Capri, his ‘monstrous temper’ and hypocrisy), 6.45.3 (his hypocrisy again, and engagement to Macro’s wife Ennia) and 6.50.4-5 (Caligula ready to assume power during Tiberius’ final illness). Tiberius Gemellus is never mentioned by name, but referred to at 2.84.1.

824 Nero Caesar was born in AD 6 and Drusus in 7 or 8; their tirocinia took place in respectively 20 and 23; see Kienast 1996, 81. Their public advancement is mentioned in 3.29.1-3 and Suet. Tib. 54.1; see also Hurlet 1997, 551-572 on their careers.

825 Gemellus was born in AD 19 or 20, Caligula in 12; see Kienast 1996, 83, 85 for their dates of birth and their careers.

of the Tiberian hexad (6.46), where Tacitus describes Tiberius’ deliberations about the succession: *dubitavit de tradenda re publica*. Tiberius, trying to make up his mind about the transmission of power after his death, is portrayed as hesitating between three potential candidates: first the Younger Drusus’ son Tiberius Gemellus and Germanicus’ son Caligula, and, after them, his nephew Claudius. His biological grandson has his preference, being closer to him in blood and affection, but he is too young; Caligula, of the right age and widely popular, is resented for that very quality by his grandfather, and is moreover unscrupulous and hypocritical.827 In fact, Caligula’s character is presented as the very reason for Tiberius’ hesitation: *gnarum hoc principi, eoque dubitavit*. Note that Caligula is moreover depicted as holding the *vulgi studia* – a formulation reminiscent of the popularity of his father, which he has clearly inherited. Indeed, his two (now dead) brothers Nero and Drusus Caesar had also been portrayed as enjoying the fame of their late father.828 Tiberius even (*etiam*) briefly considers Claudius, but discards the idea: although he is closely related and of the right age and intentions, he is considered mentally incapable.829

While age, backing and mental health seem reasonable considerations in the choice of a successor, personal affection (or the absence of it, in the case of Caligula) appears a less relevant and more selfish criterion. It is, however, in keeping with the impression arising from 1.10.5, where the *prudentes*, discussing Augustus’ choice for Tiberius, juxtapose personal affection and care for the state as (presumably) legitimate motives in the selection of a successor. Again, like in the case of Augustus and the *dettirima comparatio* he allegedly desired with his successor, Tacitus adds another hint of selfishness to Tiberius’ thoughts. He states – in his authorial voice – that Tiberius did not want to select someone from outside the *domus Caesarum*, fearing that the reputations of Augustus and the Caesars in general would be in-

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827  6.45.3-46.1: [C. Caesarum] nihil abnuentem, dum dominationis apisceretur: nam etsi commotus ingenio, simulationum tam in sinu avii perdicerat. Gnarum hoc principi, eoque dubitavit de tradenda re publica, primum inter nepotes; quorum Druso genitus sanguine et caritate propior, sed nondum pubertatem ingressus, Germanici filio robur iuventae, vulgi studia, eaque apud avum odii causa. Note that phrases similar to *robur iuventae* are also used as arguments for Nero’s and Britannicus’ readiness for imperial power at 12.25.1 and 12.65.3.

828  3.29.3; 4.15.3.

829  6.46.2: *etiam de Claudio agitanti, quod is composita aetate, bonarum artium cupiens erat, imminuta mens eius obstitit*. On Claudius’ perceived physical and mental impairments, see e.g. Sen. *Apocol*. 1.1-2, 4.1, 5.2-3, 6.2, 7.3, 8.1-2, 11.3, 11.5, 14.2; Suet. *Cl*. 2-9, 15.4, 38.3, *Ner*. 6.2, 33.1; *Dio*: 60.2.1-2, 60.2.4; *Levick* 1990, 13-15 on his physical and mental disabilities.
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sulted.\textsuperscript{830} He continues by explaining that Tiberius was more concerned with glory among posterity than with the goodwill of his contemporaries.\textsuperscript{831} As was the case with Augustus, the emperor is depicted as less occupied with providing a capable administrator for the Empire (or at least one admired by the population) than with posthumous fame. In the end, Tiberius refrains from making a choice, although he is depicted as correctly predicting that Caligula will eliminate Gemellus, obtain sole rule, and reign in an evil fashion (6.46.3–4).

This seems a somewhat biased representation of events when compared with the other ancient sources and with what we may conjecture about the historical Tiberius’ considerations. Suetonius and Dio do pay attention to the two boys who would eventually succeed Tiberius, and to the emperor’s more active involvement in directing the transmission of his power. Tacitus, for instance, does not mention that Tiberius did in fact make a choice: as Suetonius tells us, he chose to appoint his two grandsons in his testament ‘heirs to equal shares of his estate, each to be sole heir in case of the other’s death’.\textsuperscript{832} Suetonius furthermore states that Tiberius advanced Sejanus so that the latter could eliminate the sons of Germanicus and secure the succession for Tiberius’ biological grandson Gemellus, while Dio draws attention to Tiberius’ promotion of Caligula.\textsuperscript{833} The Tacitean Tiberius appears remarkably passive and indecisive in the face of the succession. He also emerges as more selfish in his considerations than in Suetonius’ biography. Suetonius presents a similar picture of Tiberius’ considerations in choosing a successor, hesitating between his two grandsons Caligula (of whose character he disapproved) and Tiberius Gemellus (whom he considered to be born from adultery, a detail not in Tacitus), but disliking both of them, and already fearing that the Empire would eventually suffer under the rule of Caligula.\textsuperscript{834} Suetonius, however, does not convey any impression of selfishness in writing about Tiberius’ hesitations; this impression may therefore be Tacitean. Dio’s account stands midway between those of Tacitus

\textsuperscript{830} 6.46.2: \textit{sin extra domum successor quaereretur, ne memoria Augusti, ne nomen Caesarum in ludibria et contumelas vererent, metuebat.}
\textsuperscript{831} 6.46.2: \textit{quippe illi non perinde curae gratia praesentium quam in posteros ambitio.}
\textsuperscript{832} Suet. Tib. 76.1: \textit{eo testamento heredes aequis partibus reliquit Gaium ex Germanico et Tiberium ex Druso nepotes substituitque in vicem.}
\textsuperscript{833} Suet. Tib. 55; Dio 58.8.1-3; Velleius is mostly silent on the topic.
\textsuperscript{834} Suet. Tib. 62.3; Cal. 10.2-12, 19.3 (where he states, however, that Tiberius was, at some point, more inclined towards Gemellus). Apart from the suspicions of adultery, Suetonius adds another detail: that Tiberius’ astrologer Thrasyllus influenced the emperor’s thoughts and decision about the succession.
and Suetonius, and may indeed be based on both of them: he states that Tiberius rejected Gemellus as his successor because of his age and the suspicion that he was not a real son of Drusus, and tended towards Caligula as his successor, hoping that his own misdeeds would be forgotten in comparison with the future ones of Caligula – the motif of the *detrimenta comparatio* again. Modern scholars allow for a more balanced judgement of Tiberius. Levick argues that the historical Tiberius deliberately planned to have Gemellus and Caligula as joint successors, which seems a very reasonable interpretation of Tiberius’ will, and does not preclude the possibility that Tiberius might have wished Gemellus to succeed, but could not disregard Caligula’s older age, official positions and the support from both the people and the Praetorian prefect Macro.

In any case, as a result of Tacitus’ downplaying of Caligula, the question of the succession to Tiberius as depicted in the *Annals* is a largely counterfactual one, in which the actual course of the succession is hardly treated, and the focus is firmly on what could have happened, but did not: the hopes attached to Germanicus, the cautious optimism shown to Drusus after his brother’s death, the joyful promises attached to Nero and Drusus Caesar – and, importantly, the betrayal of those expectations by the premature deaths of all of these men. This kind of ‘virtual history’ – expressed in themes such as the deception of expectations, the disproving or not of (undeserved) reputations, speculations about what might have been – is a recurrent feature of Tacitus’ historical thinking in both the *Histories* and the *Annals*. Apart from conveying the atmosphere of a particular moment in time – in which such expectations may have been widespread, and which it was the historian’s duty to record – it also functions as a reflection on the haphazard nature of imperial succession, and the role of chance in determining who would be the next emperor.

Similar contemplations about the role of chance are connected to Tacitus’ representation of Claudius in the Tiberian *Annals*. Tacitus never names Claudius as a potential successor, even if he is a member of the imperial family and Tacitus knows that he will eventually become emperor. On the contrary, Claudius is kept

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835 Dio 58.8.1; 58.23.1-4; in 57.22.4b, however, he states that Tiberius hated Gemellus because he was a bastard. Levick 1999a, 291-292 n. 38 lists the accounts of the ancient sources; Philo (*Leg. 24f*) and Josephus (*AJ* 18.188, 211f, 214f, 219) state that Tiberius preferred Gemellus.


837 Andrew Stiles (Merton College, University of Oxford) is currently preparing a doctoral dissertation on expectations of the future under the Julio-Claudian dynasty.
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completely out of sight in the Tiberian hexad; although he is Germanicus’ brother by blood, he is consistently neglected as such.\(^{838}\) Of course, this impression may be heavily distorted due to the loss of the whole narrative of the reign of Caligula, in which he may have figured more prominently. However, Claudius’ near-invisibility in the Tiberian hexad is in accordance with his historical role under Tiberius, as can be reconstructed from other sources. Claudius was considered mentally and physically incapable of performing public duties, and consequently was deliberately kept in the equestrian class until the principate of Caligula, who chose him as his colleague in the consulship in AD 37.\(^{839}\) He is not included in the list of members of the imperial family in the Tabula Siarensis, and although he features in the SCPP, he is only mentioned by name without any further elaboration, and in the last place, even after Germanicus’ children.\(^{840}\) Indeed, Tacitus, in reference to the process of drawing up the gratiarum actio of the SCPP, states that Claudius was originally overlooked, and only appended after questions by the senator L. Asprenas (3.18.3).\(^{841}\) Claudius’ limited public role may have resulted in a lack of interest on the part of the contemporary chroniclers and historians, and thus in a dearth of records on Claudius’ activities under Tiberius.

This is one possible explanation for his absence in the Tiberian hexad; another is that Claudius simply did not do anything Tacitus considered important enough to mention, since he played no active role in either politics or imperial domestic intrigues. It is also possible, however, that Tacitus intended to mirror in his narrative the suddenness of Claudius’ historical elevation to the throne. Indeed, after

\(^{838}\) Both in 2.71.1 and in 3.5.2, the frater of Germanicus must refer to Drusus (‘the ineffectual Claudius is ignored’, Goodyear 1981 ad 2.71.1; Claudius is mentioned briefly as Germanicus’ brother in 3.2.3, but only as accompanying Drusus, who takes pride of place). Other (brief) references to Claudius in the Tiberian hexad: 1.54.1; 3.3.2; 3.18.3-4; 3.29.4; 4.31.3.

\(^{839}\) Until 37, Claudius was only made augur and sodalis Augustalis, but had no other official functions; see Suet. Cl. 2-6 (esp. 2.1). His nephew Caligula promoted Claudius and designated him as consul twice, but probably not from any real approval, but rather as a way of gaining popularity or perhaps even as a joke; in any case, Claudius continued to be mocked under Caligula (Suet. Cl. 7-9). On Claudius’ marginal role prior to his accession, see Levick 1990, 11-20; Osgood 2011, 9-11. Claudius does not appear on imperial coinage until the reign of Caligula.

\(^{840}\) TS 1.6-7; SCPP 132-151; Eck/Caballos/Fernández 1996, 245-247. Cf. Griffin 1997, 258: ‘we find Claudius thanked, not before or after his and Germanicus’ sister, but after his nephews: indeed his name is very awkwardly inserted into praise appropriate to such young persons, but not to a man of thirty.’

\(^{841}\) See Woodman/Martin 1996, 191 and Lebek 1999 on comparison between Tacitus and the SCPP in this matter.
recounting the accidental omission of Claudius from the SCP, Tacitus reflects on the mockeries of human affairs: although Claudius – whom ‘fortune was keeping in hiding’ – was the last person to be marked out for the imperial office in terms of reputation, hope and veneration, he would eventually become emperor.842 In this way, Tacitus again draws attention to the ‘messiness’ of imperial succession: even though power was held firmly by one family, and emperors might prepare for the transmission of their power by elaborate arrangements, the actual succession was still inevitably subject to chance – as the fate of Germanicus makes so painfully clear.

2.3.5 THE NON-DYNASTIC ALTERNATIVE: THE CAPACES IMPERII OF 1.13

As argued above, Tacitus’ representation of the emperor and his heirs apparent suggests that, in the opinion of the majority of the population, actual ability to govern the state is not very relevant in gaining popularity or in being considered suitable for the emperorship – other criteria such as illustrious ancestry and an appealing character are implied to be of greater significance. Tacitus reinforces this impression – and further strengthens his implicit condemnation of these priorities – by suggesting that there are other possible, more sensible criteria and candidates for the succession, but that these are never considered real alternatives. He does this through his depiction of the so-called capaces imperii: four men whose aptitude and willingness to become emperor are said to have been discussed by Augustus in the last days of his reign.843 The context of this story, which seems almost an aside to the

842  3.18.4: mihi quanto plura recentium seu veterum revolvo, tanto magis ludibria rerum mortalium cunctis in negotiis obversantur. quippe fama spe veneratione potius omnes destinabantur imperio quam quem futurum principep fortuna in occulto tenebat – the last phrase presumably being a reference to Claudius’ hiding behind a curtain when he was acclaimed emperor. Woodman/Martin 1996 ad loc. pointedly note that ‘Tacitus, imitating his character Messalinus … had omitted even the name’. Malloch 2013, 1 makes the interesting point that Claudius’ ‘liminal presence under Tiberius prefigures his marginality in his own reign’.

843  1.13.2: quippe Augustus supremis sermonibus cum tractaret quinam adipisci principem locum suffecturi ab-nuerent aut impares vellent vel idem possent suparantique, M. Lepidum dixerat capacem sed aspernantem, Gallum Asinium avidum et minorem, L. Arruntium non indignum et, si casus daretur, ausurum. de prioribus consentitur, pro Arruntio quidam Cn. Pisonem tradidere. The sources of this story are difficult to determine: Goodyear 1972 ad loc., issue (iii). In the remainder of this paragraph, I will, for the sake of convenience and convention, use the
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main narrative, is Tiberius’ reluctance to assume sole imperial power, and the senators’ attempts to persuade him. Tacitus states that several senators caused offence with their remarks, in particular Asinius Gallus and L. Arruntius, who were already suspected of (imperial) ambitions by Tiberius. He then introduces Augustus’ deliberations, which most likely refer to the emperor’s last discussions with Tiberius, warning him for possible rivals. This, in turn, accounts for Tiberius’ alleged suspicions of these individuals, which are – incorrectly – described as culminating in Tiberius’ elimination of all of them except Lepidus. Gallus, whom Augustus, according to Tacitus, considered ‘greedy and inferior’ (avidus et minor), is hated by the Tacitean Tiberius for his defiance, and because he had married Tiberius’ ex-wife Vipsania and was therefore suspected by him to have ‘intentions beyond those of an ordinary citizen’. Arruntius, ‘not unworthy and, if the chance were given, likely to dare it’ (non indignum et, si casus daretur, ausurum), is suspected on account of his wealth, readiness, ‘exceptional qualities’ and matching reputation with the public. Tacitus states that some sources name Cn. Piso instead of Arruntius, but no further information is given about him here; and M. Lepidus, whom Augustus thought ‘was capable but would spurn it’ is not further discussed either. Since Tacitus represents Tiberius as perceiving these four capaces as threats to his position, these features – a connection to the imperial family, certain character traits, a good reputation and sufficient funds – may be considered to constitute important requirements for potential successors or rivals to the throne.

Besides the direct remarks about Tiberius’ suspicions and his removal of these term capaces to refer to these four men, even if not all of them are actually considered to be capaces imperii by Augustus.

844 Goodyear 1972 ad loc., issue (i). If the sermones are interpreted in this way – rather than as Augustus’ thoughts on possible candidates for the succession after his death – it is logical that Augustus does not include any members of the imperial family, such as Germanicus or Drusus, in his list of potential capaces. See also O’Gorman 2006 on reading 1.13 in the context of virtual history.

845 1.13.3: omnesque praeter Lepidum variis mox criminibus struente Tiberio circumventi sunt; see Goodyear 1972 ad loc. on the truthfulness and implications of this statement.

846 1.12.4: nec ideo iram eius lenivit, pridem invisus, tamquam ducta in matrimonium Vipsania, M. Agrippae filia, quae quondam Tiberii uxor fuerat, plus quam civilia agitaret Pollionisque Asinii patris ferociam retineret; see Bosworth 1977 on Tacitus’ portrayal of Gallus.

847 1.13.1: post quae L. Arruntius haud multum discrepans a Galli oratione perinde offendit, quam<quam> Tiberio nulla vetus in Arruntium ira: sed divitem promptum, artibus egregis et pari fama publice, suspectabat.

848 Cf. Goodyear 1972 ad loc., citing Woodman: ‘precisely those qualities which were regarded as virtues under the Republic are or can be represented as highly dangerous under the Principate.’
four men, Tacitus also uses other methods to suggest that the *capaces* were real threats to the emperor’s power – and hence actual alternatives to Tiberius and his heirs apparent, Drusus and Germanicus, and, more generally, to the practice of dynastic succession. First, whereas Tacitus mentions them as *capaces* in this context, the other ancient sources do not: none of them relate any contemplations by Augustus on imperial rivals. Suetonius does not include any of Tacitus’ four *capaces* in his lives of Augustus and Tiberius, and whereas Dio does mention Asinius Gallus by name in the context of Tiberius’ accession, he does not connect him to (Tiberius’ suspicions of) imperial ambitions. Tacitus, then, is the only author to stir up connotations of (Tiberius’ fear of) rivalry during the accession debate. However, for an understanding of Tacitus’ narrative of the senatorial meeting and Tiberius’ reluctance to assume the emperorship, the digression on the *capaces* is not, strictly speaking, necessary. Tacitus makes clear that Gallus’ and Arruntius’ pleas that Tiberius assume power are the main reason for his irritation, and that his underlying distrust was only additional; and indeed, after the digression other senators continue petitioning him, until Tiberius, weary of everyone’s entreaties, at last gives in (1.13.5). To show how Tiberius was finally overcome by the senators’ pleas, Tacitus could easily have left out Augustus’ contemplations. The fact that he did not, and that he introduced these thoughts about the succession at this particular point – when the Senate talks about Tiberius formally becoming emperor – implies that he wants to represent Tiberius’ position as being (at least potentially) challenged by other contenders.

Furthermore, Tacitus repeatedly brings up these four men in the rest of the Tibe-

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849 Suet. *Tib*. 24, Vell.Pat. 2.124 and Dio 57.2 do not mention these contemplations. Suet. *Aug*. 100.2 in fact recounts some of the proposals which Tacitus attributes to the *capaces*, but without including their names. Dio does name Arruntius, Piso and Asinius in his history, but never in the context of imperial rivalry; Tiberius’ hatred of Gallus as referred to in the accession debate at 57.2.5 is attributed to the latter’s bluntness, his marriage to Vipsania and his claims on Tiberius’ son Drusus as his own. In Dio’s version, it seems more of a personal hatred, arising from Tiberius’ affection for his ex-wife and son (Devillers 2009, 158); cf. Suet. *Tib*. 7.2-3 on his emotional attachment to Vipsania. See Goodyear 1972 *ad loc.* on possible source relationships between the accounts of Tacitus and Dio.

850 *Contra* Goodyear 1972 *ad loc.* (mentioning a suggestion by Crook), who argues that Tacitus’ mention of Gallus and Arruntius (supposedly taken directly from the *acta senatus*) prompts him to tell this story, and that it is perfectly appropriate here, and that there seems to be nothing more to it. On the accession, see also Woodman 1998c.

851 1.12.2: *perculsus improvisa interrogatione*; 1.12.3: *vultu offensionem coniectaverat*; 1.12.4: *nec ideo iram eius lenivit, pridem invisis*; 1.13.1: *L. Arruntius haud multum discrepans a Galli oratione perinde offendit.*
rian narrative: they (re)appear more often than any other non-imperial individual, except for Sejanus.852 They are, moreover, conspicuous in other ways. M. Lepidus is given exceptional attention through a chapter-long speech in oratio recta and unequivocal praise by Tacitus himself.853 L. Arruntius, too, receives a special treatment through Tacitus’ positive depiction of his suicide and his correct prediction of the disasters of Caligula’s reign.854 He is, moreover, presented as an influential senator, arousing suspicion and hatred from Tiberius, Sejanus and Macro at various points in the narrative, and eliciting praise from Tacitus.855 Asinius Gallus is represented as incurring the emperor’s dislike due to a lack of political tact, (unintentionally?) offending proposals, and suspicions of rivalry.856 And Cn. Piso, of course, plays a leading part in what may be considered one of the major episodes of the Tiberian

852 Woodman/Martin 1996 ad 3.11.2. The most frequently mentioned is Asinius Gallus; then follows Lepidus, then Arruntius; Cn. Piso is the capax playing the largest role in the Tiberian narrative in terms of the amount of text dedicated to him, due to his behaviour as governor of Syria and his following trial (Syme 1955, 27). For the occurrence of Gallus: 1.8.3, 1.76.1, 1.77.3, 2.32.2, 2.33.2-4, 2.35.1-2, 2.36.1-4, 3.11.2, 4.20.1, 4.30.1, 4.71.2, 6.23.1, 6.25.2; Arruntius: 1.8.3, 1.76.1, 1.79.1, 3.11.2, 3.31.3, 6.5.1, 6.7.1, 6.27.3, 6.47.3-48.4, 11.6.2; Lepidus: 2.48.1, 3.11.2, 3.35.1, 3.50.1-51.2, 3.72.1, 4.20.2-3, 4.56.3, 6.5.1, 6.27.4 (see Syme 1955 on his identification); Cn. Piso: 1.74.5, 2.35.1-2, 2.43.2-4, 2.55-58, 2.69-82, 3.8-19, 3.24.1, 6.26.3 (see Syme 1956 on disambiguation).

853 4.20.2-3: hunc ego Lepidum temporibus illis gravem et sapientem virumuisse comperior: nam pleraque ab saevis adulationibus aliorum in melius flexit. neque tamen temperamenti egebat, cum aquabili auctoritate et gratia apud Tiberium viguerit. unde dubitare cogor, fato et sorte nascendi, ut cetera, ita principum inclinatio in hos, offensio in illos, an sit aliquid in nostris consilii licetique inter abruptam contumaciem et deforme obsequium pergere iter ab initio ac periculos vacuum. Lepidus is often considered by modern scholars as the embodiment of Tacitus’ ideal of senatorial behaviour under an emperor, as he exhibits the kind of ‘golden mean’ attitude between servility and truculence which Tacitus also praises in his father-in-law Agricola (cf. Agr. 42.3-4 and Oakley 2009a). See Sinclair 1995, 164-184 on Lepidus.

854 6.48.2-4; cf. Tacitus’ confirmation documento sequentia erant bene Arruntium morte usum.

855 E.g. 6.27.3 (where Germanicus is prevented from going to the province entrusted to him as governor; nothing is said about Tiberius’ motives, but in Hist. 2.65.2 fear is adduced as the reason). His potentia in the Senate is remarked upon by Cotta Messalinus in 6.5.1; he is praised by Tacitus for his sanctissimae artes in 6.7.1, and in 11.6.2 by Silius as being among those ad summam provectos incorrupta vita et facundia. He is attacked both by Sejanus (Dio 58.8.3, probably the same incident as alluded to in 6.7.1) and by Macro (6.47.3) and names their enmity as one of his motives for committing suicide in 6.48.1-3. On Arruntius’ life and career see Rogers 1931.

856 E.g. 1.12.4 (plus quam civilia agitaret ); 2.36.1 (et certamen Gallo adversus Caesarem exortum est and haud<ed> dubium erat eam sententiam altius penetrare et arcana imperii temptari; see Devillers 2009, 159 n.23); 4.71.2; Tiberius’ suspicions of Gallus’ adultery with Agrippina in 6.25.2, which may have had political implications (see Shotter 1971, 454-455 and cf. 4.53.2 with Martin/Woodman 1989 ad loc. and 4.40.3); on Gallus, see Shotter 1971, Bosworth 1977 and Devillers 2009.
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hexad: Germanicus’ eastern command, his death and the subsequent trial of Piso. His depiction in this episode is significant because it touches on various themes of the Tiberian narrative: the popularity of Germanicus, the atmosphere of rumours, secrecy and dissimulation, and the incompatibility of ‘republican senatorial principles’ with the imperial system.  

And then there is the highly significant moment at which these four men are introduced: at a point in the narrative where Tiberius’ position is presented as still weak, and his succession to Augustus not yet affirmed. As touched upon at various points before, the opening chapters of the Tiberian narrative create the impression that Tiberius’ power is contested, that his succession was not self-evident, and that there were alternative candidates for the emperorship. Chapter 1.3 depicts Tiberius as a successor only by default and through crime; 1.4 reports criticism on Tiberius and introduces Agrippa Postumus as a contender for the throne; 1.5-6 strengthen the impression of criminal causes for Tiberius’ succession and magnify the threat posed by Agrippa; 1.7 has Tiberius worry about the reasons for his succession and the possibility of a coup by Germanicus; 1.10 introduces the story about the deterrima comparatio; and then in 1.13 the story about the capaces appears. All this, at the beginning of Tiberius’ reign, implies that, in AD 14, there would still have been a possibility that imperial power was not going be transmitted within Augustus’ own family, to Tiberius, and eventually Drusus and Germanicus. This, as argued above (section 2.3.1), is an unjustified insinuation, not just historically, but, more importantly, also with regard to what Tacitus tells us in the rest of his narrative. The imperial succession is presented as being perceived as fully dynastic and the

858 The importance of Agrippa Postumus in these chapters is strongly exaggerated with respect to the historical evidence; Koestermann 1963 ad loc. and 1961, 333; Goodyear 1972 ad loc.; his prominence is usually seen to be ‘designed to lend greater weight to his murder as the first action of the new reign’ (Martin 1990, 1508); cf. Syme 1958, 306-307. Levick 1999a, 56-66 and Pettinger, 2012 however, consider Agrippa to be a more serious danger.
859 Cf. Wiedemann 1996a, 204-205: ‘[i]t may be more than a coincidence that two of those named were the fathers of men who were later themselves to lay claim to the Principate. The son of Marcus ... Aemilius Lepidus ... was first trusted, and then [205] executed, by Caligula; Lucius Arruntius ... adopted as his own son Camillus Scribonianus, who was to rebel against Claudius in 42; and various Julio-Claudian emperors felt themselves threatened by men called Piso. Whatever lies behind the anecdote, it raises the question what the source would be from which an alternative leader might derive his authority. Tacitus’ account is intended to suggest that at the beginning of Tiberius’ reign, there still existed political figures whose power was independent of the backing of the princeps.’
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activities of the members of the domus Augusta, in particular the two heirs apparent Drusus and Germanicus, receive a great deal of attention, while the capaces are not mentioned in people’s talks about the succession to Augustus in 1.4, and will not be considered later in the context of the succession to Tiberius either.

By depicting the capaces as he does, then, Tacitus achieves two things. First, he instills in the reader’s mind the impression that Tiberius’ position is being challenged from his accession onwards – an impression which might not be true, but which is sustained throughout the hexad. Furthermore, Tacitus offers the reader alternative criteria and alternative candidates for the emperorship, some of which he even – a rarity in his writings – introduces with unambiguous praise; at the same time, he makes clear that these alternatives do not stand any chance against the members of the imperial family when it comes to the succession. In doing so, he draws attention to, and questions, the overriding importance of kinship and dynasty in the transmission of imperial power, at the expense of potentially more important considerations, such as ability. O’Gorman also offers an interesting interpretation, examining this passage in the context of the Roman suasoriae and the modern concept of virtual history. She argues that Tacitus interweaves the narratives of the Histories and the Annals with a virtual history of the Pisonian Empire, as an imaginary alternative to the Julio-Claudians. In doing so, she argues, Tacitus indirectly represents the Principate as the inevitable political system after Augustus, in which the only possible variation is who occupies the post of emperor, the Julio-Claudians or the Pisones; Tacitus’ virtual Pisonian dynasty is thoroughly

860 It is notable that even in his obituary, Tiberius is paired with others who either restrain him or help him rule; even in his last mention he is not the undisputed sole ruler of the Empire; see Martin 1981, 139-143, Woodman 1989 and Martin 2001 for interpretations of the obituary. See also the next section (2.4.4) on Germanicus and Agrippina challenging his position; and cf. Kraus 2009, 105: ‘Whether based in fact or paranoia (not always his own!), Tiberius is constantly throughout the hexad in counterpoint with men who may – or could – or might – replace him.’ Note that some formulations in this passage conjure up the spectre of civil war: e.g. the ‘quo usque patieris, Caesar, non adesse <c>aput rei publicae?’ (1.13.4; cf. Cic. Cat. 1.1.1) and plus quam civilia agitaret (1.12.4; cf. Luc. BC 1).

861 Interestingly, Devillers 2009 interprets the four capaces as each embodying a different kind of senatorial behaviour under the Principate. Asinius is too keen for power and lacks political tact, thus incurring the hatred of the emperor. Piso and Arruntius both start off by playing along imperial politics quite well, but one is destroyed by getting entangled in dynastic affairs, while the other becomes progressively more disillusioned with imperial rule. The only capax able to sustain himself under the Principate is Lepidus, who is not too avid, not too closely connected to the court, and not too pronounced in his views on imperial power.

862 O’Gorman 2006.
imperial.\textsuperscript{863} She suggests that the passage about the \textit{capaces} may be regarded as ‘reflecting on the question: ‘What if Augustus had considered successors outside his immediate family?’’ and that the ‘Julio-Claudian dynasty is not, from this perspective, determined in advance.’\textsuperscript{864} While I agree to her other observations, I would, however, conclude that, in the end, purely by the fact that all the Pisones in Tacitus’ narratives actually fail to obtain imperial power, Tacitus represents the Julio-Claudian dynasty as firmly established.

Tacitus, then, when writing about the candidates for the imperial succession, creates a deliberate contrast between the opinions of various focalizers and his own representation of these individuals through the narration of their deeds. Inviting the reader to confront these different perspectives with one another, he implies that those individuals who are widely regarded as good successors or emperors may actually not be so \textit{capaces imperii}, and that the qualities which are generally considered important in a successor have little to do with the candidate’s actual ability to be a good emperor – indeed, that some individuals who are praised for their behaviour are never even considered as potential successors because they are not connected to the imperial family. As such, Tacitus represents succession as based on personal motives and irrelevant criteria rather than on merits and abilities and shows, through his narration, how this produces undesirable results.

\textsuperscript{863} O’Gorman 2006, 284: ‘By choosing a virtual history that is imperial rather than republican, moreover, Tacitus makes a further political point about the principate: its emergence is not entirely contingent upon the existence and actions of the individual who happens to hold the position of princeps, but rather it is deeply embedded as a mode of political thinking and political desire in the aristocracy and plebs of first-century AD Rome.’\textsuperscript{864} O’Gorman 2006, 297.
2.4 Kinship

So far, it has been argued that kinship is represented by Tacitus as an important factor in the issue of succession to the throne, both for the emperor and for the other characters in the narrative. This section examines the matter of kinship in greater detail, investigating the different values attached to kinship by blood and through adoption. Moreover, it treats the ways in which the main characters are associated with their relatives and capitalize on their kinship connections, the consequences this has for the question of their perceived entitlement to imperial power, and the resulting tensions between Tiberius on the one hand, and Germanicus and Agrippina on the other.

2.4.1 Kinship by Blood and Through Adoption

The Romans did not distinguish between adoption and consanguinity as far as legal rights were concerned: adopted children held the same rights as biological offspring with regard to, for instance, the inheritance of property.\(^{865}\) Tacitus’ narrative, however, shows signs that not all kinds of kinship connections are considered equally genuine or valid, both by the characters and by Tacitus himself. More specifically, it suggests that kinship by blood (consanguinity) is considered more genuine and valuable than kinship through adoption.

\(^{865}\) *Inst.* 1.107, 2.136, 2.138; Gardner, 1998, 117.
Kinship relations and kin terms

One way to approach this issue is to examine Tacitus’ use of kin terms with regard to different kinship relations in the narrative. Kin terms – such as pater, avia, or gener – are used to place one character in relation to another one, usually primarily to inform the reader of the kinship connection between these individuals. Often, however – especially in the case of an author so sensitive to the use of language as Tacitus – the use of kin terms has further implications. When the nature of the relation between certain characters is already known to the reader, for instance, the use of a kin term – which is then, strictly speaking, not necessary for the reader’s understanding – may have the effect of emphasizing the family connection, for whatever purpose. Repeated use of kin terms with regard to a particular character may serve to cast him explicitly in the context of family relations, defining that person as someone to whom kinship and ancestry are important; we will see that this is the case with Germanicus. By contrast, not or only rarely designating a character with kin terms when describing his dealings with his relatives may be part of a strategy – by Tacitus the narrator or his characters – to downplay his connection to them. Furthermore, the use of a particular kin term instead of another one when there is an alternative – as is usually the case when people are related to each other in various ways, through consanguinity, marriage or adoption – is often suggestive. Kin terms, then, are a subtle yet important method of suggestion, and the frequency and contexts in which they are used by Tacitus are relevant to our understanding of his representation of imperial kinship.

The consanguineous kinship relations within the imperial family are denoted

866 When Tacitus narrates Livilla’s associations with Sejanus and their plot against Drusus, for instance, he first introduces her as uxor eius Livia and soror Germanici (4.3.3); this is enough for the reader to be able to situate her in the imperial family and understand her ancestry and her relation to Drusus. When he comments on her adultery with Sejanus, however, Tacitus adds that Augustus was her great-uncle and Tiberius her father-in-law, and her children were Drusus’ (4.3.4: atque illa, cui avunculus Augustus, socer Tiberius, ex Druso liberi, seque ac maiores et posteros municipali adultero foedabat). These are facts that the reader could have inferred by himself on the basis of the prior information; the function of these kin terms is to draw a contrast between Livilla’s elevated ancestry on the one hand, and the low birth of Sejanus and her own base conduct on the other. By emphasizing her family connections, the outrage of her behaviour is underlined.

867 Such as in Augustus’ reference, in a letter to Livia quoted by Tiberius, to Claudius as nepos tuus, although Augustus was related to Claudius as well (Suet. Cl. 4.1).

868 This is the case when, for example, Tiberius designates Gaius and Lucius as nepotes rather than filii of Augustus, thereby ignoring their adoption and their political importance (3.6.2).
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by Tacitus with kin terms considerably more often than adoptive connections. The kin relations that are explicitly stressed as family bonds through the use of kin terms are mainly those around Germanicus (with his children, his father Drusus and his grandparents), as well as the parental bonds between Tiberius and the Younger Drusus, and between Tiberius and his mother Livia – all consanguineous relations. The connections for which the family aspect is downplayed by the avoidance of kin terms are the parental bond between Augustus and Tiberius, and that between Tiberius and Germanicus – both adoptive. As such, blood relationships are depicted in family terms much more often than adoptive connections, suggesting a difference in perception. The emphasis on the ‘family aspect’ of consanguinity is particularly strong in the case of Germanicus and his family, whose connections are denoted relatively often with kin terms. Germanicus, Agrippina and their children are denoted with 155 kin terms in the Tiberian narrative, while Drusus, Livilla and their children receive only 68 terms. The members of Germanicus’ domus, then, are denoted with significantly more kin terms than those of Drusus’ house. To some extent, this is due to a greater general attention to Germanicus and his circle: they occupy more space in the narrative, in amount of text, than the members of Drusus’ house, so there are more ‘opportunities’ to use kin terms. But even when taking this into account, it is a choice on Tacitus’ part to represent the members of Germanicus’ circle more emphatically in the context of family relations. This may also be observed, for example, in the fact that Germanicus’ grandparents are mentioned with kin terms ten times, even though their role in the narrative – both their active participation and the number of words devoted to them – is very limited.

869 The relationship between Tiberius and his son Drusus the Younger is denoted with 24 kin terms, that between Livia and Tiberius with 26, that of Germanicus and his blood-relations (Drusus the elder, Antonia, his children, his grandparents, Tiberius as his uncle) with 35; the marriage of Germanicus and Agrippina receives 18 kin terms. This count is based on an investigation of the total of 266 kin terms used by Tacitus in his Tiberian narrative. As every kin term features at least two people (in the case of pater, both the father and the son are implied, even though only the father is explicitly denoted by the term), the total number of kin terms is lower than the total number of times that characters are denoted with kin terms. In this count, I have not made a distinction between the person denoted by the kin term and the person implicated in the relation.

870 Augustus/Tiberius: 6 terms, Tiberius/Germanicus: 12.


872 Germanicus and Livia: 1.33.1, 2.14.1, 3.3.3, 3.17.2, 3.17.2 (Livia as avia) and 1.33.1, 3.17.2 (Germanicus as nepos); with Octavia: 4.57.3 (Germanicus as nepos); with Mark Antony: 2.43.5, 2.53.2 (Mark Antony as avus). In all cases except 3.17.2, the terms are used in a comment by Tacitus.
Tacitus’ use of kin terms appears at times to contrast markedly with the other ancient sources. In particular, the small number of kin terms designating the adoptive relation between Augustus and Tiberius is striking. Augustus, in the *Annals*, is represented by Tacitus as Tiberius’ political predecessor, rather than his father – a strong contrast with the emphasis put (by kin terms) on the parental relationship between Tiberius and his mother. In the instances where Tiberius and Augustus are called father and son, the kin term is often used for a particular reason.\(^{873}\) This stands in stark contrast with the epigraphic and numismatic sources from Tiberius’ reign, where Tiberius is commonly referred to as *divi filius*; the underrepresentation of the parental relationship between Augustus and Tiberius is therefore probably a Tacitean construction – and one that has significant consequences on the level of the narrative, as will be seen.\(^{874}\)

Similarly, Tiberius is seldom mentioned as the father of Germanicus, and kin terms denoting their adoptive parental tie are infrequent (12) compared to the number of kin terms used to describe the relationship between Tiberius and his natural son Drusus (24), who is much less prominent than Germanicus in the narrative. Considering the amount of text devoted to the (tense) relationship between Germanicus and his adoptive father, their connection is greatly underrepresented.

\(^{873}\) Note that Augustus is always *pater*; Tiberius is never *filius*, except in 1.3.3, which, strictly speaking, is not part of the Tiberian narrative. The other instances are 1.6.1: *patris iussa simulabat* (with reference to the murder of Agrippa Postumus, where *patris* stresses the irony of the absence of filial piety by Tiberius: Woodman 1995, 266); 1.73.3: *scriptis [sc. Tiberius] consulis non ideo decretem patri suo caelum, ut in aerniciem civium is honor verteretur* (Tiberius is perhaps claiming the exclusive rights to the interpretation of Augustus’ legacy, placing filial piety above the law?); 3.12.1: *patris sui legatum atque amicum Pisonem fuisse* (perhaps Tiberius justifying his friendship with Piso on the ground of his ‘inheritance’ of affection from Augustus); 4.39.2: *benevolentia patris Augusti* (Sejanus, wanting to marry Livilla, employs ‘a most appropriate form of *captatio benevolentiae*’; Martin/Woodman 1989 ad loc.); 4.40.5: *lo<n>ge antisse patris mei amicitias* (Tiberius responds to Sejanus’ reference to Augustus); 4.52.2: *Tiberium ... sacrificantem patri* (ironical again: Tiberius’ parental bond with Augustus is stressed when Agrippina claims to be the true descendant of Augustus).

\(^{874}\) All of Tiberius’ coins name him *divi filius* (Claes 2013, 52); the SCPP names Tiberius as son of Augustus in lines 4 and 86. Of course, as Inger Kuin points out to me, Tacitus has no need to emphasize Tiberius’ relation to Augustus, whereas imperial coins do have a clear legitimating purpose in the context of Tiberius’ position. However, since Tacitus does link some characters to Augustus, and presents others as stressing their relationship to him (most notably Agrippina), the absence of kinship terms to indicate the relationship between Tiberius and his adoptive father is notable. Cf. Rose 1997, 22: ‘Unlike Gaius and Lucius Caesar, Tiberius’ connection to Augustus and the Julian family was legal rather than consanguineous, and the coinage, inscriptions, and monuments produced during his [Tiberius’] principate appear to have been carefully signed to connect the emperor’s family with the Julian gens.’
with regard to kin terms.875 Again, this contrasts notably with ‘official’ documents such as the SCPP or the Alexandrian edict of Germanicus, in both of which Tiberius is explicitly denoted as the father of Germanicus, as well as with material evidence and even with coins minted under Caligula, where Germanicus is linked to Tiberius and Augustus.876 Consequently, in the Annals, the connection between these two characters is represented relatively rarely in the light of kinship when compared to the other main relationships of Tiberius (with Drusus and Livia) and Germanicus (with his parents, wife, grandparents and children). This may reflect the lack of familial affection between adoptive father and son as constructed throughout the narrative. It is, moreover, reinforced by Tacitus’ context-dependent attribution of kin terms, which implicitly depicts the adoption of Germanicus as a political façade. As observed by Nipperdey and Goodyear, Tacitus systematically distinguishes between the original blood-relationship between Tiberius and Germanicus, and the more recent adoptive one, through the use of kin terms. They are described as uncle and nephew (their biological relationship) by Tacitus and other people talking about them, but are called father and son (their new, official connection) only when they themselves are speaking or present. In other words, when the ‘political façade’ of the adoption has to be kept up in public or official circumstances, their adoptive terms are used; but when people can speak freely, they can regard the adoption as the sham that it is.877 It may be added that when the biological terms are used,

875 Even when adding the nine instances where Tiberius is referred to as the patruus of Germanicus or Germanicus as Tiberius’ filius fratris, emphasizing the biological instead of the adoptive relationship, their connection is minimized.
876 SCPP 32, 60, 124, 127, 154, 156; Oliver 1989, 65-69 no. 17; CIL 13.1036 from the arch at Saintes; RIC I² Gaius 35, 43, 50 (references from Hekster forthcoming and Claes 2013, 52). Remarkably, the TS presents a different picture: there, Germanicus is mainly linked to his biological father Drusus the Elder, rather than to Tiberius; see Hekster forthcoming. Edwards 2012b argues that the ‘official’ documents from Tiberius’ reign suggest Tiberius’ dependency on Germanicus for the continuation of the dynasty. 877 Woodman/Martin 1996, 101 on ‘the general rule in T. that the blood-relationship is used in narrative and in speeches about Tib. and Germanicus but not addressed to them (e.g. 3.3, 17.2, 31.1), while the adoptive relationship is used in their own speeches or in those addressed to them (e.g. 12.3),’ with Goodyear 1972 ad 1.33.1: ‘Nipperdey acutely observes that in the narrative of T. and in speeches about Tiberius and Germanicus, but not addressed to them we hear of their blood relationship (2.5.2, 2.43.5, 3.3.3, 3.5.2, 3.17.2, 3.31.1, 6.24.2), while in speeches of Tiberius and Germanicus themselves or in other speeches which are addressed to them we hear of their adoptive relationship (1.40.2, 1.42.4, 2.71.1, 3.12.5). The only exception is 2.14.4 patris patruique vestigia, where Germanicus needs to mention both Drusus and Tiberius. So consistent a difference can hardly be fortuitous. Its explanation, I think, is that T. regards the adoption as a political façade, and will neither rec-
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this is often in the context of criticism of the bad relations between Tiberius and Germanicus, whereas the adoptive terms are mainly used in positive evaluations of their relationship. 878

_The values of consanguinity and adoption_

In the use of kin terms, then, there is a difference between adoptive and consanguineous relationships, despite their legal equivalence: blood-ties are more frequently described in the sphere of kinship and family. A closer look at the text itself substantiates this impression. At different occasions, Tacitus uses the word _sanguis_ to stress the fact that the kinship relation in question is one by blood. 879 Several of these passages suggest that a blood-connection is a strong relationship, or that it generates a more powerful kind of affection than adoptive ties. The idea that _propinquus sanguis_ creates a bond or obligation between persons is voiced by Germanicus, urging his friends on his deathbed to avenge him, and next by Tiberius asking Piso’s relatives to defend him according to their capacities. 880 Deviations from this expectation are

878 Biological: 1.33.1 (authorial focalization, Tiberius’ hatred of Germanicus); 2.5.2 (idem); 2.14.4 (Germanicus’ focalization, but exceptional, because a distinction is needed between Drusus and Tiberius); 2.43.5 (authorial, Tiberius’ estrangement from Germanicus); 3.3.3 (authorial, Tiberius keeping Antonia at home during the ceremonies for Germanicus); 3.5.2 (rumours, criticism on Tiberius’ failure to meet Germanicus’ ashes on their return to Rome); 3.17.2 (rumours, criticism on Tiberius’ hatred against Germanicus’ family); 3.3.1 (authorial; Tiberius’ dislike of Germanicus); 6.24.2 (Drusus Caesar, accusing Tiberius of murdering his nephew); cf. Koestermann 1963 _ad_ 1.33.1. Adoptive: 1.42.1 (Germanicus on his reverence for Tiberius); 1.42.2 (Germanicus, claiming more respect from the soldiers on the basis of his being the _imperator_’s son); 1.42.4 (Germanicus, on reporting about the mutinies to Tiberius); 1.47.2, twice (Tiberius’ thoughts, on his sons as helpers); 2.44.1 (Tiberius, considering himself safer with both his sons commanding legions); 2.51.2 (Tiberius, being happy that his sons command such respect from the Senate); 2.57.4 (Piso, remark on Germanicus’ status as the son of a _princeps_ rather than of a king); 2.71.1 (Germanicus, asking his friends to inform his father and brother of his death); 2.82.2 (rumours, criticism on Augustus’ and Tiberius’ behaviour towards their sons); 3.2.1 (authorial, the orders of Tiberius with regard to the last offices to be rendered to Germanicus); 3.12.5 (Tiberius, on his grief on Germanicus’ death).

879 By contrast, _sanguis_ is only used three times in the second half of the _Annals_, where the word _adoptio_ is more frequent. The word _sanguis_, besides indicating actual blood, can also refer to ‘blood regarded as running through a family, race, etc. and expressing relationship, parentage, or descent’, ‘blood-relationship, consanguinity’, and hence to ‘a person standing in blood-relationship; offspring, progeny’ (_OLD_ 8a, 8b and 10).

880 2.71.2: _si quos spes meae, si quos propinquus sanguis, etiam quos invidia erga viventem movebat, inlacrimabant quandam florentem et tot bellorum superstitem multebri fraudce cecidisse_; 3.12.6: _si quos propinquus sanguis aut fides sua patronos dedit, quantum quisque eloquentia et cura valet, iurante percilitantem_ (cf. Woodman/Martin 1996 _ad_
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considered noteworthy: people are surprised that Dolabella assists in a prosecution of a man of his own blood, and Tiberius praises Drusus for taking such good care of Germanicus’ children, even though they were not his own. Tiberius himself is described as feeling more affectionate towards his son and grandson by blood than towards his adoptive offspring. Moreover, the domus of Drusus and Germanicus are seen as distinct and opposed to each other, even though they were brothers by adoption and both belonged to the house of their common father. The blood of Augustus is mentioned various times: by Tacitus describing how Livia was connected to him through their grandchildren, by the people calling Agrippina the sole blood of Augustus, and by Agrippina herself, accusing Tiberius of murdering Augustus’ descendants and calling herself ‘the offspring of his heavenly blood’. While the first passages discussed above associate consanguinity with affection and obligation or pietas, these last three also place it in the context of claims to power and legitimacy: Augustus’ blood apparently provides special status or authority. References to blood(-ties) are associated with words like proprius (2.43.5, 4.8.4), verus (4.52.2), solus (3.4.2), stressing the genuineness and uniqueness of consanguinity.

Adoption, on the other hand, is sometimes relegated to a background position compared to blood descent, or not mentioned at all. It is seen to be unusual or

loc. for resonances of Germanicus’ speech). In 4.75.1 Tacitus notes Cn. Domitius’ propinquus sanguis in connection with his marriage to Agrippina the younger.

881 4.66.2: Publilam Dolabellam socium delationis extitisse miraculo erat, quia ... suum sanguinem perditum ibat; 4.8.4: precatusque sum, quamquam esset illi propria suboles, ne secus quam suum sanguinem foveret attolleret ... conformaret.

882 2.43.5: Tiberius ut proprium et sui sanguinis Drusum fovebat; 6.46.1 Druso genitus [sc. Tiberius Gemellus] sanguine et caritate propior.

883 E.g. 2.84.2, 4.12.1; see above, section 2.2.2.

884 5.1.2: nullam posthac subolem edidit sed sanguini Augusti per coniunctionem Agrippinae et Germanici adnexa communes pronepotes habuit; 3.4.2: studia hominum accensa in Agrippinam, cum deus patriae, solum Augusti sanguinem, unicum antiquitatis specimen appellarent; 4.52.2: non in effigies mutas divinum spiritum [sc. Augusti] transfusum: se imaginem veram, caelesti sanguine ortam.

885 As Saller 1984, 340 notes, Tacitus’ phrasing at 6.51.1 (but also 1.4.3) suggests that ‘his mother’s and maternal grandfather’s adoptions did not affect Tiberius’ membership in the Claudian gens’; the adoption of Agrippa Postumus by Augustus is not mentioned, and Augustus’ plans to adopt Germanicus only in 4.57.3. In 1.28.4, some of the Younger Drusus’ men try to persuade the mutinous soldiers to resume their loyalty to Tiberius and Drusus, rhetorically asking denique pro Neronibus et Drusis imperium populi Romani capessent? Although Tiberius and Drusus were now Julii due to Tiberius’ adoption, they are designated as (Claudii) Nerones and (Livii) Drusi, the gentes to which Tiberius belonged by birth – the soldiers disregard the adoption that was
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even undesirable to adopt someone when there already is a son in one’s family.\textsuperscript{886} And the Tacitean Tiberius does not consider adoption a valid enough basis for the legitimacy of his imperial power.\textsuperscript{887} It seems, then, that consanguinity is widely considered to be a more authentic kind of kinship than adoption in the \textit{Annals}. Especially in the context of the legitimacy of imperial power, blood-ties – in particular with the first emperor Augustus – are considered more valuable than adoptive relations. This poses an important problem, as adoption was, of course, the means by which the succession of Tiberius – and the prospective succession of Germanicus – was procured. Adoption provided both the legitimation of Tiberius’ imperial power – since it indicated Augustus’ preference for Tiberius as his successor – and the actual means by which this power could be exercised: the inheritance of patrimony, loyalty, \textit{patria potestas} over the \textit{domus Caesarum}, freedmen and slaves. This paradox is one of the sources of the continuous tension and irritation of Tiberius with regard to Germanicus and Agrippina, whose use of kinship connections is treated in the next paragraph.

2.4.2 THE BLOOD-TIES OF GERMANICUS AND HIS FAMILY

Germanicus’ biological family is frequently portrayed by references to their ancestors and descendants, often focalized through Germanicus and Agrippina themselves, but also by others, such as the army, the people or Tacitus as narrator. Many kin terms are used to describe their kinship relations, several of the occurrences of the word \textit{sanguis} in the Tiberian hexad refer to Germanicus and Agrippina, and Agrippina’s fecundity is stressed at various points.\textsuperscript{888} This starts immediately after

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{886} 1.3.5: \textit{at hercule Germanicum \ldots adscririque per adoptionem a Tiberio iussit, quamquam esset in domo Tiberii filius iuvenis, sed quo pluribus munimentis insisteret}; cf. also 1.3.1, where Tacitus seems to regard elevation of step-sons unnecessary when one’s own descendants are still alive: \textit{Tiberium Neronem et Claudium Drusum privignos imperatoris nominibus auxit, integra etiam tum domo sua}.
\item \textsuperscript{887} 1.7.7: \textit{dabat et famae, ut vocatus electusque potius a re publica videretur quam per uxorium ambitum et senili adoptione inrepsisse}.
\item \textsuperscript{888} 1.42.1, 2.71.2, 3.4.2, 3.17.2, 4.52.2, 5.1.2. Agrippina’s \textit{fecunditas} is mentioned at 1.41.2, 2.43.6, 2.75.1, 4.12.3; Germanicus and Agrippina had nine children; cf. Kraus 2009, 112-113. Livilla is never associated with fertility, despite having three children of her own. As Foubert observes, Tacitus applies the term \textit{fecunditas} in the \textit{Annals} mainly to Agrippina the Elder and (to a lesser extent) her daughter Agrippina the Younger; the
\end{itemize}

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Germanicus is first presented to the reader: his introduction opens with the mention of his marriage to Agrippina the Elder (Augustus’ granddaughter), their numerous children, his own descent from Livia and Drusus, and the public favour and hope inherited by Germanicus from his father (1.33.1-2). At the end of the introduction, Agrippina is mentioned again, emphasizing the close connection between Germanicus and his wife (1.33.3). After having been firmly placed in a family context in this formal introduction, Germanicus and Agrippina continue to be mentioned in terms of their blood ties. These references to their kin ties have several effects. On the most basic level, they provide general information about them, enabling the reader to identify their position within the imperial family. More frequently, however, Germanicus’ and Agrippina’s biological kinship connections are brought up in a context where there is no real ‘need’ for them in terms of clarification for the reader. In several instances, their relatives are mentioned because of their official military or political position, but they are designated explicitly as kinsmen, rather than political or military predecessors or authorities. In the passages narrating Germanicus’ campaign in Germany in Book 2, for instance, he is described as following in his father’s footsteps, rather than as continuing or imitating the campaigns of the previous Germanic commander. Of course, Germanicus’ predecessor happened to be his father; but the extent to which his campaign is presented in terms of a son imitating and emulating the example of his father, rather than in terms of professional competition and the continuation of the Empire’s military aims, is notable.

Also in other instances, descent and specific ancestors create expectations of similar (imitative) behaviour and provide inspiration and examples for Germanicus and his family. In many cases, however, these have an ominous ring to them. As the reader knows, Germanicus will die before being able to fulfill these expectations; in fact, as is observed by the audience at Germanicus’ Germanic triumph in 2.41.3, Germanicus’ similarity to his father Drusus the Elder and his uncle Mar-

only other two instances serve to contrast these women with Livilla and Poppaea Sabina respectively (Foubert 2010b, 351-352).

889 1.33.1-3 (focalizer: Tacitus); 3.2.3 (Tacitus); 4.4.1 (Tacitus).

890 2.7.2 (honorique patris), 2.8.1 (precatusque Drusum patrem, ut se eadem ausum libens placatusque exemplo ac memoriia consiliorum atque operum iuvaret), 2.14.4 (patris patruique vestigia prementem). Focalizers are Tacitus and Germanicus himself.

891 1.33.2 (Tacitus); 1.40.3 (Agrippina); 1.42.3 (Germanicus); 1.43.3 (Germanicus); 2.8.1 (Germanicus/Tacitus); 2.14.1 (Germanicus/Tacitus); 2.14.4 (Germanicus); 2.41.3 (people); 3.5.1 (people).
cellus prefigures his premature death. As noted earlier, Germanicus’ appeal to the examples of Augustus and Caesar in 1.42.3 conjures up the image of civil war, while his descent from the two main opponents of the late-republican civil wars, Augustus and Mark Antony, hardly carries more positive connotations. Likewise, the expectations and reputations once attached to Germanicus and Agrippina are transferred to their children and grandchildren, to whom popular hope and favour are assigned – but who, as the reader is aware, will utterly betray these positive anticipations. In the next generations, the ties of blood are perverted: Germanicus’ fraternal affection for Drusus turns into Drusus Caesar’s conspiracy against his brother Nero; Caligula does not even mourn the deaths of his relatives (6.20.1); the marital concord between Germanicus and Agrippina the Elder will be followed by their daughter Agrippina the Younger’s murder of her husband Claudius; and the reigns of their son Caligula and grandson Nero will not turn out to be as wonderful as people might have hoped on the basis of their descent from Germanicus. In fact, Germanicus and Agrippina themselves may be seen to foreshadow particular traits and behaviour in their descendants and further relatives, such as Nero Caesar’s good looks, Claudius’ ignorance and ineffectiveness, Agrippina the Younger’s hunger for power, or Nero’s theatricality and longing for admiration. But while these features may still have been acceptable in Germanicus and Agrippina – the latter’s independence and ambition are said to be mitigated by her chastity and conjugal love (1.33.3), and the former’s impetuous theatricality does not cause major problems – they return in a magnified and more destructive way with their descendants. In this sense, the frequent references to Agrippina’s *fecunditas* acquire a very portentous flavour.

In many passages references to the relatives of Germanicus, Agrippina and their children have an effect on the people around them: they generate popularity, authority, respect, pity, and other emotions. These effects of their kinship connections are particularly conspicuous in the episode of the Germanic mutinies in Book 1. Upon his arrival at the revolting camps, when Germanicus first tries to re-establish order among the soldiers, he starts out in a professional way, celebrating Augustus...
and Tiberius and the latter’s military victories with the present legions, appealing to the soldiers’ sense of duty and discipline – but to no avail.\textsuperscript{897} After this strategy has failed, he attempts to establish a more personal kind of authority for himself by referring to his descent from several military commanders – Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius and Drusus the Elder – and to invoke sympathy and respect on the basis of his own and his wife’s ancestry, with Agrippina joining him in the effort.\textsuperscript{898} This approach turns out to be more effective: the soldiers are moved by pity, and repent.\textsuperscript{899} Many of these references are phrased in emotive or even pathetic language.\textsuperscript{900} This emphasis on family connections and the ancestry of individuals stands in contrast with what Germanicus claims to do in 1.42.1: while declaring that he puts the interests of the state before his private matters, he nevertheless draws the matter back into the family domain again by referring to Tiberius with the word \textit{pater} rather than with his name or title (whether \textit{imperator} or \textit{Augustus}).

In other passages, too, the kinship connections of Germanicus’ family endow them with popularity, authority and status ‘inherited’ from ancestors or derived from children (mainly Caligula); moreover, references to their family sometimes have emotional appeal (evoking pity, reverence, sadness) or make inimical attitudes seem unfair.\textsuperscript{901} Again, this popularity is inherited by their descendants.\textsuperscript{902} The connection between appeals to ancestry and claims to imperial power is made explicit in an exchange between Tiberius and Agrippina reported by Tacitus halfway Book 4. Agrippina, expressing her indignation at the prosecution of her cousin, asserts her status as the real offspring of Augustus’ divine blood, to which Tiberius replies

\textsuperscript{897} 1.34.4-35.1; 1.69.4, \textit{compressam a muliere [sc. Agrippina] sediti\emph{em}, cui nomen principis obsistere non qui-verit}, may perhaps refer to this; Goodyear 1981 \textit{ad loc}.

\textsuperscript{898} 1.40.2 (focalizer: unspecified \textit{omnes}); 1.40.3 (Agrippina); 1.42.1 (Germanicus); 1.42.2 (Germanicus); 1.42.3 (Germanicus); 1.42.4 (Germanicus); 1.44.1 (Germanicus). Cf. two other passages in a military context: 1.69.4 Tiberius/Sejanus); 2.41.3 (Tacitus and the people).

\textsuperscript{899} 1.41.2 (the soldiers); 1.44.1 (the soldiers); see Fulkerson 2006, 177-179 on Germanicus ‘[using] his family as living props’; see also Malloch 2004 and Hurley 1989.

\textsuperscript{900} Cf. Koestermann 1963 and Goodyear 1972 \textit{ad 1.40.2} and 1.40.4, observing that the change in the soldiers’ mood needs to be explained by the dramatic departure of Agrippina and Caligula. See also Fulkerson 2006 on Germanicus’ use of emotions to compete with his soldiers’ attempt to control the narrative.

\textsuperscript{901} 1.33.1 (Tacitus); 1.33.2 (Tacitus); 1.69.4 (Tiberius/Sejanus); 2.7.2 (Tacitus); 2.41.3 (Tacitus and the people); 2.43.5 (Tacitus); 2.53.2 (Tacitus); 2.7.14 (Germanicus); 2.75.1 (Tacitus); 3.3.2-3 (Tacitus); 3.4.2 (the people); 3.17.2 (the people); 4.52.2 (Agrippina).

\textsuperscript{902} Eg. 3.29.3 (the people); 4.12.3 (Sejanus); 4.15.3 (senators); 4.53.1 (Agrippina); 6.46.1 (Tacitus).
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that 'she was not being damaged merely because she did not rule'.903 The anecdote is also related by Suetonius, with a similar gist: Agrippina voicing her (here unspecified) complaints too loudly, Tiberius patronizingly admonishing her that no harm is done to her if she does not rule.904 Suetonius, however, leaves out any references on Agrippina’s part to her blood-descent from Augustus – this is probably a Tacitean addition to the story. And although Tiberius wins the 'verbal fencing match' with his daughter-in-law through his use of a Greek sententia, the fact that she dared to initiate this match against the emperor at all, and that Tacitus makes it revolve around her claims to superiority on the basis of Augustan descent, is indicative of the challenges to his legitimacy encountered by the Tacitean Tiberius.905 The link between kinship and succession is also clear from a passage mentioned already earlier, about the preferences of the imperial court being split between the two princes: Germanicus is said to take precedence over Drusus because of his many children (due to Agrippina’s fecunditas) and his superior ancestry, being related on his mother’s side to Augustus and Mark Antony (2.43.5-6). The phrase quia claritudine materni generis anteibat almost seems to imply ancestry as an objective criterion: the meaning and indicative mood of anteibat suggest a general rule rather than the opinion of the court, and quia is almost objective.906 The blood-ties of Germanicus, Agrippina and their family, then, provide them with status, popularity and affection.

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903 4.52.2-3: [Agrippina:] non in effigies mutas divinum spiritum transfusum: se imaginem veram, caelesti sanguine ortam ... [Tiberius:] audita hacc raram occulti pectoris vocem elicuere, correptamque Graeco versu admonuit non ideo laedi quia non regnaret; note the strong verb regnare.
904 Suet. Tib. 53.1.
905 See Sinclair 1995, 142-143 (whence the quotation) on the ‘rhetorical power play’ in this passage; Borzsák 1970, 282 rightly notes that Agrippina the Elder’s political ambitions can hardly have figured in her daughter’s memoirs, which Tacitus used as his source – they must therefore be a Tacitean addition.
906 Cf. also Ross 1973, 223 on this passage: ‘two significant distortions are to be noted: first, it is Germanicus’ maternal lineage that is stressed, connecting him by birth as well as by marriage ultimately with Augustus (the fact that Germanicus’ father was Tiberius’ brother is conveniently ignored); and, second, the amazing twist of logic that makes Germanicus’ own sister Livia, the wife of Drusus, appear inferior to Agrippina, solely in order to glorify Germanicus!’
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2.4.3 THE CONSANGUINEOUS CONNECTIONS OF TIBERIUS, DRUSUS THE YOUNGER AND LIVILLA

The role and importance of consanguineous relatives is very different in the portrayal of Tiberius, the Younger Drusus and his wife Livilla. They are generally not depicted as talking or boasting about their blood-ties themselves, let alone in protracted and emotional speeches in oratio recta such as that of Germanicus in 1.42-43. When they do speak about their blood-relations, the references are usually brief, at most mildly positive and not intended to enhance their personal status; they are more matter-of-fact. When blood relations are mentioned for Tiberius and Drusus, their implications are usually less favourable than in the case of Germanicus and Agrippina. Passages regarding Tiberius’ relationship to his mother Livia are generally negative in tone: Tiberius is often annoyed at her influence and envious of her prominence. Tiberius’ biological father hardly comes into play in the narrative, and his illustrious Claudian ancestry is not a recommendation. Tiberius is also connected with crimes against his relatives. References to the paternal relation between Tiberius and Drusus are rarely negative in tone: when their relation is criticized, it is always in rumours. They are, however, often concise – usually consisting of only one kin term – and less markedly positive than the blood-ties propagated by Germanicus and Agrippina. It is noteworthy that in 3.56.1-4, where Tiberius requests tribunician power for Drusus, thereby effectively designating him as his successor, their kinship relation is not mentioned at all. Drusus is called by his proper name and described as adulescens, and his being Tiberius’ natural son is not

907 E.g. at 1.14.1-2 (focalization: Tacitus); 1.72.4 (anonymous writers of poems); 3.64.1-2 (Tacitus); 4.57.3 (Tacitus and other sources); 5.2.1-2 (Tacitus); note that none of these remarks are focalized by Tiberius himself.

908 Tiberius Claudius Nero is only mentioned by Tacitus as Tiberius’ father in 6.51.1, without further elaborations. 1.4.3: vetere atque insita Claudiae familae superbia.

909 3.17.2; 6.24.2; cf. Suet. Tib. 50-54 on Tiberius’ odium adversus necessitadines.

910 Positive tone: 1.25.3 (Tiberius); 1.26.1 (Drusus); 1.28.4 (loyal centurions); 1.29.1 (Drusus); 1.47.2 (Tiberius); 2.44.1 (Tiberius); 2.51.2 (Tiberius); 3.31.1 (twice, Tacitus); 4.4.1 (Tiberius); 4.7.1 (Drusus); 4.11.1 (Tacitus). Neutral: 1.24.1 (focalization Tacitus); 1.25.3 (Tacitus); 3.31.2 (Tacitus); 4.3.1 (Tacitus); 4.12.1 (Tacitus). Negative: 1.76.3 (rumours); 1.76.4 (rumours); 3.37.2 (rumours); 4.10.2 (twice, both Sejanus’ rumour); 4.10.3 (rumour); cf. also 3.59.4 on Drusus learning from his father’s bad example. Almost the only passage which is a bit more elaborate is 4.4.1, where Tiberius praises Drusus for his paternal benevolence towards Germanicus’ children.
used as an argument for the emperor’s request. Tiberius’ relations to his biological grandchildren are not mentioned often; however, in the chapter describing Tiberius’ joy at the birth of Drusus’ twins (1.84.1-2), they are deliberately emphasized, not just by the relative length of the passage, but also by the addition of the people’s reaction to the twins, and because Tacitus seems to have intentionally antedated the notice of their birth. By doing so, he increases the dramatic contrast of Drusus’ flourishing family and Tiberius’ joy over the recent decease of Germanicus and popular grief about that; in addition, he censures Tiberius’ pride by (unfairly) remarking that ‘everything, even the fortuitous, he turned to glory’ (2.84.1). So, at almost the only place where he depicts Tiberius as boasting of his family connections in a fashion similar to Germanicus and Agrippina, Tacitus interprets this in a very negative way.

Drusus’ blood-ties are not very prominent or favourably assessed in the narrative, either. In the episode of the Pannonian mutinies, Drusus mentions his descent from Tiberius, and the connection between father and son is named again in Tiberius’ letter to the legions. However, each of these references is limited to one kin term only and stated in more factual language – there is nothing like Germanicus’ elaborate prayer in *oratio recta* to his father Drusus the Elder in 1.43. They are not intended to enhance Drusus’ personal status or evoke emotional reactions; kinship is not an argument in Drusus’ attempts to conciliate the soldiers – and it is noteworthy that he manages to suppress the mutiny much more easily than Germanicus. The kin relation between Tiberius and Drusus is referred to in a more subjective and extensive way when the soldiers are offended that emperors only

911 Goodyear 1981 *ad loc.* argues for an advancing of at least two years. Focalizers of the passage are Tacitus (narrative), Tiberius (reported speech) and perhaps the people (paraphrase of their reaction?); but note that the grandparental relation between Tiberius and the twins is not stressed by a kin term. By contrast, the death notice of Germanicus Gemellus and Tiberius’ grief at this are only mentioned very briefly (4.15.1), in only half a sentence, together with the passing away of one of Tiberius’ friends. The twin is not even named (he is called *alterum ex geminis Drusi liberis*), the cause of death goes unmentioned, and nothing is said about his father Drusus’ reaction. Tiberius’ relation to Tiberius Gemellus is only remarked upon briefly in 6.46.1. It is notable, however, that Tacitus makes no mention of the story (reported in Suet. *Tib.* 62.3 and Dio 58.23.1-4) that Tiberius suspected that the twins were born from adultery; instead, he emphasizes Tiberius’ blood-connection to Gemellus through the use of the word *sanguis* (6.46.1).

912 Cf. Goodyear 1981 *ad loc.*: ‘a grandfather’s family pride hardly warranted this generalization’. Moreover, in another passage, Tiberius’ boasting of his descent seems rather proud and pompous (4.43.4).

913 1.24.1 (focalization Tacitus); 1.25.3 (Tacitus, later Tiberius); 1.26.1 (Drusus); 1.28.4 (loyal centurions); 1.29.1 (Drusus).
ever send their sons to deal with the legions: first Tiberius instead of Augustus, and now Drusus instead of the emperor Tiberius. Here, the kinship terms refer to the lesser authority, standing, and influence of the sons of emperors – still under their fathers’ potestas, as the technical term filios familiarum indicates – compared to that of their fathers; quite the reverse of the soldiers’ reaction to paternity and ancestry in the Germanic mutiny. The only time Drusus is seen to stress his ancestry to his own advantage is in his complaints about Sejanus’ growing power, when he is said to state repeatedly and openly that ‘with a son alive and well, someone else was being called ‘assistant in command’” (4.7.1). This is the beginning of a chapter-long speech in oratio obliqua against Sejanus, but to no avail: only a few lines later, Drusus has been poisoned and buried, and Germanicus’ sons promoted. Moreover, Tacitus takes up two chapters for a discussion and refutation of the rumour – ‘so effective that it has not yet abated’ – that Tiberius, led to believe by Sejanus that Drusus planned on killing him, poisoned Drusus by accident (4.10-11). This rumour is mentioned neither by Suetonius nor by Velleius; Dio mentions but immediately refutes it. Although Tacitus disproves the story, and ostensibly discusses the case at such length to enhance his credibility as a historian, he nevertheless casts a shadow on the relation between Tiberius and Drusus by associating both of them with plans to murder the other. Drusus’ relations to his own children are hardly mentioned or commented upon. When, for instance, his twins are born (2.84.1-2) or one of them dies (4.15.1), it is the reaction of Tiberius that is pointed out by Tacitus; and it is Tiberius who classifies Drusus’ three children as an asset (3.56.4). In the context of a senatorial debate on provincial governors being accompanied by their wives, Drusus expresses his affection for his uxor carissima et tot communium liberorum parens – but these references turn out to be loaded with dramatic irony: ‘in two years’ time, his ‘dearest wife’ … would conspire with Sejanus to murder...

914 1.26.2: Tiberium olim nomine Augusti desideria legionum frustrari solitum: easdem artes Drusus retulisse. numquamne ad se nisi filios familiarum venturos?

915 It is notable that the soldiers choose to phrase the lesser power of Tiberius and Drusus (in comparison with Augustus and Tiberius) in terms of the subordination of sons to their fathers’ potestas, rather than as that of legates or military commanders to their emperor’s imperium maius. The reproach reappears at 1.46.1-3, to which Tiberius’ considerations in 1.47.1-2 are a response, but here the comparison is between duorum adulescentium nondum adulta auctoritas and Tiberius’ maestas imperatoria, longa experientia, severitas and munificentia. The soldiers, then, deliberately stress the family aspect and cast it in a negative light.

916 Dio 57.22.1-4.

917 Martin/Woodman 1989, 123-125.
him’.\textsuperscript{918} Otherwise, Drusus’ paternal behaviour is mentioned twice, but in both cases it refers to his treatment of the children of Germanicus (at 4.4.1 and 4.8.4).

The consanguineous kinship connections of Drusus’ wife Livilla are concentrated mainly in two places. First, in 4.3, where Tacitus, narrating the outset of Sejanus’ plans to eliminate the Caesars, portrays her as defiling herself, her ancestors and her descendants; Livilla’s kinship to Augustus, Tiberius and Drusus is pointed out to stress the depravity of her affair with the equestrian Sejanus. Then, in the context of Tiberius’ response to Sejanus’ letter, several of her blood relatives are mentioned, probably to highlight that the marriages of any member of the imperial family are both influenced by the family situation, and in turn affect the relations within it.\textsuperscript{919} Yet these references to her kinsmen do not reflect favourably on Livilla either. That Sejanus could ask for her hand in the first place was made possible by his and Livilla’s own alleged involvement in the death of her previous husband; moreover, in the paragraph between these mentions of Livilla’s relatives, the Tacitean Tiberius writes of the intra-familial rivalry between Agrippina and Livilla, and the factions tearing the imperial house apart. Furthermore, the two other references to her blood relations cause more harm to than enhancement of her personal reputation.\textsuperscript{920}

There may be various reasons for the less frequent and more negative mentions of the blood-ties of Tiberius, Drusus and Livilla. Perhaps Tacitus wants to imply that they do not need the added authority or prestige which blood-ties can provide, because their positions are already secure enough, or their methods already effective enough without it. This may at least be the case for Drusus, who succeeds in suppressing the mutiny without stressing his descent from Tiberius; for Germani-

\textsuperscript{918} 3.34.6; quote from Woodman/Martin 1996 \textit{ad loc.}
\textsuperscript{919} Her mother Antonia and grandmother Livia are named as counsellors for Livilla (4.40.2), and the position and achievements of her brother Germanicus and father Drusus as an argument against her marrying an equestrian (4.40.4). Not a single one of them is named, only kin terms are used, and relatively many, for that matter; perhaps the reason for the use of so many kin terms with respect to Livilla here is the special position of the women of the imperial family, who on the one hand derive their status mainly from their male family members, not being able to hold any public offices themselves, but on the other hand provide the essential dynastic links; see Corbier 1995.
\textsuperscript{920} In 4.60.2, she is depicted as conspiring against Nero Caesar, the husband of her daughter Julia. In 2.84.1, she is denoted as \textit{soror Germanici}, which probably mainly serves to identify the woman which has not played a major part in the narrative so far. However, it may also be considered as a touch of added wryness, that the sister of Germanicus was actively involved in (what the people perceived as) ‘further pressure on the house of Germanicus’ (2.84.2). On Tacitus’ portrayal of Livilla, see Sinclair 1990.
Kinship

cus, on the other hand, emphasizing his ancestry seems to be a last resort when he
cannot otherwise control the soldiers. Otherwise, references to illustrious ancestry
may simply be more in place for Germanicus and Agrippina in general, because
their blood-relations (Augustus, Drusus the Elder) are actually worth boasting
about. The ties of Tiberius (his relatively unknown father) and Drusus (the dis-
liked Tiberius), by contrast, are not regarded as valuable, so perhaps this is a reason
why they are not depicted as emphasizing them. Moreover, appealing to ancestry
and consanguinity seems to be more in line with the more theatrical characters and
more personal styles of leadership of Germanicus and Agrippina as described in
the narrative. Perhaps, the pattern may be connected to Tacitus’ view on kinship as
irrelevant for determining suitability for the emperorship, as noted above (section
2.3): Germanicus’ use of his blood-ties as an argument may be another way to sug-
gest his ineptness.

2.4.4 Kinship and Legitimacy: Challenges to Tiberius’
Position

Germanicus and Agrippina are presented as actively and effectively deriving per-
sonal reputations, hopes and affection from their consanguineous kinship connec-
tions in the context of their official functions. Tiberius, Drusus the Younger and
Livilla, by contrast, are associated with consanguineous kinship relations much less
often and less elaborately than Germanicus and Agrippina, and with much less pos-
itive effects. Whereas the children of Germanicus and Agrippina profit from their
parents’ popularity, Drusus’ descent from Tiberius is not an unequivocal advantage
to him, and Livilla is depicted as defiling her descendants. That ‘family’ is an impor-
tant issue with respect to Germanicus and Agrippina is hardly surprising; after all,
their descendants Caligula, Nero and Germanicus’ brother Claudius would con-
tinue the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Family, in their case, often takes the form of their
consanguineous descent from Augustus and Drusus, and of their own numerous
children.921 But this makes for a painful contrast with Tiberius, Livia and Drusus,
who are not connected to the founder of the Principate by blood, or even through

921 In this way, Germanicus is connected both to the past and to the future of the Principate; cf. Pelling 2012,
298-299; O’Gorman 2000, ch. 3; Kraus 2009, 110-112.
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marriage, after Augustus’ death and Tiberius’ divorce from Julia.\textsuperscript{922} Their Livian and Claudian lineage is not considered to be a valuable asset in the public opinion. This creates a constant tension between Germanicus and Agrippina on the one hand, and Tiberius and Livia – and sometimes Drusus the Younger – on the other. Indeed, Germanicus and Agrippina are depicted as challenging Tiberius’ authority on the basis of their kinship relations.

The historical Tiberius’ formal position as emperor was, as has been argued (section 2.3.1), undisputed; however, his status as the legitimate successor of Augustus also rested on his inheritance of Augustus’ personal authority, and on his being regarded as the ultimate interpreter of the Augustan political legacy.\textsuperscript{923} Precisely these elements – essential for justifying one’s imperial power and obtaining legitimacy and acceptance – are depicted by Tacitus as being inherited by Germanicus and Agrippina. In the \textit{Annals}, Tacitus plays up the importance of Augustus as an example and a legitimator for Tiberius, in comparison with Tiberian sources such as Valerius Maximus, Velleius Paterculus and the SCPP, but also with later accounts such as Suetonius’ biographies. The Tacitean Tiberius refers to Augustus very often in the narrative – Tiberius’ reliance on Augustan precedent may even be regarded as a central aspect of his characterization in the \textit{Annals}.\textsuperscript{924} As Cowan suggests, however, comparison with Tiberius’ handling of the Augustan legacy in sources from the Tiberian period implies that this emphasis on Augustus as providing justification or legitimacy for Tiberius’ reign may be more of a Tacitean interpretation than a contemporary one. She observes that several Tiberian sources show a more dynamic attitude towards Augustus, and are seen to reinterpret Augustus’ virtues and deeds in a Tiberian context.\textsuperscript{925} Examining the use of the title of \textit{optimus princeps} for Tiberius, she suggests that, instead of making reference to Augustus or Tiberius’ member-

\textsuperscript{922} Kraus 2009, 110.

\textsuperscript{923} Cowan 2009a, arguing that ‘the emphasis upon Tiberius’ deference to Augustus is, in many ways, peculiarly Tacitean—or, at least, it is proportionately greater in Tacitus’ account, reflecting the concerns of his narrative and his choice of subject matter, than in other, and in particular contemporary (Tiberian) accounts’ (205); cf. Seager 1972, 175-176: ‘his preoccupation with Augustan practice was intended to emphasize the continuity between Augustus’ principate and his own and so to assert by implication the legitimacy of his rule.’ In imperial ideology, Tiberius clearly emphasized his position as son of Augustus: Rose 1997, 22; Claes 2013, 52, 83.

\textsuperscript{924} Cowan 2009a.

\textsuperscript{925} Cowan 2009b; ‘rather than being assimilated into the Augustan past and depending on Augustus, the new principate accommodated ‘Augustus’ within a peculiarly Tiberian vision for the \textit{res publica}’ (472).
ship of the Julian family as sources of legitimation, the accounts connect Tiberius’ right to rule to his virtues. The documents surrounding Germanicus’ death also exhibit a much more flexible attitude towards kinship: they feature mostly living members of the *domus Augusta*, instead of revered ancestors like Augustus. Tacitus’ emphasis on Augustus as legitimator of his successors’ position, then, is not found to such an extent in the Tiberian sources. Nor is it found in such a degree in later sources like Suetonius and Dio, as Cowan demonstrates in another article. It is therefore probably a Tacitean emphasis.

At the same time as enhancing the importance of Augustus for Tiberius’ authority, Tacitus downplays the latter’s connection to the first emperor. As mentioned above, their adoptive parental relationship is rarely denoted with kin terms. Also in other ways the kinship connection between Augustus and Tiberius is minimized. Tacitus, for instance, makes no mention of Tiberius’ funeral laudation for Augustus – traditionally an act of filial pietas – nor of Tiberius’ adoption by Augustus in his obituary at 6.51 (Tiberius is called *privignus*). When wondering whether or not Tiberius arrived at Augustus’ deathbed in time in 1.5.4, the old emperor is called ‘Augustus’, not ‘father’ – remarkable, considering the emotional potential of the scene. Tacitus, then, downplays the kinship connection between Augustus and Tiberius, which runs counter to Tiberius’ emphasis on his adoption by Augustus in imperial coinage and official documents such as the *SCPP* and the *TS/TH*, and which is all the more notable on the level of the *Annals*, since Augustus as ancestor is repeatedly linked to other characters in the narrative. Indeed, Agrippina the Elder actively asserts her descent from him, and Germanicus is associated with Augustus several times as well; but this, too, differs from the Tiberian evidence. After

926 Cowan 2009b, 484-485: “[i]n a context in which others might make reference to Augustus, and, in some cases, claim familial connections to Augustus, and challenged by the constant threat of a rival who might succeed in winning over the forces of coercion and control, this accolade [of *optimus princeps*] placed Tiberius’ right to rule on a basis other than conformity to Augustus’ ‘deeds and words’, or his membership of the Julio-Claudian gens. It proclaimed instead that he ruled because he was the *optimus princeps*. It established a yardstick which valued virtue more than it valued imitation or ‘dynasty’.”
927 See Hekster forthcoming on the flexibility and the lesser focus on Augustus as ancestor in these documents.
928 Cowan 2009a.
929 We know from Suet. Aug. 100.3 and Dio 36.34.4-41.9 that Tiberius held a *laudatio funebris* for his father. Tiberius’ adoption is also disregarded in 1.28.4, cited above, note 885.
930 For instance with 10 kin terms to his grandchildren, with 5 terms to his daughter Julia (note that this is almost as often as to Tiberius, whose role in the narrative is much larger than Julia’s), and 4 to his wives.
Germanicus’ death, imperial ideology as expressed in senatorial decrees, material culture and coinage seems to have tried to reduce Germanicus’ connection to the *gens Iulia* and to have emphasized his Claudian ancestry, redefining his position within the imperial family, his link to the ruling emperor, and, by consequence, the status of his sons as potential successors. At the same time, coins were minted for Drusus and his twin sons, stressing their position as rightful heirs to Tiberius’ imperial power. So, whereas Tiberian imperial sources after AD 19 apparently tried to minimize Germanicus’ connection to the ruling Julian line of the family and thereby his entitlement to imperial power, and advertised Drusus as the rightful successor, Tacitus does not cast Drusus so much as a potential successor but on the contrary, accentuates Germanicus’ and Agrippina’s connection to Augustus, also after the former’s death, thereby implying that they were the rightful heirs to the Augustan legacy. Moreover, the relationship between Tiberius and Germanicus is minimized, implying that Germanicus derives his authority from his connections to Augustus and Drusus, rather than from his adoption by Tiberius.

In summary, while Tacitus enhances the importance of Augustus for Tiberius, he also downplays the latter’s connection to him, while at the same time playing up Germanicus’ and Agrippina’s links to the first emperor. By doing so, he weakens Tiberius’ legitimacy and suggests that Germanicus and Agrippina pose a challenge to Tiberius’ authority by being perceived as the true heirs of Augustus’ power. This suggestion is particularly Tacitean: as observed, in many aspects it does not accord with the sources from Tiberius’ reign, or even with later accounts. Moreover, Tacitus’ emphasis on Germanicus’ claim to power appears somewhat paradoxical. Germanicus, like Tiberius, was a Claudian; although Germanicus could trace a kinship link back to Augustus through his mother Antonia, the daughter of Augustus’ sister Octavia, his membership of the *gens Iulia* was a result of his adoption by Tiberius. A

931 Rose 1997, 26-27, referring to Germanicus’ funerary arch in Rome (cf. *TS* i.9-21), which figured his biological family (Drusus, Antonia, Claudius, Livilla, Agrippina and their children) but not his relatives by adoption (Augustus, Livia, Tiberius and Drusus the Younger) with whom he had always been represented in imperial statuary ever since his adoption, thus effectively ignoring his adoption and his former position as successor to Tiberius and dissociating him from the Julian line. The other funerary honours, too, emphasized Germanicus’ connection to Drusus, to whom he had not usually been linked during his lifetime; cf. the honours in the *TS* and *TH*, including joint portraits of Germanicus and his biological father (*TH* 1-4), the erection of another arch close to a monument for Drusus (*TS* i.26-32), the frequent mention of Drusus as Germanicus’ father and the relative absence of references to Tiberius as father of Germanicus – Tiberius is more often designated as Tiberius Caesar Augustus or princeps; cf. Lebek 1989, 65 n.52 and 1991, 68; Hekster forthcoming.
similar confusion can be discerned in the highly problematical modern designation of ‘Julio-Claudian’ for a dynasty in which none of the emperors were strictly speaking Julii by blood, even if some of them were so through adoption. Both Drusus the Younger and Germanicus are denoted as (adoptive) grandsons of Augustus in several inscriptions. And as Levick rightly points out, Claudius had the exact same ancestry of Germanicus, but he does not acquire any prominence or status as a consequence. Tacitus’ depiction of kinship ties within the imperial family appears somewhat selective – in a way, he resembles the official Tiberian documents in their flexibility with respect to the depiction of kin relations and the in- and exclusion of individuals from particular groups such as the domus Augusta or the gens Iulia. Tacitus’ intention, in any case, seems to be to suggest that Germanicus and Agrippina are widely seen to have claim to imperial power.

Tiberius finds his position contested by several others as well – his mother Livia, his ‘minister’ Sejanus, his Praetorian prefect Macro, mutinous soldiers, the people, several senators and, notably, the example of his father and predecessor, the Divine Augustus –, all of whom implicitly question his sole control of the Augustan heritage, and his position as successor. Insinuations of Tiberius’ illegitimate occupation of the imperial post also arise from the anecdote of Clemens, the false Agrippa Postumus, who was rumoured to have been supported by many courtiers, equestrians and senators. When the impostor is caught and asked by Tiberius how he became Agrippa, he answers ‘the way in which you became Caesar’ – presumably to be interpreted as ‘usurping a place to which he had no right’. As Seager observes, ‘[it] is in the light of such criticisms that we must regard Tiberius’ extreme sensitivity to the acclamation of Agrippina as the sole descendant of Augustus and to Agrippina’s own constant harping on her birth. Such behaviour was not merely a studied insult to himself, the adopted son, and to his mother, who was Julia Augusta.

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933  See Hekster forthcoming.
934  Levick 1975, 32.
935  Lyasse 2008; Cowan 2009a.
936  2.39-40, remarked upon by Tacitus as follows: eodem anno mancipii unius audacia, ni mature subventum foret, discordiis armisque civilibus rem publicam perculisset (2.39.1); his support: muli e domo principis equitesque ac senatores sustentasse opibus, iuvisse consiliis dicentur (2.40.3).
937  Seager 1972, 176. Suet. Tib. 25.1-3 reports the incident with Clemens, but does not mention any such utterance; Dio 57.16.3-4 has an exchange similar to that of Tacitus.
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only by testamentary adoption; it implied a challenge to Tiberius’ position.\textsuperscript{938}

Tacitus’ depiction of the kinship ties of the main characters in his narrative is rather complex, but several conclusions may be drawn. In contrast to the legal equality of adoption and consanguinity, he presents these two kinds of kinship as being perceived differently by the persons in his narrative. He places Germanicus and his family much more in the context of blood-ties and makes them derive various advantages from the use of their kin relations. Tiberius, Drusus and Livilla, on the other hand, are rarely seen as referring to or profiting from their consanguineous connections. By emphasizing and downplaying particular relationships, moreover, Tacitus suggests that Germanicus and Agrippina are considered the rightful heirs to Augustus’ power. As a result, they are portrayed as implicitly challenging Tiberius’ position, whose power is represented as being highly dependent on his connection to Augustus.

\textsuperscript{938} Seager 1972, 176.
Conclusion

In the *Histories*, the Tacitean Galba had elaborated on the qualities required to fulfill the imperial duties. Such explicit utterances are virtually absent in the *Annals*, and any indications of what might have been considered important qualities in an emperor by the figures in the narrative must be deduced from scattered remarks. At several points in the Tiberian hexad one can get a glimpse of the features which make a man potentially suitable for the emperorship, in the view of Tacitus’ characters: age, experience, character, wealth, behaviour, reputation, and having the right wife and children. Yet the narrative also indicates clearly that these qualities cannot make up for a lack of membership of the ruling family: kinship is the determining factor in the imperial succession, in the views of the people, the Senate, the army, and the main characters. The only two men considered as potential successors to Tiberius are Drusus and Germanicus, and after their deaths, their sons. Ancestry is a major factor in people’s preference for Germanicus over Drusus as future successor to Tiberius. Capable men from outside the imperial family are not mentioned as candidates for the succession: the *capaces* make regular reappearances throughout the narrative, but there is never any question of them being potential candidates for the throne. M. Lepidus, who may, in Tacitus’ opinion, be considered to be the most competent and respected man in the narrative, never comes close. Even Sejanus, who seems very suited to the imperial climate in his cunning, dissimulation and ability to acquire popularity, and who is actually accredited with imperial ambitions, knows that the only way to the centre of power is through a connection with the *domus Augusta*. Various groups do consider other individuals more suitable for the emperorship than Tiberius, and the emperor’s power and authority are indeed contested or challenged by others in the narrative. But these ‘rivals’ are family mem-
bers: Germanicus, Agrippina, Livia, or their impostors: the fake Agrippa Postumus and Drusus Caesar. Moreover, through his depiction of the use of family ties, Tacitus suggests that consanguinity and relations through adoption are perceived as different kinds of kinship, despite their legal equality, blood-ties being felt to be more genuine. This seeming disregard of a candidate’s actual ability to ‘do the imperial job’ is remarkable. Of course, even if imperial birth or adoption is a prerequisite for being considered for the succession, various succession candidates within the imperial family can still be eliminated on the grounds of other criteria. Yet we only see this process of selection on the basis of capacity at work in extreme situations such as that of Claudius, and even in his case, it turns out to be eventually unsuccessful.

The transmission of imperial power, then, clearly proceeds along family lines in Tacitus’ representation – and this accords with the strongly dynastic image of the emperorship and the succession which arises from sources dating to Tiberius’ reign, such as statuary groups, official documents like the SCPP and the Tabulae, and contemporary literary accounts. But Tacitus’ depiction of the succession diverges from these documents, as well as from later sources such as Suetonius and Dio, in one fundamental respect: by questioning this ‘dynastic principle’, rather than taking it for granted. By inviting the reader to confront popular perceptions of Tiberius, Drusus and Germanicus with their actual competence as it emerges from the narration of their acts, Tacitus suggests that kinship is not a relevant criterion for assessing effective leadership. Moreover, by bringing in the story about the four capaces imperii, Tacitus hints at available alternatives – different possible criteria, other potential candidates – but shows that these are never seriously considered. By endowing his narrative of the succession with connotations of civil war and allusions to intra-familial strife in Rome’s regal period and within the Atreid house, furthermore, he draws attention to the destructive nature of the rivalry for power within the domus Augusta. As such, he indirectly criticizes the judgment of the characters in the narrative with regard to the requirements for the emperorship. In fact, the narrative provides hints that the importance of ancestry – and of the popularity derived from it – is sometimes at odds with the requirements for successfully carrying out the tasks of the emperor. The Tacitean Tiberius seems very well aware of this when he predicts the future crimes of the young Caligula, whose popular support derives from his descent from Germanicus. Although Germanicus is represented as the widely favoured candidate for the succession, the narration of events suggests that he is not suited to the ways of the Principate, and that it might
CONCLUSION

actually be the hated Tiberius who makes a better emperor. And it is through the foreshadowings in the Tiberian hexad, as well as (probably) the actual narrative of the reigns of Caligula, Claudius and particularly Nero, that the reader realizes that direct descent from the first emperor and a charismatic prince do not in any way guarantee responsible government.

This specifically Tacitean focus – questioning the importance of kinship, suggesting a difference in value between consanguinity and adoption, and implicitly criticizing the neglect of other criteria of selection such as capability or experience – is particularly interesting when situated in the time of writing, a time which, for the very first time, saw realistic alternatives to dynastic succession. Tacitus was composing his *Annals* during the reign of Trajan, who was the first emperor to have been selected by his predecessor on the basis of qualities other than kinship, and to have been designated as imperial successor by an act of extrafamilial adoption. Moreover, he was the first princeps to honour both his imperial adoptive father and his biological father on coinage. Questions such as the value of illustrious ancestry and the (in)equality between kinship by blood and through adoption were naturally on people’s minds, and are reflected in other literary works of the Trajanic age. Tacitus’ treatment of the succession to Tiberius, then, is just as revealing – or perhaps even more so – about his attitude towards the emperorship in his own day, as it is about his views on the Julio-Claudian succession.
CLAUDIUS

Chapter 3
The theme of palace politics – the struggle for power and the corresponding intrigues at the imperial court – may be considered one of the main strands of the extant Claudian narrative. This theme principally revolves around the imperial succession, mostly in the shape of Nero’s rise to prominence and power at the expense of his adoptive brother and rival for the throne, Britannicus. The succession is an issue which reappears regularly, receives much space in terms of number of words and chapters, and is given prominence by the structuring of the narrative into years and Books. Simply with regard to space, the succession is the dominant theme in the domestic narrative in Book 12: while foreign narratives take up about half of all the chapters (36 of a total of 69), the issue of the imperial succession receives 20 chapters, and other domestic (senatorial) business only 13. Moreover, several of the narrative years, as well as both extant Claudian Books, open or conclude with subjects related directly to the question of the succession. Given Tacitus’ deliber-

939 Walker 1960, 22-25; Syme 1958, 257-260; Martin 1981, 160-161. On the structure of the *Annals* after the Tiberian hexad, see Syme 1958, 253, 256; Keitel 1977, 1-16 (esp. 1-4); Sage 1990, 964-968; Malloch 2013, 1; all argue for a hexadic structure, with six Books for Tiberius and Nero, and two for Caligula and four for Claudius. This means that we lack more than half (Books 9 and 10) of the Claudian narrative.


941 The year AD 48 ends with Claudius’ choice for Agrippina as his new wife and her preparations for securing Nero’s engagement to Octavia; 49 starts with the legalizing of Claudius’ marriage to his niece Agrippina; 50 opens with the adoption of Nero by Claudius; 51 begins with Nero’s assumption of the *toga virilis*; 52 closes with an argument between Agrippina and Narcissus, in which the latter accuses her of *nimiae spes*; 53 opens

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ate divergence from his earlier practice of making Book and year endings coincide, the beginnings and endings of Books gain particular significance. Tacitus’ focus on the issue of the transmission of imperial power is thrown into greater relief when compared with Suetonius’ biography of Claudius. While reporting several of the same anecdotes as Suetonius, Tacitus – unlike Suetonius – explicitly relates these to the succession question. Moreover, Tacitus devotes relatively much more attention than Suetonius to the events leading up to the eventual succession of Nero: to his engagement and marriage to Octavia, his adoption and coming of age, and, most importantly, to Agrippina’s scheming in bringing all this about. Furthermore, the narratives of Parthian and Armenian affairs – which Tacitus intersperses throughout the Claudian Books – may be seen to foreshadow, as well as reflect and comment upon, the dynastic struggles at the Roman imperial court. As at the beginning of the *Annals*, echoes of tragedy – especially to the fate of the Atreid dy-

with Nero’s marriage to Octavia; and the year 54 is entirely devoted to Agrippina’s efforts to transfer power to herself and her son, starting with portents and ending with the murder of Claudius (although the main episode of the year – Claudius’ death – only took place in October; cf. Martin 1981, 159). The opening of Book 11 is no longer extant, but it ends with the death of Messalina, while the narrative of the year continues well into Book 12, which opens immediately with the selection of a new wife for Claudius, and ends with his death and the succession of Nero.

942 In the Tiberian hexad, the endings of the individual Books tend to coincide with the conclusions of narrative years. In the Claudian and Neronian *Annals*, Tacitus has discarded this practice, making the beginnings and endings of those Books especially meaningful. See Syme 1958, 269-270; Sage 1990, 984; Malloch 2013, 1-2; Griffin 1984, 86-87 on year and Book divisions in the Neronian narrative. On the question of stylistic changes in the later Books of the *Annals*, see Adams 1972.

943 For instance, Tacitus’ account of the ludi saeculares in 11.11.2-12.1 focuses on the prophetic popularity of Nero in comparison with Britannicus at their appearance in the *lusus Troiae*, while Suetonius mentions no such thing with respect to the ludi at Cl. 21.2, and only reports Nero’s success at the *lusus* without any reference to his future reign or to Britannicus. Both authors tell the story of Britannicus greeting Nero as Domitius or Ahenobarbus after his adoption, but whereas Suetonius recounts the tale merely to illustrate Nero’s cruelty (*Ner* 7.1), Tacitus links it to a speech of Agrippina’s about the question of the legitimacy and recognition of the adoption, and to actions removing support from Britannicus (12.41.3).

944 See Keitel 1977 and 1978; Clark 2011. This connection between foreign and domestic events in the Claudian Books is unique: Keitel 1977, 193: “None of the other Parthian narratives in Book 1-6 or 13-16 is as imbued with dynastic intrigue as those in Books 11 and 12, nor do they foreshadow events at Rome in the same way. Books 11 and 12 are distinctive in this respect with good reason. Domestic intrigue dominates the narrative in these Books as it does nowhere else in the *Annals* (save Book 4 which has no long foreign excursuses). Events in the East dovetailed neatly with Tacitus’ view of the *domus Caesaris* during Claudius’ last years, and they were given broad scope and detail in order to enhance the main theme of the Roman narrative.” See also Walker 1960, 28-30.
nasty – reinforce the atmosphere of dynastic intrigue; and at the moment of Nero’s succession, Tacitus evokes that of Tiberius.945

As in the Tiberian Books, the succession to Claudius is presented by Tacitus as essentially an opposition between the emperor’s two sons, Nero and Britannicus. But there are some notable differences between the Tiberian and the Claudian arrangements for the transmission of power. First, the theme of imperial succession is much more prominent and explicit in Books 11 and 12, where Tacitus devotes substantial and coherent parts of his text to narrating the stages of Nero’s advancement, in a rather explicit way, and in his own authorial voice.946 In the Tiberian Books, the succession is often referred to, but in a more diffuse way, in scattered and often indirect remarks focalized by various characters; there are few passages in which Tacitus himself discusses the theme as such. The imperial succession, then, is a clearly signalled theme in the Claudian Books, whereas it is constantly present in the background in the Tiberian narrative. Furthermore, although the struggle for the succession and the accompanying courtly intrigues are a leading theme in the Claudian Annals, they hardly involve the emperor himself. In nearly all ancient sources, including Tacitus, Claudius is portrayed as a passive and ignorant emperor ruled by his wives and freedmen – a stark contrast with Tiberius’ active involvement with Drusus’ advancement and clear feelings with regard to Germanicus. In line with this, Tacitus depicts the matter of the succession to Claudius as a struggle between several of Claudius’ wives and freedmen. This chapter, therefore, investigates Tacitus’ representation of the transmission of imperial power in the Claudian Annals from the perspective of agency and power: who decides about this transmission? Who is described as involved in determining the course of the succession, which methods do they use, and, finally, what does this suggest with regard to the balance of power at the imperial court, and Tacitus’ view on Claudius’ principate? When expedient, I will sometimes refer to the ways in which certain themes develop in the following Neronian Books, since they are in many respects a continuation of the Claudian narrative, but diverge from it in certain significant aspects.

The chapter starts with a part (section 3.1) about the candidates for the succession – Nero and Britannicus – and the criteria of selection. It argues that Tacitus

945 Santoro l’Hoir 2006; Galtier 2011.
946 Cf. Syme 1958, 359 Martin 1990, 1580 on Tacitus grouping his material more in episodes in the third hexad.
presents Nero’s rise to power as inevitable, but that he downplays the agency of the two candidates and minimizes the extent to which they are characterized, thereby indirectly attributing Nero’s succession to factors outside himself. The next two sections discuss the ‘stakeholders’ of the succession: the persons involved in, and concerned with, the transmission of imperial power. Section 3.2 examines Claudius’ role in the process, concluding that Tacitus deliberately denies the emperor an active and rational part, and reinforces this impression by his characterization of Claudius as ignorant, passive and weak. Section 3.3 concentrates on the driving force behind Nero’s promotion: Claudius’ wife Agrippina. It investigates the methods and helpers employed by her in her efforts to secure imperial power for her son, as well as an enhanced position of power for herself. Compared to other ancient sources, Tacitus magnifies her agency, and emphasizes it by portraying her as a ruthless, scheming, power hungry, almost masculine woman. A brief section 3.4 draws attention to the passive reactions to the matter of the succession by main constituents of the state: the Senate, the military and the people. Section 3.5 analyses the role of kinship in the conflicts surrounding the succession, in particular the role of authoritative ancestors and the tension between filiation by blood and through adoption with regard to claims to power. It suggests that ancestry as an argument in Nero’s succession is represented as being of secondary importance in comparison with the scheming of Agrippina, and that Tacitus draws remarkably little attention to the differences in kinship ties with Claudius – and, consequently, the different validity of their ‘right’ to the succession – between Nero and Britannicus. The conclusion draws together the observations and offers some suggestions for the interpretation of the succession issue in the Claudian Annals as a whole.947

947 I am grateful to Simon Malloch for sharing his commentary on Book 11 with me before its official publication.
3.1 The candidates for succession and criteria of selection

3.1.1 THE CANDIDATES FOR THE SUCCESSION

In Tacitus’ depiction of the struggle for the succession, there are only two candidates for the purple: Nero and Britannicus. Britannicus, as Claudius’ biological son by his third wife Messalina, is the obvious heir to his father’s power. However, his position is challenged, and eventually undermined, by Nero, who is the emperor’s great-nephew as well as the son of his fourth wife Agrippina, and who will during the course of the narrative become connected to the emperor as his stepson, son-in-law and adopted son. These two boys are represented as the two only real contenders for imperial power; no other potential successors are named. In the speech attributed to the freedman Narcissus in 12.65.1, just before the decease of Claudius, he only refers to the options of Nero’s and Britannicus’ succession: *seu Britannicus rerum seu Nero poteretur*. But also earlier in the extant narrative, the question of who will succeed seems restricted to these two candidates. The dynastic nature of the succession seems to be taken for granted.

Nero and Britannicus

Nero’s future succession looms over the account of Claudius’ principate from the moment Nero is first introduced at 11.11.2 as ‘L. Domitius, by adoption later admitted into command and the nomenclature of ‘Nero’’.\(^\text{948}\) Also in the narrative of

\(^{948}\) As Furneaux 1907 and Malloch 2013 *ad loc.* observe, the full mention of his name and the description make it likely that this is Nero’s first appearance in the (Claudian) *Annals*. In this chapter, I will use the name Nero to describe the later emperor, even when writing about the boy before his adoption and assumption of that name, for the sake of clarity.
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Book 12, Tacitus continuously associates him with the imperial succession; in fact, Nero only figures in the text in the context of Agrippina’s preparations for the transfer of power to her son, and does not appear in the narration in any other setting. Britannicus’ candidacy for the succession is less explicit in our extant text, either because Tacitus had already presented him as the heir apparent to his father in the earlier, lost, Books of the Claudian Annals, or because both he and his readers know that Britannicus will not actually succeed in the end. His candidacy can be inferred from the repeated contrasts drawn between the rising position of Nero and the decreasing status of Britannicus, comparing their chances on succeeding Claudius (see below, section 3.1.3). In addition, Britannicus’ position is likened to that of Gaius and Lucius Caesar under Augustus (12.25.1), and certain soldiers are said to have looked for Britannicus after the announcement of Claudius’ death (12.69.1).

A more independent hint of the dynastic role of Britannicus may be found in 11.26, where Silius, meaning to replace Claudius as emperor, proposes to marry Messalina and adopt Britannicus (11.26.2). His proposal must be seen in a dynastic context, also because there is no question of adopting Messalina’s other child, Octavia: it is not, then – or in any case, not only – a matter of personal affection. Clearly, Britannicus is seen to fulfill a role in the context of imperial power, perhaps providing Silius with the necessary legitimacy (by linking him to the ruling emperor). More probably, Silius’ adoption of Britannicus would satisfy Messalina by guaranteeing her son’s succession, even after the couple’s intended murder of Claudius. However, even before Silius’ proposal, Tacitus makes clear that Britannicus will not gain power in this way, through the foreshadowings of Nero’s imperium in 11.11.2 and Claudius’ punishment of Messalina and marriage to Agrippina in 11.25.3.

Other candidates

No other individuals are mentioned or suggested by Tacitus to be contenders for the throne. In the context of the succession, Dio briefly mentions that Claudius

949 That the Tacitean Silius intends to replace Claudius as emperor is clear from his remark mansuram can- dem Messalinae potentiam – i.e. she would still enjoy the power of an empress – and from Tacitus’ earlier representation of their affair, e.g. 11.12.3: velut translata iam fortuna, servi liberti paratus principis apud adulterum visebantur; it is not unthinkable that Sejanus’ plan to marry Livilla as a way to gain power will have had a bearing on Tacitus’ representation of Silius’ similar intentions. For the motives of Silius see Malloch 2013 ad 11.12.3 and 394-398; Fagan 2002 with bibliography; Osgood 2011, 209-213.
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had another son, referred by him as ‘ὁ ἕτερος’: Claudius Drusus, born in AD 19 or 20 to Claudius’ first wife Plautia Urgulanilla, and engaged to a daughter of Sejanus’. However, Dio’s sole purpose in bringing him up is to note that, unlike his half-brother Britannicus, he was no longer in the race for the emperorship, since he had died several years before – by choking on a pear he had thrown in the air to catch it with his mouth, as Suetonius reports. Tacitus does not bother to mention the boy, who died in Tiberius’ reign before formally becoming an adult, either in the Tiberian narrative, or in the extant Claudian Books.

The only other man who may potentially have been considered as a successor to Claudius is Lucius Silanus, fiancé of Claudius’ daughter Octavia. In the context of Agrippina’s plans to engage Nero to Octavia, Tacitus mentions that Claudius had already betrothed his daughter to Silanus, and ‘by means of triumphal insignia and the magnificence of a gladiatorial show [he] had brought the young man, brilliant as he was in other respects too, to the enthusiastic attention of the public’ (12.3.2). Lucius Junius Silanus was the son of M. Silanus Torquatus and Aemilia Lepida, and as such a lineal descendant of Augustus. After his betrothal to Octavia, he was actively promoted by Claudius. But while Tacitus mentions the details of Silanus’ advancement by Claudius, he keeps completely silent about his Augustan ancestry, and limits himself to the vague iuvenis et alia clarus.

This omission is remarkable for several reasons, which have not always been noticed by scholars. First, for the simple fact that direct descent from Augustus was a valuable asset, and must have constituted the main reason for Claudius to connect Silanus to his daughter when she was only an infant in AD 41. Furthermore, because Tacitus does mention it very explicitly in the case of his brothers Marcus and Decimus in the Neronian Books: they were considered potential rivals to Nero

950 Cf. Ann. 3.29.4.
951 Dio 60.32.1 (Xiphilinus/Zonaras?); Suet. Cl. 27.1.
952 On the ancestry of Silanus and his parents, see Syme 1986, 188-192.
953 In addition to receiving the triumphal insignia and holding gladiatorial games, he had also received the privilege of standing for political office five years before the normal age; Levick 1990, 58 PIR 3 J829. Suetonius and Dio also mention Claudius’ promotion of Silanus: Suet. Cl. 24.3; Dio 60.5.7-8, 60.21.5, 60.31.7.
954 Furneaux 1907 ad loc. rightly takes alia to refer to his descent from Augustus.
955 Levick 1990, 57-58. Whether this betrothal was intended by Claudius to bolster his own position, or to eliminate the potential threat posed by Silanus on the basis of his ancestry by connecting the young man to himself, is irrelevant here.
precisely because of their descent from the first emperor.\footnote{13.1.1-2 (Marcus), 15.35.1 (Decimus). In fact, the \textit{Annals} feature a long series of Silani appearing alongside and/or challenging the Julii and the Claudii: D. Silanus, exiled on a charge of adultery with the Younger Julia but recalled under Tiberius (3.24); M. Silanus Creticus, replaced by Piso as governor of Syria (2.43.2); Junia Caecilia, engaged to Nero Caesar (2.43.2); C. Silanus, banished under Tiberius (3.66-69); Junia Silana, omitting Tiberius from her testament (3.76); Junia Claudilla, married to Caligula (6.20.1); C. Appius Silanus, murdered on the orders of Messalina (11.29.1); L. Silanus, fiancé of Antonia, expelled from the Senate and driven to suicide on the accusation of incest with his sister Junia Calvina (12.3-4 and 12.8); M. Silanus, murdered by Agrippina (13.1); Junia Silana, exiled on the urgings of Agrippina (13.22.2); D. Silanus Torquatus, driven to suicide in AD 64 after an accusation of revolutionary plans (15.35); Junia Lepida, accused of incest with her nephew L. Silanus Torquatus by Nero (16.8), while he is charged with revolution and executed in Bari (16.8-9). Like the Pisones in O’Gorman’s 2006 article, the Silani may be considered another ‘virtual dynasty’ next to the Julio-Claudian.} Last, since Nero is indirectly compared to Silanus in this passage: like Silanus, Nero will be engaged to Octavia, and will figure in public games to enhance his popularity.\footnote{Cf. the similarity between 12.3.2: \textit{gladiatorii muneris magnificentia protulerat ad studia vulgi} and 12.41.2: \textit{ludicro circensium, quod adquirendis vulgi studiis ebatur}.} However, what Tacitus withholds is that Silanus and Nero were connected to the first princeps in the same degree: their mothers were great-granddaughters of Augustus through the Elder Julia.\footnote{Nero’s grandmother the Elder Agrippina and Silanus’ grandmother the Younger Julia were both daughters of Augustus’ only child Julia the Elder.} This crucial fact means that in many respects Silanus may have seemed a better fiancé than Nero: his lineage and popularity equalled Nero’s, but he was already an adult with political and military experience, and was thus in a position to replace Claudius, were the emperor to die before Britannicus reached adulthood.\footnote{Levick 1990, 58; Seif 1973, 166; Koestermann 1967 estimates his year of birth at AD 24. Nero was born in AD 37.} Silanus, then, may in reality have been perceived as a potential successor, but is not presented as such by Tacitus. By suppressing information about his lineage, Tacitus may be deliberately avoiding presenting Claudius as making a conscious, strategic choice in the matter of his daughter’s engagement. Moreover, by downplaying Silanus, he presents the struggle for the succession as revolving around Nero and Britannicus – Silanus, who was eliminated soon after Nero became a candidate, plays no notable role in the competition, and would distract from the contrast between the two young boys – thus continuing the dualism of two contrasting potential successor also discernible in the two previous cases of Piso/Otho and Drusus/Germanicus. Furthermore, Tacitus’ depiction of Silanus as \textit{iuvenis et...}
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*alia clarus,* without specifying his Augustan ancestry and his political and military experience, minimizes the threat he may pose to Nero as a rival for the succession, and as a consequence represents Nero’s advancement as more effortless than it may have been.

3.1.2 Nero’s Rise and Britannicus’ Downfall

The competition for the succession, then, is between Nero and Britannicus; yet Tacitus makes it very clear, almost from the beginning of the extant Claudian narrative, that it is Nero who will, in the end, become emperor. In fact, the Claudian narrative as it has come down to us is not so much a narration of the last seven years of Claudius’ reign, as a description of the road to, and preparations for, Nero’s succession.\(^{960}\) Even though the actual transfer of power will only take place two Books later, Nero is already firmly associated with his later *imperium* at the moment when he is first introduced into the narrative. Especially from the start of Book 12 onwards, after Agrippina’s betrothal to Claudius, it is the steady advancement of Nero by his mother, and the accompanying growth of her influence, that constitutes the main thread of the narrative.\(^{961}\) Nero’s steady rise is complemented by a corresponding decline in the position of Britannicus, who becomes progressively more miserable and isolated.\(^{962}\)

*The lusus Troiae (11.11.2-12.1)*

Nero and Britannicus make their first appearance in the extant Annals in the context of the *lusus Troiae* – organized by Claudius as part of his *ludi saeculares* – in which both boys participate (11.11.2). The games themselves are barely discussed; rather, Tacitus uses the occasion to juxtapose and contrast the two boys with regard to their candidacy for the succession, and focuses on the reaction of the spectators to them.\(^{963}\) Nero’s future fortune is made explicit straight away: whereas Britannicus is denoted as *Britannicus imperatore genitus,* Nero is introduced as *L. Domitius adop-

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960 Cf. Koestermann 1967 ad 12.3.2.  
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tione max in imperium et cognomentum Neronis adscitus, prefiguring his adoption by Claudius and his later succession to his new father.\textsuperscript{964} Nero’s final ‘victory’ over Britannicus is also implied in the immediately following statement that ‘the fact that the goodwill of the plebs was keener toward Domitius was received like a prophecy’ (11.11.2) – of Nero’s succession, we may assume.\textsuperscript{965} Although acrior implies that Britannicus was greeted with enthusiasm as well, the people’s preference for Nero is particularly wry in the face of the express mention of Claudius’ presence at the spectacle – sedente Claudio circensisibus ludis – and the designation of Britannicus as the emperor’s biological son and thus the appropriate focus for public fervour.\textsuperscript{966}

To illustrate the people’s fascination with Nero and their conviction of his imperial future, Tacitus inserts a short digression on Nero and his guardian snake(s) (11.11.3). He reports that ‘it was publicized’ – vulgabatur; the agents are not specified – that Nero had been guarded by snakes in his infancy, ‘a fantasy which was assimilated to foreign wonders’, according to Tacitus, as even Nero himself, not exactly unassuming (haudquaquam sui detractor), only talked about one single snake. The story, recalling as it does the connotations of snakes attached to Hercules, Alexander the Great, Augustus and Scipio Africanus, links Nero to these men and their power.\textsuperscript{967}

The greater favour shown to Nero is repeated and explained some sentences later: the people’s inclination derives from his being the sole male descendant of Germanicus, whereas his mother is pitied because of the savagery shown to her by Messalina, wife of Claudius and mother of Britannicus (11.12.1). The reference to Messalina’s hostility towards Agrippina closes off the episode of the lusus Troiae and provides a transition to the next event: Messalina’s affair with Silius,\

\textsuperscript{964} Notably, Nero is not introduced with reference to his biological parents Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus and Agrippina, as might be expected when a character first figures in the narrative (cf. the first active appearance of Germanicus in 1.33 or Sejanus’ introduction at 4.1). The fact that, instead, the point of reference is his (future) relation to Claudius places the following episode firmly in the context of the succession.\textsuperscript{965} Seif 1973, 66; Malloch 2013, 175; 189.\textsuperscript{966} Malloch 2013 \textit{ad loc}.\textsuperscript{967} The story recalls that of Hera sending two snakes to kill the young Hercules; snakes were furthermore associated with the conceptions of Alexander the Great, Augustus and Scipio Africanus, whose mothers were said to have been impregnated by Zeus, Apollo and Jupiter respectively in the guise of a serpent – this is presumably what is meant by the \textit{externa miracula}: Plut. \textit{Alex}. 2.6-3.4 (Alexander), Suet. \textit{Aug}. 94.4 and Dio 45.1.2 (Augustus) and Liv. 26.19.5-6 (Scipio); O’Gorman 2000, 162-171; Malloch 2013 \textit{ad loc}; see Malloch 2013, 192 on the roles of snakes in ancient myth and literature.
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which might have secured imperial power for Britannicus. However, since Tacitus has already made clear what the outcome will be – Nero’s succession – the whole story of their liaison and attempted coup is indirectly marked as doomed to fail.\textsuperscript{968} Moreover, their affair may even be seen as the cause of Nero’s rise to power, since it leads to Messalina’s fall, which will generate Agrippina’s opportunity of marrying Claudius and promoting her son.\textsuperscript{969} Interpreted as such, the story of Nero’s rise to power starts here. Already in this first passage, Nero is the more prominent of the two; note also that his description is much longer, as Britannicus is only accorded three words in the whole passage.\textsuperscript{970} This impression is heightened by this episode being preceded by a narration of eastern affairs, in which the struggle between the brothers Gotarzes and Vardanes for control over the kingdom of Parthia is a leading element.\textsuperscript{971}

\textit{Agrippina’s marriage to Claudius (12.1-3)}

After this episode, Nero disappears from the narrative for the remainder of the Book, only to reappear at the beginning of Book 12, in the context of his mother’s engagement to the emperor (12.1-2), which provides the prerequisite for Nero’s further advancement. After the execution of Messalina, the three main imperial freedmen – Pallas, Callistus and Narcissus – compete over the selection of a new wife for Claudius, and in a council convened by the emperor argue in favour of their own candidate. The arguments of the first two centre upon marital affection and the new wife’s expected treatment of Claudius’ children – if the new empress wanted her own children to succeed, she could, after all, pose a threat to any exist-

\textsuperscript{968} Malloch 2013, 175.
\textsuperscript{969} Seif 1973, 68; Malloch 2013 \textit{ad loc}. Note also that, although Messalina’s death concludes Book 11, the narrative year flows over into the next Book with the choice of a new wife for Claudius, which is presented as the immediate result of Messalina’s death, thus creating a continuity between the events on both sides of the Book division: 12.1.1: \textit{caede Messalina convulsa principis domus}; cf. Seif 1973, 143-144 and 149-150; Mehl 1974, 97. In this way, Messalina’s fall comes to function as a stage in Nero’s advancement.
\textsuperscript{970} Cf. Vessey 1971, 392; Seif 1973, 65. The fact that Tacitus chooses this specific setting of the \textit{lusus Troiae} for the introduction of what will become the main thread of the narrative – the struggle for the succession between Nero and Britannicus – must be considered significant, since Suetonius does not link the \textit{ludi sacculares} and the \textit{lusus Troiae} to the question of the succession at all. Suetonius mentions the \textit{ludi} and the issue of the calculation, but no similar incident; and he reports Nero’s success at the \textit{lusus}, but without mentioning the role of Britannicus (Suet. \textit{Cl.} 21.2 and \textit{Ner.} 7.1 respectively).
\textsuperscript{971} Keitel 1977, 42-44 and 1978, 463-464; Malloch 2013 \textit{ad loc}; see also Hausmann 2009, 197-198.
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ing imperial offspring. Aelia Paetina is recommended by Narcissus on the basis of her previous marriage to Claudius, their common daughter Antonia, and the lack of novercalia odia towards Britannicus and Octavia (12.2.1). Next, Callistus proposes Lolliia Paulina, who, being childless, would be free from rivalry and stepmotherly hatred (12.2.2). Both freedmen, then, take Britannicus’ succession to Claudius for granted. By contrast, the last speaker, Pallas, does not pay attention to the fate of Britannicus after Claudius’ remarriage, but instead focuses on the introduction of Nero into the imperial household – a prefiguration of Britannicus’ eclipse during Nero’s rise.\(^7\) In fact, what Pallas praises most in Agrippina is the aspect that the other two freedmen had presented as disadvantages: the presence of children of her own, not related to Claudius.\(^7\) And it is precisely the absence of the denial of stepmotherly hatred in Pallas’ speech that foreshadows Agrippina’s later novercalia odia towards Britannicus (e.g. in 12.26.2, 12.41.3 and 12.65.2).\(^7\)

Pallas, then, employs a different strategy from the two previous speakers (note that his case is introduced by *at*) to promote his candidate Agrippina: one touching on the dynastic legitimacy of Claudius’ emperorship – a pressing question after the attempted usurpation of Silius and Messalina.\(^7\) His main line of reasoning – *maxime* implies there were other arguments as well – centres upon Agrippina bringing with her Germanicus’ grandson (i.e. Nero), and on her Julian blood. His argument is threefold: such a marriage would connect Claudius to the Julian family, thereby enhancing his legitimacy as an emperor; it would prevent future challenges to Claudius’ power by keeping Agrippina’s proven (and still potentially fruitful: *integra iuventa*) fecundity and ‘the brilliancy of the Caesars’ within the imperial family; and it would bring a male descendant of Germanicus into Claudius’ house, thus providing a successor who, being a grandson of the celebrated general, would be ‘altogether worthy of a Commander’s fortune’ (*dignum prorsus imperatoria fortuna*).\(^7\)

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973 Hausmann 2009, 318. Cf. Keitel 1977, 142: ‘Pallas avoids the main issue raised by Narcissus and Callistus, whether the new wife would be a hostile step-mother to Britannicus, the heir-apparent. Instead Pallas’ negative formulation, that Claudius cannot afford to allow Agrippina to marry outside the family, glides over the obvious danger of her bringing her own son, the last male heir of Germanicus (11.12.1), into competition with Britannicus.’
974 Keitel 1977, 142; on ancient perceptions of stepmothers, see Watson 1995.
975 Seif 1973, 162; 156 on the different nature of Pallas’ case; Mehl 1974, 100.
976 12.2.3: *at Pallas id maxime in Agrippina laudare, quod Germanici nepotem secum traheret, dignum prorsus imperatoria fortuna: stirpem nobilem et familiae <Iuliae> Claudiaeque posteros coniungeret; et ne femina expertae...*
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depicts Agrippina’s marriage to the emperor as a step towards Nero’s future reign.

Claudius is convinced by these arguments, and no further mention of Britannicus is made. The argument of children, however, returns some lines later, in an address of Vitellius’ to the Senate. Initially, Claudius and Agrippina are reluctant to celebrate their marriage, fearing popular censure of their incestuous relationship (12.5.1). Vitellius, however, addresses the Senate and convinces them that the emperor should marry Agrippina (12.5.2-7.2). His oration is highly ironical, as it is an almost complete inversion of everything Tacitus has told the reader so far, or will proceed to relate.977 As an argument for the emperor’s remarriage, he cites the solace provided to Claudius by being able to entrust his small children to the care of a wife – rather ironical in view of Agrippina’s later hostility towards her stepson (12.5.3).978 Once the Senate agrees that Claudius should take a new spouse, however, Vitellius argues in favour of selecting Agrippina partly on the basis of her proven fecundity (12.6.1: *puerperis insignem* and *fecunditatis experimentum*) – thus again presenting Nero as an asset.979

*Nero’s engagement to Octavia (12.3-4 and 12.9)*
The connection between Agrippina’s marriage and Nero’s advancement is also suggested by the statement that Agrippina, after being chosen by Claudius as his new wife, immediately starts using her ‘wifely power’ (12.3.1: *potentia uxoria*) to

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977  See below, section 3.2.2 for a more detailed treatment of the speech; and Seif 1973, 178-179; Mehl 1974, 112-113; Devillers 1994, 246-247; see Shannon 2012, 170-171 on the religious terminology used by Vitellius to represent the proposed marriage as holy.


979  Considering the emphasis on the *experimentum* of her fecundity (the *fecunditas* occupies a subordinate position), it is not so much Agrippina’s capacity to produce a new heir that is praised, but the product of her ‘proven fecundity’ – Nero – that she is bringing into Claudius’ house.
further his son’s cause by preparing his engagement to the emperor’s daughter Octavia.\textsuperscript{980} This engagement is denoted with the term \textit{maiora} (which will be repeated in 12.9.1), implying that Agrippina’s marriage to Claudius is merely a step towards a higher goal: Nero’s future succession.\textsuperscript{981} Octavia is emphatically denoted as \textit{Caesars filia}, highlighting why it is so important that Nero be connected to her: she is the emperor’s daughter, and an engagement to her would make Nero the emperor’s son-in-law and significantly increase his position.\textsuperscript{982} Since Octavia was promised to Silanus, the young man needed to be removed before Nero could be betrothed to her, which is accomplished through criminal means.\textsuperscript{983}

After these preparations and the wedding of Claudius and Agrippina, ‘it was next decided to hesitate no further’: consul designate Mammius Pollio is induced to propose the Senate to beg Claudius to betroth Octavia to Domitius (12.9.1).\textsuperscript{984} Pollio addresses the Senate, employing words similar to those recently used by Vitellius in his speech advocating Claudius’ marriage to Agrippina (12.5-6) – unmistakably

\textsuperscript{980} 12.3.1-2: \textit{nondum uxor potentia uxoria iam uteretur. nam ubi sui matrimonii certa fuit, struere maiora nuptiasque Domitii, quem ex Cn. Ahenobarbo generat, et Octaviae Caesaris filiae moliri.}

\textsuperscript{981} Seif 1973, 166; Hausmann 2009, 320.

\textsuperscript{982} It is quite unlikely that Tacitus’ audience would be unaware of Octavia’s ancestry – this is, after all, the fourth Claudian Book – and the addition is not needed for identification, as there is no other Octavia to confuse her with.

\textsuperscript{983} Vitellius accuses Silanus of incest with his sister Junia Calvina, Claudius accepts the charges, Silanus is removed from the senatorial order and compelled to forswear his praetorship, and the engagement is cancelled by Claudius (12.4.1-3). Some chapters later, Tacitus reports how Silanus takes his own life on the day of the wedding of Claudius and Agrippina, while his sister Junia Calvina is banished from Italy (12.8.1). By several means, Tacitus makes the false accusation and its consequences appear particularly scandalous. Most importantly, he explicitly denies the charge (\textit{fratrumque non incestum, sed incustoditum amorem}; as Seif 1973, 168 notes, the charge of incest is accepted without reservations at Sen. \textit{Apocol. 8.2}); he aggravates Vitellius’ invention of it by reminding the reader of his censorship and by adding that Calvina had until recently been his own daughter-in-law; he censures Silanus’ sudden removal from the Senate by referring to the recent \textit{lectio senatus} under the supervision of precisely Claudius and Vitellius (Koestermann 1967 \textit{ad loc.}); he highlights Silanus’ unawareness of the \textit{insidiae} (Hausmann 2009, 325); he reports popular ridicule at Claudius’ attempts to appease the gods for the incest of the Silani at the moment of his own incestuous wedding (12.8.2); and he has the imperial wedding day overshadowed by the suicide of Silanus (12.8.1. As Seif 1973, 184 notes, Dio and Suetonius do not connect his death thematically to the wedding of Claudius and Agrippina. Furneaux 1907 \textit{ad loc.}, however, notes that Suetonius and Dio report that Silanus was killed or forced to commit suicide; Tacitus, then, credits the young man with the independent action of burdening the wedding day with a death). Perhaps the naming of Eprius Marcellus, who would become a hated \textit{delator} under Nero, also serves to criticize the matter; cf. Keitel 1977, 145 n.27.

\textsuperscript{984} Cf. Furneaux 1907 \textit{ad 12.8.2} on Agrippina’s involvement.
indicating Tacitus’ low opinion on the matter, as well as the fact that the engagements of Agrippina and Nero are part of the same grand scheme. The proposal for the engagement is described as quod aetati utriusque non absurdum et maiora patefacturum erat (12.9.1). The focalization here is unclear; perhaps it is Tacitus’ own explanation of the proposition. The term maiora – referring, evidently, to Nero’s succession – recalls the use of the same word in 12.3.2, thereby linking the conception of the design to its accomplishment.

Through the engagement, Nero becomes the equal of Britannicus, being linked to the emperor now as his prospective son-in-law, in addition to positions as great-nephew and stepson (12.9.2). By contrast, nothing is said about Britannicus himself, or his supporters. In fact, Tacitus states that Nero’s engagement was brought about by Britannicus’ enemies: ‘through the efforts of his mother and the skill of those who, for having accused Messalina, feared vengeance from her son’ (12.9.2). As the unnamed individuals had helped bring about the fall of Messalina, it was to their advantage that Britannicus not become powerful enough to punish them. Fear of revenge for the elimination of Messalina as a reason for promoting Nero is also found in Dio, who, however, connects it to the efforts of the imperial freedmen to procure Agrippina’s marriage to Claudius: they are depicted as (rightly) thinking that this marriage will move Nero closer to the succession. By placing the anecdote here, and so reminding the reader that it was Messalina’s execution that paved the way for this, Tacitus associates Nero’s rise with crime, and suggests that some people at the court were inimical towards Britannicus. The next chapters (12.10-11) deal with the Parthians’ discontent with their leader Gotarzes, who had been murdering several of his family members – perhaps a foreshadowing of Nero’s eliminations of many of his relatives later in the narrative.

In the preceding chapter, moreover, to highlight the contrast with Britannicus even more, Nero had been provided with extra support in the form of Seneca. Agrippina had requested remission from exile as well as a praetorship for him, installing

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985 12.9.2. As Hausmann 2009, 342 states, the engagement is thus presented ‘in ein ebenso moralisch fragwürdiges Licht wie die zuvor dargestellte Hochzeit des Kaisers mit Agrippina’; see also Devillers 1994, 156-157 on similarities.
987 Hausmann 2009, 343.
988 Dio 60.31.8 (Zonaras); cf. Mehl 1974, 106. Suetonius and Josephus say nothing about fear of revenge.
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him as teacher of the young Nero and hoping that he would help further her son’s position: *utque Domitii pueritia tali magistro adolesceret et consiliis eiusdem ad spem dominationis uterentur* (12.8.2). It was believed – by Agrippina and her supporters, presumably – that Seneca would be loyal to her out of gratitude for the recall, and hostile towards Claudius for his initial exile.990 Suetonius and Dio also connect Seneca’s installation as tutor to Nero’s advancement, although they do not draw an explicit causal relation between the two: Suetonius places Seneca’s appointment after Nero’s adoption by Claudius, while Dio mentions in one sentence that Agrippina herself was ‘training her son for the throne and was entrusting his education to Seneca’.991 All three sources, then, agree in interpreting the installation of Seneca as an important step towards Nero’s succession.992 It also illustrates how Britannicus is gradually deprived of support: in two subsequent chapters, someone inimical to Britannicus’ father is given a high function at court, as tutor to his rival for the succession, while the enemies of his mother conspire with his new stepmother to elevate that rival to a position of equality with himself.

**Nero’s adoption by Claudius (12.25-26)**

The next stage of Nero’s hasty advancement (12.25.1: *festinatur*) is his adoption by Claudius. The narrative seems to hurry as well, as the adoption, which only took place at the end of February, is made into the opening item of the narrative year AD 50.993 The imperial freedman Pallas, one of Agrippina’s supporters, persuades Claudius to adopt Nero, using two arguments to explain why Claudius should adopt an extra son in addition to his biological child Britannicus.994 First, he asserts that it is in the interest of the state (*consuleret rei publicae*) that Claudius surrounds Britannicus’ boyhood with ‘a protective cordon of maturity’, meaning that ‘Britannicus is so young that he needs to be protected from public affairs by Claudius’

990 12.8.2; although no focalizer is specified and *credebatur* is general, one may understand ‘Agrippina and her supporters’ as the source of the thoughts, as well as of the following verbs *placitum, inducunt* and *uterentur* in the next chapter: Furneaux 1907 *ad loc*.
991 Suet. Ner. 7.1; Dio 60.32.3 (Zonaras).
993 See Kienast 1996, 96 for the date.
994 12.25.1: [Pallas] *stimulabat Claudium consuleret rei publicae, Britannici pueritiam robore circumdaret. sic apud divum Augustum, quamquam nepotibus subnixum, viguisse privignos; a Tiberio super propriam stirpem Germanicum adsuumpit: se quoque accingenter iuvene partem curarum capessituro.* None of the other sources (Suet. Cl. 27.2 and 39.2; Dio 60.32.2; Jos. AJ. 20.8.1) relate any motive for Claudius’ adoption of Nero.
relying on someone older such as Domitius’. Yet, while ostensibly well-meant advice to protect Britannicus, the military feel of the words *robor* (strength, force) and *circumdare* (enclose, surround) suggest something very different: of Britannicus ‘safely’ kept in custody, encircled by Nero’s power. It is notable that the care of Britannicus, previously presented by Vitellius as the task of Agrippina (12.5.3), is now transferred to Nero. Moreover, the contrast drawn by Pallas between Britannicus’ *pueritia* and Nero’s *robor* is illusory: as Tacitus will relate in the next paragraph, the boys were only three years apart.

Pallas next cites (what he presents as) Augustan and Tiberian precedent for the adoption: both emperors, although they had their own offspring to rely on, had allowed others to flourish. Augustus’ stepsons (Drusus the Elder and Tiberius) thrived while he had grandsons of his own to support him, and Tiberius had adopted Germanicus in addition to his own son Drusus the Younger. As such, Nero could constitute a useful complement to Claudius’ biological son, and could take upon himself a part of Claudius’ imperial cares. Knowing the importance of Germanicus and Augustus for Claudius, this is a potentially fruitful approach. In reality, however, the comparison falls short, since neither emperor voluntarily relied on these others. Augustus only definitely advanced his stepson Tiberius once both Gaius and Lucius Caesar had passed away, while Tiberius even withdrew to Rhodes during their lifetime, allegedly not to stand in the way of the youngsters’ promotion. Tiberius himself had adopted Germanicus on Augustus’ orders, and the Tiberian narrative has given eloquent testimony to the hostility between the two. Furthermore, the phrase *partem curarum capessituro* recalls Vitellius’ statement, in his

995 Interpretation by Woodman 2004 *ad loc.*
996 Cf. Vessey 1971, 404 notes that *circumdare* is ‘frequently used of sieges and hostile encirclements’; the military image recurs at 12.41.3: *datosque a noverca custodiae eius imponit* (discussed below) and 12.68, and more explicitly in Dio 60.32.6 (Zonaras).
997 Koestermann 1967 *ad loc.*
998 Mehl 1974, 132; at the moment of Nero’s adoption, Nero was 12 years old (he was born in December 37), Britannicus 9 (being born in February 41).
999 See below, section 3.5.1.
1000 Cf. 1.3.3; Suet. *Tib.* 10.1-2 See Bowersock in Millar/Segal 1984 on Tiberius’ stay on Rhodes. There might even be a hint of threat here, if the comparison is extended: just like Gaius and Lucius were rumoured to have been murdered by their stepmother Livia, so Britannicus needs to die before Nero can fully assume his position as successor; see Keitel 1977, 166: ‘Tacitus implies throughout that none of those who stood between the stepson and throne died a natural death.’
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senatorial address, that a new wife could take away the emperor’s domestica cura (12.5.3) – just as Agrippina will share his domestic cares, so Nero will share some of the emperor’s public burdens: to the reader, this bodes no good for Claudius.1002 And again, there is military language involved: Claudius is advised to gird himself (accingere) with the sword that is Nero, so to speak.1003 In spite of the evident inaccuracy of Pallas’ arguments, Claudius is won over.

But while Pallas ostensibly acknowledges Britannicus’ importance to Claudius and presents Nero only as additional help, the far-reaching consequences of the adoption are spelled out clearly by Tacitus: Nero, who is three years older than Britannicus, gains precedence over his new brother.1004 Biological and adoptive sons were legally equal, but the age difference would make Nero the first of the two to reach manhood, and to assume offices and power, creating a visible priority, and unofficially making Nero the heir apparent.1005 The designation of Britannicus with the term filius here – rather than with his proper name – emphasizes the gravity of the consequences. Nero, who was only beginning to equal Britannicus some chapters before (12.9.2), is now taking precedence.1006 The Senate responds with a ‘more studied sycophancy’ towards him who they understand has just been designated imperial successor. The formulation quaesitio adulatione recalls the quaesitio adulatio of the Senate after Tiberius’ request to endow Drusus with tribunicia potestas (3.57.1).1007 In both cases, a privilege accorded to a male member of the domus Augusta is (rightly) interpreted by the Senate as indicative of the imperial succession; however, whereas the adulation was directed to both Tiberius and Drusus in the former case, here it is Nero who ominously overshadows his father.1008 A law establishing Nero’s adoption is passed, the boy receives the name of ‘Nero’, and Agrippina is honoured with the title ‘Augusta’.1009

1002  Mehl 1974, 133; immediately before (12.5.3), the word capessat had been used with reference to imperial labours; cf. Devillers 1994, 248 on parallels with Vitellius’ speech.
1003  Furneaux 1907 ad loc.
1006  Seif 1973, 196. Dio 60.33.2.2 reports a portent, probably in connection with the adoption of Nero.
1007  Furneaux 1907 ad loc.
1008  Shannon 2012, 177.
1009  12.26.1. Dio also reports the granting of the title to Agrippina, but not in connection to the adoption (60.33.2a).
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The honours decreed by the Senate for Nero and Agrippina after the adoption cause people to take pity on Britannicus, who is gradually forsaken even by his slaves – who, we may assume, understood what was to come, like the senators. Tacitus’ use of the word fortuna – previously denoting Nero’s bright future: imperatoria fortuna – only increases Britannicus’ misfortune. The boy, so Tacitus relates, understood the falsity of Agrippina’s dutifulness towards him and turned it into mockery. Tacitus then reports that some maintain that Britannicus was not slow by nature, but he adds that he – the focalization switches from the unnamed sources ferunt to Tacitus himself – is uncertain whether this was actually true, or whether this reputation was attributed to him due to his perils, and endured because it was never tested. The formulation sine experimento prefigures Britannicus’ early death, implying that he died before being able to disprove his reputation as perceptive. Significantly, the adoption episode had been preceded by a Parthian intermezzo and a chapter reporting Agrippina’s removal of two women perceived by her as rivals; both sections emphasize the intrigues and struggles for power at the imperial court which are also at work in the case of Nero’s adoption.

Nero’s assumption of the toga virilis and Britannicus’ increasing isolation (12.41-42)
The next step in Nero’s advancement is his entry into adulthood, symbolised by his assumption of the toga virilis. The event is narrated at the beginning of the narrative year AD 51, although it only took place at the beginning of March. Notably, this chapter, together with the following two chapters on Agrippina’s increasing power and on prodigies, constitutes the only res internae in this narrative year, which fur-

1010 12.26.2: quibus patratis nemo adeo expers misericordiae fuit quem non Britannici fortuna maeror adificent. desolatus paulatim etiam servilibus ministeriis etc. Walker 1960, 61 notes the pathetic colouring of the words.
1011 12.26.2: puer intempestiva novercae officia in ludibrium vertebat, intellegens falsi. I do not agree with Hausmann’s (2009, 355 n.1109) contention that intellegens falsi refers to Britannicus’ general capacity to see through falseness rather than his appreciation of these particular officia for what they actually are.
1012 12.26.2: neque enim se sequem ei fuisse indolem ferunt, sive verum, seu periculis commendatus retinuit famam sine experimento. Koestermann 1967 ad loc., however, rightly points out that other passages (e.g. 12.41.3, 13.15.1) characterize him as not ignorant.
1014 See Keitel 1977, 151-159.
1015 Kienast 1996, 96; although he does not give a date for the actual assumption of the toga, he dates the accompanying honours on the 4th of March.
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ther includes eight chapters on Parthian affairs. It is not very probable that nothing else worthy of mention occurred in this year – or the following three years, for that matter: the narrative pace is speeding up considerably as we approach the end of Claudius’ reign, and the next years 52, 53 and 54 all have only six chapters each. This increased speed is also signalled more explicitly by the phrase toga Neroni mat-urata (12.41.1) and the simultaneity of all the events narrated in chapter 41 suggested by simul (12.41.2). The toga was indeed ‘speeded up for him’, since Nero was only 13 years old when he assumed it, instead of the conventional age of 14 to 17.1016 The reason for this premature entry into manhood, Tacitus states, was that ‘he should seem adapted to undertake political life’ (12.41.1). The formulation quo capessendae rei publicae habilis videretur is telling in several respects. Although res publica normally means general public business in such a context, when associated with the emperor’s eldest son, one might also take it to refer to the (government of the) Roman state. In addition, the verb capessere recalls Vitellius’ description of Claudius’ imperial tasks, as well as Pallas’ proposal that Nero might take on part of the emperor’s burdens.1017 The third time the term is used with reference to the succession issue, the next step has been taken: it is not just a proposal anymore, but Nero is presented as actually ready to undertake public duties. The language used suggests that the imperial power is slowly being transferred from the emperor to his adoptive son.

To celebrate Nero’s entry into adulthood, the Senate sycophantically proposes various honours to him, which are gladly conceded to by Claudius: Nero is allowed to assume the consulship at the age of 20 and will in the meantime bear the title of consul designatus and have proconsular imperium outside Rome; he is granted the title of princeps iuventutis; and a donative for the soldiers and a congiarium for the people are distributed in his name (12.41.1). Moreover, circus games are organized in his honour.1018 Suetonius adds that Nero led a decursio of the Praetorians and returned thanks to Claudius in the Senate; Dio mentions no honours at all, just divine displeasure through earthquakes and perhaps lightning on that very day.1019 These honours, which resemble those bestowed on Gaius and Lucius Caesar during the

1016  Levick 1990, 72-73; Osgood 2011, 228-229; Furneaux ad loc. notes that there are no other cases of boys entering adulthood before their 14th year until Commodus and Caracalla.
1017  12.5.3; 12.25.1; cf. Seif 1973, 201; Devillers 1994, 153-154 on parallels.
1018  The occasion was celebrated on coins as well: RIC I Claudius 76-79 (Osgood 2011, 229-231).
1019  Suet. Ner. 7.2; Dio 60.32.2c.
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reign of Augustus, effectively, though not explicitly, designate Nero as Claudius’ successor. This is also implied by the display staged at the games, organized ‘to gain the public’s enthusiasm’, in which both Nero and Britannicus figure. Britannicus rides past in his *toga praetexta* – the traditional outfit for freeborn boys – while Nero wears triumphal clothing, and ‘the people had only to look at the latter with his commander’s decoration, the former with his boyish garb, and to make the appropriate assumptions about the fortune of each’ (12.42.2). The imperative subjunctives *spectaret* and *praesumeret*, together with Tacitus’ assertion that the games were produced *adquirendis vulgi studiis*, indicate that they were a deliberate attempt – undoubtedly by Agrippina – to manipulate the public opinion about Nero and to promote him as Claudius’ successor.

The contrast between Britannicus and Nero is emphatic due to the parallel formulations *Britannicus in praetexta* / *Nero triumphali veste* and *hunc decore imperatorio / illum puerili habitu*, which illustrate the difference in position and, hence, fate. Again, *fortuna* is a keyword in the comparison between the two boys, military imagery (triumphal clothing) is used, and Nero is associated with imperial honours (*decus imperatorium*) while Britannicus’ puerility is emphasized. The contrast in maturity may seem somewhat inflated, given the small age difference, but the difference in powers was clearly considerable. Britannicus’ position is further weakened as, in the following chapter, Tacitus recounts how Britannicus is increasingly cut off from support by his stepmother. The nature of Britannicus’ fate – referred to immediately before with the phrase *fortunam utriusque praesumeret* – is indicated with the words *qui ... sortem Britannici miserabantur*. Freedmen, centurions and tribunes sympathizing with or loyal to Britannicus are removed: the officials are taken away *fictis causis* and *per speciem honoris*, his tutors are accused with *quasi crimina* and afflicted with exile or even death (12.41.2-3). An example of the pretexts used by Agrippina is cited: when running into each other, Britannicus had greeted Nero as ‘Domitius’ rather than as ‘Nero’, his new name, acquired through

1020 Osgood 2011, 228-229; Levick 1990, 73: ‘More important than the precedents were the purpose and effect of the grant, which were of course to provide Nero with interim power from which he could not be dislodged in the event of Claudius’ death.’
1021 12.41.2; note that Tacitus uses the same word for these games – *ludicrum* – as he had done for the Game of Troy in 11.11.2, where both boys also appear to the public and are contrasted by Tacitus.
1022 Furneaux 1907 *ad loc.* on Agrippina’s involvement; Seif 1973, 203.
1023 See Seif 1973, 203 on the construction of the sentence.
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The adoption. Agrippina complained about this to Claudius, alleging that this was the start of disaffection, that Britannicus, encouraged by his praecaptors, was spurning Nero’s adoption and that it would lead to public ruin if nothing were to be done about those teaching such hostilities (12.41.3). Claudius is taken in, eliminates his son’s best tutors and replaces them with guards of Agrippina’s choice. The terms novera and custodia in this one sentence suggest that Britannicus was being watched closely or kept in custody. Whereas Nero was given the best possible teacher – Seneca – both to educate him and to help him gain the throne, Britannicus is more and more deprived of educational, political and emotional support, and his tutors even end up administering poison to him in 13.15.4. The fact that Claudius allows his son to be subjected to a similar treatment imposed previously on himself – Claudius was not even allowed to appear in public – portrays the emperor as very ignorant and passive.

Dio also reports that Agrippina removed Britannicus’ supporters, in particular his tutor Sosibius, and had the new guards keep him in a kind of imprisonment, not allowing him so see his father or appear in public. He, however, cites an accusation of conspiracy against Nero as the pretext on which Sosibius was removed, while Tacitus quotes the greeting incident. Suetonius recounts the same anecdote as Tacitus, but with slight differences. In his version, Britannicus greets Nero as ‘Ahenobarbus’ out of habit (ex consuetudine), after which Nero attempts to convince Claudius that Britannicus was a changeling or illegitimate child. The episode is brought up to illustrate Nero’s cruelty, and Suetonius does not mention anything with regard to Britannicus’ deteriorating position at the court, nor to Agrippina’s influence in the matter. Tacitus, on the other hand, places it in the context of Nero’s rise and the stark contrast with the position of Britannicus. Earlier his equal (12.9.2), then assuming precedence (12.25.2), Nero is now depicted

1024 12.41.3: obvii inter se Nero Britannicum nomine, ille Domitium salutavere.
1025 12.41.3; cf. Koestermann 1967 ad loc.
1026 Cf. Hausmann 2009, 362; this is part of the network of military imagery signalled earlier.
1027 On Claudius’ low profile and unfavourable treatment before his accession, see Suet. Cl. 2-9 (esp. 2.1); Levick 1990, 11-20.
1028 Cf. Dio 60.32.5-6 (Zonaras); cf. also Dio 60.34.1 (Xiphilinus/Zonaras).
1029 Suet. Ner. 7.1.
1030 As Warmington 1977 ad loc. argues, Suetonius’ statement that Britannicus greeted Nero wrongly ex consuetudine cannot be true; instead, it must have been a deliberate affront, and the story must derive from a quarrel between the two.
as almost literally triumphing over his younger brother. Moreover, just as Tacitus had connected pity for Britannicus’ lot (12.26.2: *nemo adeo expers misericordia fuit, quem non Britannici fortuna maeror<e> adficeret*) to his abandonment by his slaves (12.26.2: *desolatus ... etiam servilibus ministeriis*), so he links his fortune (12.41.2: *sortem Britannici miserabantur*) to the removal of all his other supporters here.\footnote{1031} The episode is followed by another section of Parthian affairs, the last in the Claudian Books. Again, dynastic intrigues and conspiracies are a central feature of the narration, functioning ‘as a dark counterpoint to the worsening situation within the Roman royal family’ through thematic and verbal echoes.\footnote{1032}

*The marriage of Nero and Octavia and Nero’s speeches in the Senate (12.58)*
The narrative year AD 53 opens with the marriage of Nero to Claudius’ daughter Octavia. The brief, factual statement of the wedding occupies only one sentence, perhaps because its preparations had been narrated more elaborately before (12.3-4 and 12.9), but more likely because Nero’s primacy and succession had already been established even before the official celebration of the marriage.\footnote{1033} The information provided, however, deserves attention. Clearly, Tacitus was in no position to alter the names of the consuls of the year: D. Junius and Q. Haterius. Nonetheless, by mentioning Nero’s marriage to Octavia in the same sentence as the names of the consuls, and by thus juxtaposing Nero with the brother of L. Silanus, the young man who had to be eliminated for the wedding to take place, he emphasizes the (criminal) lengths to which Agrippina is prepared to go for her son’s succession.

The next piece of information is Nero’s age (*sedecim annos natus*) the mentioning of which here seems, strictly speaking, of no particular use. Perhaps Tacitus intends to draw attention to his young age at the moment of his marriage and thus to the solely political nature of the relationship.\footnote{1034} The political significance of the match

\footnote{1031} Cf. Keitel 1977, 181.  
\footnote{1032} Keitel 1977, 190-193, who points out similar diction such as *discordia, patruus, noverca, incautus* and *ignarus*.  
\footnote{1033} 12.58.1: *D. Iunio Q. Haterio consulibus sedecim annos natus Nero Octaviam Caesaris filiam in matrimonium accepit*; Seif 1973, 226; Hausmann 2009, 297. Suetonius and Josephus are also brief and factual; Dio, however, adds that Octavia had to be adopted into another family for the marriage not to be incestuous – something not related by Tacitus; Suet. Cl. 27.2, Ner. 7.2; Jos. AJ 20.8.1; Dio 60.33.2.2. It is not clear whether the portent referred to in this passage of Dio is to be connected to Nero’s adoption or to his marriage. Dio also (60.33.11) reports that people regarded Nero’s marriage as part of his route to manhood.  
\footnote{1034} Cf. Hausmann 2009, 397.
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is also highlighted by the addition of Caesaris filiam to Octavia’s name: as in 12.3.2, the filiation does not serve to identify the girl, but to emphasize Nero’s new status as the son-in-law of the emperor.1035

The remaining, larger part of the chapter is taken up with the mention of speeches pronounced in the Senate by Nero on behalf of various provincial communities – Troy, Bononia, Rhodes and Apamea – for which he procures privileges.1036 The orations may have taken place in different years, but are here summed up together, presumably to create an impression of Nero’s quick and ample assumption of public roles.1037 The purpose of these addresses is said to be ‘so that he could sparkle in honourable pursuits and the glory of eloquence’ (12.58.1).1038 This kind of representation offered Nero the opportunity of showing his rhetorical skills, of building connections in the provinces, and acquiring both popularity and the loyalty of these communities.1039 The placement of Nero’s senatorial speeches here, before five chapters of Claudius’ involvement in senatorial proceedings, is not accidental. Unlike in all the previous cases, the depiction of this step in Nero’s advancement is not complemented by a reference to Britannicus’ converse fate – his role seems played out. In fact, Britannicus has been replaced as main foil or rival to Nero by their father Claudius, whose performances in the Senate narrated in the next chapters are, by many techniques, contrasted unfavourably with Nero’s senatorial appearances here, associated with studia honesta, eloquentia and gloria.1040 In 12.59.1, Claudius is said to be driven to produce saevissima by his wife; the issue of imperial procurators in 12.60.4 is closed off by Tacitus with a scathing remark about the influences of Claudius’ freedmen; and in his reward of immunity to Cos in 12.61.2 the emperor is censured by Tacitus for his blatant nepotism.1041 As Seif notes, similar

1035 Hausmann 2009, 397.
1036 Suet. Ner. 7.2 also mentions the orations on behalf of Bononia, Rhodes and Troy, although in Cl. 25.3 he attributes the cases of Rhodes and Troy to Claudius’ involvement.
1037 Koestemann 1967 ad loc. suggests that there may have been some time between them; Osgood 2011, 231 mentions Nero’s prefecture at the Latin festival and the votive games as further public duties by Nero, but these are not named by Tacitus.
1038 This strictly speaking is only used with reference to his address on behalf of Troy, but may be extrapolated to the others as well.
1039 Osgood 2011, 231, arguing that this ‘obviously was to mark Nero as the clear, if not absolutely explicit, designate’.
1041 The best discussion of these chapters can be found in Hausmann 2009, 401-414.
actions of both speakers (e.g. remarks on mythical ancestry) are only criticized in the case of Claudius, while Tacitus does not apply the qualification facunde (used for Nero in 12.58.1) to Claudius’ speeches.\footnote{1042} Whereas Nero’s requests are actually followed by actions or decisions from the Senate, the result of Claudius’ motion with regard to Cos is not mentioned, thus portraying Nero’s proposals as more successful.\footnote{1043} Moreover, Claudius’ involvement in obtaining the privileges for Rhodes and Troy, found in Suetonius, is omitted in Tacitus.\footnote{1044} In addition, Nero is seen as pleading for good causes – cities destroyed by earthquakes and fire, or an island that had earned their freedom only to be deprived of it – while Claudius is portrayed as the benefactor of his many freedmen and his private doctor.\footnote{1045} Finally, Tacitus neglects to mention several positive measures taken by Claudius with regard to the ordo equester and Roman citizens, which Suetonius does list.\footnote{1046} Only in the case of the Byzantines’ request does Tacitus not append a negative comment to Claudius’ measures, but Claudius is only allowed a brief speech of consent after the lengthy oration by the Byzantine legates, which may be seen as a positive contrast to Claudius’ address with regard to Rhodes.\footnote{1047} Nero’s performances are also criticized by Tacitus, but in a more indirect way; in Claudius’ case, by contrast, the authorial criticism is explicit.\footnote{1048} All of this adds up to a rather tendentious negative portrayal of Claudius in comparison with Nero. After ‘defeating’ his brother Britannicus, Nero is now depicted as ostensibly successfully rivalling his father Claudius. Significantly, Tacitus situates Nero’s ‘victory’ over his father in the context of senatorial addresses and debates, rather than in the palace, behind closed doors: Nero’s rise takes place

\begin{footnotes}
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\item[1042] Seif 1973, 229.
\item[1043] Hausmann 2009, 412.
\item[1044] Suet. Cl. 25.3; see above, note 1036.
\item[1045] Hausmann 2009, 400.
\item[1046] Keitel 1977, 205; Hausmann 2009, 409.
\item[1047] Seif 1973, 290, noting also Tacitus’ use of at to contrast Claudius’ peformances to Nero’s (12.59.1: at Claudius), as well as the Byzantines’ from Claudius’ (12.62.1: at Byzantii).
\item[1048] Nero’s stories about the Julian descent from Aeneas, however, are denoted by Tacitus as haud procul fabulis, a similar qualification as the people’s stories about the snakes in his bedroom (11.11.3: fabulosa); Mehl 1974, 156. Moreover, the alleged aim of his speeches, showcasing his studia honesta and eloquence, both draws attention to Nero’s preference of less honourable arts at the expense of oratory, and to the speciousness and potential danger of the stated purpose by recalling Agrippina’s artes honestae (12.6.1) and studia matris (12.9.2); 1974, 156-157; cf. Tacitus’ comments on Nero’s aliena facundia and his pursuit of other disciplines at 13.3.2-3 – this is also treated below, section 3.1.4. Note that Tacitus uses a similar method in the Tiberian hexad, where Tiberius is often criticized explicitly, whereas criticism on Germanicus has to be inferred by the reader.
\end{footnotes}
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in full public view, under the eyes of the Senate, who do not protest.\(^{1049}\)

Narcissus' opposition to Agrippina (12.65)

Nero and Britannicus are next contrasted in the last scene before Claudius' murder, where the imperial freedman Narcissus – responsible for Messalina’s execution – is given a chapter-long speech in oratio obliqua, reported by unnamed sources (ferebatur) to have been uttered ‘among his intimates’ (inter proximos). In his address, Narcissus opposes Agrippina and demonstrates his support for Claudius and Britannicus; this is presented as an immediate reaction to Agrippina’s elimination of Nero’s aunt Domitia Lepida in the preceding chapter, which apparently made Narcissus finally realize the true nature of Agrippina’s intentions.\(^{1050}\) His opposition is in vain, however: Lepida is executed and Agrippina will seize the first opportunity – Narcissus’ sojourn in Sinuessa – to carry out her plans.\(^{1051}\) Narcissus’ argument appears to run as follows:\(^{1052}\) he is certain of his own ruin, whether Nero or Britannicus will succeed, but he will sacrifice his life for Claudius, who has deserved this much from him.\(^{1053}\) If Nero were to succeed, he and Agrippina would be guilty of the same charge on which Messalina and Silius had been condemned previously – the usurpation of imperial power and the murder of Claudius – and, presumably, this would lead them to execute Narcissus, who had fallen out with Agrippina before.\(^{1054}\) If, on the other hand, Britannicus were to become the new emperor, he would owe

1049 The location – the Senate – may also foreshadow Nero’s later problematic relation with this body.
1050 12.65.1-3: ob haec mors indicta, multum adversante Narcisso, qui Agrippinam magis magisque suspectans propssisse inter proximos ferebatur etc.
1051 Narcissus seems to be aware of the futility of his attempts as well: the strongly adversative at after the possibility of a succession by Britannicus appears to imply that he considers this scenario rather unlikely: Woodman 2004, 243 n.91.
1052 Both the text of Narcissus’ address and its interpretation are disputed and rather vague, due to uncertainties in the textual transmission; I follow Fisher’s 1906 OCT reading here rather than Heubner’s 1983 Teubner edition. See Seif 1973, 272-273 for an overview of the various conjectures.
1053 12.65.1: certam sibi perniciem, seu Britannicus rerum seu Nero poteretur; verum ita de se meritum Caesarem, ut vitam usui eius impenederet. Furneaux 1907 ad loc. explains that ‘he had destroyed the mother of the first … and opposed the mother of the second … and had nothing to hope from either, but owed all to Claudius, and would risk all to frustrate Agrippina’s plots against him’. Dio 60.34.4 also mentions Narcissus’ loyalty towards Claudius.
1054 12.65.2: convictam Messalinam et Silium: pares iterum accusandi causas esse, si Nero imperaret; I largely follow Woodman’s (2004, 243, n.91) interpretation here. The freedman would indeed be quickly eliminated by Agrippina after Nero’s accession: 13.1.3; also in Dio 60.34.4-6.
Narcissus nothing but would instead avenge himself upon the freedman for his destruction of Messalina, Britannicus’ mother. As it is, however, the intrigues of Agrippina – who is denoted as Britannicus’ stepmother here – are wrenching apart the imperial household, and Narcissus regrets bringing Messalina’s *impudicitia* to the emperor’s attention, since that ultimately led to what he presently understands is a far worse situation. This is most likely to be understood as follows: while Messalina’s misdeeds only harmed Claudius, Agrippina’s affect the whole house (*domus omnis*), including Britannicus and Narcissus himself, whose position had become overshadowed by the influence of Pallas. Not even immorality is lacking now, though: Agrippina has Pallas as her adulterer, illustrating that she would sacrifice anything – her esteem, shame, her body – for power, appropriately denoted by the word *regnum* (12.65.2). Insisting on such words – note the iterative *dictitans* – he allegedly embraced Britannicus and prayed – stretching out his hands sometimes to the gods, sometimes to the boy himself – that he would grow up as soon as possible, drive off his father’s enemies and even avenge his mother’s killers (12.65.3). The words *robur* and *maturrimum*, hopefully applied to Britannicus, emphasize the present difference in status between the two boys, recalling as they do the contrast between Nero’s *robor* and Britannicus’ *pueritia* in 12.25.1, as well as between Nero’s *maturata toga virilis* and Britannicus’ *puerilis habitus* in 12.41.1-

1055 12.65.2: *Britannico successore nullum principi meritum*; *meritum* is the original manuscript reading, but most editors and commentators emend this to *metum*. I follow Woodman’s (2004) retention of *meritum*, since the claim that he would have nothing to fear were Britannicus to succeed does not seem plausible: he had, after all, eliminated Britannicus’ mother.

1056 The phrasing *novercae insidiis domum omnem convelli* recalls the similar formulations of the tearing apart of the imperial household with regard to the competition between the imperial freedmen over Claudius’ new wife (12.1.1) and to the rivalry between Agrippina the Elder and Livilla under Tiberius’ roof (4.40.3). Agrippina’s *insidiae* may therefore refer both to her recent elimination of one of the members of the imperial family, Domitia Lepida, as well as to her maltreatment of Britannicus, who is implied as an object by Agrippina’s designation as *noverca*.

1057 12.65.2: *at noverca insidit domum omnem convelli, maiore flagitio, quam si impudicitiam prioris coniugis reticuisset*. Seif 1973, 274 understands the sentence differently: he takes *maior flagitio* as *si insidias Agrrippinae tacerit, id maius flagitium esse, quam etc.* Perhaps one may read in *quam si impudicitiam prioris coniugis reticuisset* an allusion to Narcissus’ squabble with Agrippina at the Fucine Lake, where he is presented as not keeping silent about Agrippina’s threatening plans (12.57.2: *nec ille reticet, impotentiam maliebrem nimiasque spes eius arguens*), an utterance which will gravely endanger him if Nero becomes emperor. See Zwierlein 2008 for an entirely different reading and interpretation.

1058 Adapted from Hausmann 2009, 427 n.1343.
2. Just as Claudius had consented to ‘protect’ Britannicus’ boyhood with Nero’s age, so now Narcissus urges Britannicus – in vain – to grow up to protect his own father.\footnote{Seif 1973, 275.} Remarkably, nothing is mentioned as regards Britannicus’ reaction to this show of support.

Interestingly, this scene strongly resembles an incident reported in Suetonius’ life of Claudius. There, however, it is Claudius himself who hugs his son and encourages him to grow up, and the anecdote is reported in the context of Claudius’ regretting, at the end of his life, his marriage to Agrippina and adoption of Nero.\footnote{Suet. Cl. 43.}

The penitent emperor is represented by Suetonius as actively taking steps to secure the succession for his biological son: he promises Britannicus to rectify his inferior position (‘he who dealt the wound will heal it’ must refer to Britannicus’ neglect as a result of Claudius’ adoption of Nero), he expresses his intention to let Britannicus assume the \textit{toga virilis} early, like Nero, so that ‘the Roman people may at last have a genuine Caesar’ and, in the following chapter, makes and seals his will – in which, presumably, Britannicus figured as heir. Dio, too, mentions Claudius’ vexation at Agrippina’s behaviour, his display of affection towards Britannicus, and his intention to give him the \textit{toga virilis} and make him his successor.\footnote{Dio 60.34.1-2.} In both authors, these expressions of regret on the part of Claudius, and his actions to advance Britannicus as his heir, are the reason for Agrippina’s decision to murder her husband. None of this is mentioned by Tacitus, which is remarkable, given the similarity between the accounts of Suetonius and Dio on the one hand, and between Tacitus on the other.\footnote{Mehl 1974, 161-162. In the same chapter (43), Suetonius also relates Claudius’ remark ‘that it had been his destiny also to have wives who were all unchaste, but not unpunished’ – a statement very similar to that which Tacitus attributes to the emperor in the chapter previous to the current (12.64.2).}

Nothing is said about Britannicus’ impending coming of age, which would make him a real rival to Nero’s position, and which, historically, is very likely to have determined the timing of Claudius’ murder – if he was indeed killed.\footnote{Wiedemann 1996a, 241, Levick 1990, 77-79 and Osgood 2011, 244-245 all mention that Claudius died just a few months before Britannicus would turn 14, the minimal age for boys to assume the toga of manhood. Although none of them affirms that Claudius was indeed murdered – this is indeed impossible to know – they do all indicate the timing as very opportune for Agrippina and Nero; but see for a different opinion Aveline 2004, 454-458. Even Josephus, who is the only ancient source not to accept Claudius’ murder as fact, mentions this as a reason for rumours of Agrippina’s murder of Claudius: \textit{AJ} 20.8.2. Aveline 2004 and Osgood 2011, 242-245 mention that Claudius died just a few months before Britannicus would turn 14, the minimal age for boys to assume the toga of manhood.}

1060 Suet. Cl. 43.
1061 Dio 60.34.1-2.
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1063 Wiedemann 1996a, 241, Levick 1990, 77-79 and Osgood 2011, 244-245 all mention that Claudius died just a few months before Britannicus would turn 14, the minimal age for boys to assume the toga of manhood. Although none of them affirms that Claudius was indeed murdered – this is indeed impossible to know – they do all indicate the timing as very opportune for Agrippina and Nero; but see for a different opinion Aveline 2004, 454-458. Even Josephus, who is the only ancient source not to accept Claudius’ murder as fact, mentions this as a reason for rumours of Agrippina’s murder of Claudius: \textit{AJ} 20.8.2. Aveline 2004 and Osgood 2011, 242-245.
The anecdote which Tacitus attributes to Narcissus seems more befitting of Britannicus’ father, and it is likely that Tacitus found the scene in relation to Claudius in his sources, but has purposefully transferred it to Narcissus in his own narration.\footnote{Koestermann 1967 \textit{ad loc.}; Martin 1981, 159 n.31; Seif 1973, 271; Hausmann 2009, 425; but see Aveline 2004, 454-458 on the improbability of a Claudian ‘change of heart’. A hint for this may be discerned in the next chapter, where Agrippina deliberates on the kind of poison to use for the murder, afraid that ‘if she selected a slow-wasting one, Claudius on nearing his end might recognize the deception and return to loving his son’ (12.66.1; Mehl 1974, 168). Modern scholars are divided with regard to the veracity of the episode: Seif 1973, 277 considers it possible; Levick 1990, 76 and Aveline 2004 consider it improbable that Claudius actually came to regret his decisions (Levick argues that it is more likely the invention of Britannicus’ supporters or Agrippina herself after her alienation from her son). The Tacitean Narcissus’ leading role in the opposition against Agrippina had been prefigured by their altercation at 12.57.3 – which Tacitus, contrary to the other sources, must have deliberately inserted there – and Tacitus’ insistence on his support of Claudius and Britannicus facilitates the transition to the next chapter, in which Agrippina seizes the opportunity for her murderous plans when Narcissus is away from Rome: Koestermann 1967 \textit{ad loc.} It also creates a contrast with the narration of the Messalina-affair at the end of Book 11, which is explicitly conjured up and compared to the present situation by Narcissus himself in his speech; there, he decisively and successfully takes the lead against the emperor’s wife, but here, in the battle with the new imperial spouse, he is hopelessly outmatched: Mehl 1974, 168-169; cf. Keitel 1977, 195.\footnote{12.64.2; cf. Mehl 1974, 162.}}

By omitting the crucial details of Claudius’ regret and belated advancement of Britannicus, Tacitus portrays Claudius as ignorant and passive, deprives Britannicus of an important source of support, and represents Nero’s rise to power as more unhindered than it might have been.

\textit{Nero’s succession to Claudius (12.68-69)}

The last stage in Nero’s rise to imperial power is his actual succession, necessarily preceded by Claudius’ death, which has been foreshadowed by prodigies some chapters earlier (12.64). The process is set in motion after Agrippina learns of a drunken remark of Claudius’, ‘that he was fated to bear the outrages of his spouses and then to punish them’.\footnote{12.64.2; cf. Mehl 1974, 162.} She decides to accelerate her plans – the formulation \textit{agere et celerare} implies that she already intended to murder Claudius. When Narcissus is temporarily away from Rome, she seizes the opportunity and poisons Claudius with the help of the poisoner Locusta, Claudius’ court physician Xenophon and his taster Halotus (12.66-67). While Claudius is already lifeless – \textit{iam exanimis} – Agrippina keeps pretending that he is still alive, whilst making the nec-

\begin{quote}
245 evaluate the evidence for murder.
\end{quote}
necessary preparations for Nero’s succession, keeping Octavia and Britannicus from leaving the palace, and waiting for the right moment to announce the change of emperor (12.68). When the time is right, the palace doors fling open, and Nero emerges towards the cohort on duty, accompanied by Burrus (12.69.1). At the latter’s sign, the soldiers give Nero a favourable reception and carry him to the camp. Tacitus reports that ‘they say’ (ferunt) that some soldiers hesitated, looked around and asked repeatedly (note the iteratives respectare and rogitare) where Britannicus was; ‘but soon, with no one to authorize differently, they followed what was being offered’.\(^{1066}\) Nero briefly addresses the Praetorians, promises a donative after Claudius’ example, and is hailed as imperator; the Senate and the provinces accept the succession without hesitation (12.69.2). Claudius is deified and the funeral is celebrated in the manner of Augustus, but the emperor’s will is not read out, ‘lest the preference of stepson to son should, by resentment at its injustice, disturb the disposition of the public’ (12.69.3).\(^{1067}\)

Everything seems to go as planned: the soldiers welcome Nero as their new emperor, and the Senate and provinces consent quickly.\(^{1068}\) Yet by bringing up Britannicus no less than three times in this chapter – which ostensibly only deals with Nero assuming imperial power – Tacitus hints that Nero’s succession might not have been so self-evident and smooth as it seemed. First, it surely is no coincidence that he uses the same verb for Nero’s appearance to the cohorts (12.69.1: *Nero egreditur ad cohortem*) as he had done for Agrippina’s efforts to prevent Britannicus from leaving the bedroom (12.68.2: *ne cubiculo egrederetur*). ‘Es entsteht der Eindruck, als mache Nero sich das Recht zu eigen, das eigentlich dem leiblichen Sohn des Claudius zugestanden hätte’, as Hausmann observes.\(^{1069}\) Furthermore, despite Burrus’ direction, there are reportedly still some soldiers who looked for Britannicus, even though they gave up rather quickly when no alternative was proposed. Although Tacitus expressly focalizes this notice through unnamed others – *ferunt* with an accusative and infinitive construction – he seems to confirm it by adding, in

\(^{1066}\) 12.69.1: *dubitavisse quosdam ferunt, respectantes rogitantesque ubi Britannicus esset: mox, nullo in diversum auctore, quae offerebantur secati sunt*; Seif 1973, 290.

\(^{1067}\) On Claudius’ deification see Fishwick 2002.

\(^{1068}\) See Osgood 2011, 245-249 on Rome’s and the provinces’ reaction to Nero’s acclamation. Hausmann 2009, 437 notes that the participles (*inlatusque, praefatus, promisso donativo*) enhance the impression of swiftness and smoothness.

\(^{1069}\) Hausmann 2009, 436.
his own authorial voice and with an indicative, that they ‘followed what was being offered’. Finally, there is Claudius’ will which is prevented from being read out ne antepositus filio privignus iniuria et invidia animos vulgi turbaret. Presumably, the will named Britannicus and Nero joint heirs, in which case Nero’s assumption of sole power might cause uneasiness or outright resentment. By stating that Agrippina tried to prevent this, Tacitus implies that the people would indeed feel iniuria and invidia at the preference of Nero to the emperor’s biological son. Notably, Nero is called privignus while Britannicus is filius, even though both boys were in fact Claudius’ sons with equal legal positions. Ignoring Nero’s status as filius both emphasizes the injustice done to the real son, and depicts his adoption as not being really acknowledged as rightful. It may also be significant that Nero is denoted as Claudius’ stepson, rather than as his great-nephew or son-in-law; in this way, his status is seen to be determined by his mother and her marriage to Claudius, rather than through his own initial kinship relation or his marriage to the emperor’s daughter: Nero’s succession seems to be Agrippina’s work from start to finish.

Thus ends Claudius’ principate and begins the new reign: with efforts to suppress the discontent of the people by not having Claudius’ will read out (12.69). It is significant that it is the disposition of the people (vulgus) that is the concern here. With regard to the other major groups – the Senate, the provinces, and the soldiers – Tacitus mentions their consent, either obsequious and swift (as with the former two), or with some hesitation but enthusiastic after instruction by one of Agrippina’s helpers (in the latter case). No reaction from the people is reported; instead, Tacitus merely relates the attempts to prevent their dissatisfaction. This looks forward to the crucial role public opinion will play in the Neronian Books, in criticizing Nero’s abilities as emperor, in imbuing the young princeps with fear for other men allegedly perceived as capaces imperii, and as such in triggering several

1070 Hausmann 2009, 437 n.1371; a similar tactic was used in 1.10.7 (see section 2.3.1 above).
1071 If the will had accorded Nero a prior or senior position with respect to Britannicus, it would certainly have been used to support Nero’s claims. See Levick 1990, 78; Griffin 1984, 96; Seif 1973, 292-294 for different views on the content of the will; Suet. Cl. 44.1 mentions that Claudius made his testament after starting to regret his adoption of Nero, and shortly before being murdered, but he does not relate its content.
1072 In addition, it may recall Pallas’ statement, when trying to convince Claudius to adopt Nero, that Augustus advanced his privigni even if he primarily relied on his biological grandsons.
1073 Hausmann 2009, 438.
1074 Cf. Koestermann 1967 ad loc.: ‘die alte feierliche Formel senatus populusque R hat ihre Bedeutung völlig eingebüßt.’

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3.1.3 NERO’S SMOOTH SUCCESSION

The inevitability of Nero’s rise to power
Tacitus makes his Claudian narrative revolve around Nero’s rise to power, and represents the latter as swift and inevitable, through several techniques. First, he systematically and elaborately describes all the steps in Nero’s promotion, as discussed in the previous section. In most cases, these are not merely brief notices, but full chapters, containing descriptions of how, why and by whom the promotion under discussion was brought about.1075 As such, the matter of the succession is treated in clearly signalled, coherent passages and made into a conspicuous and significant element of the Claudian narrative – a substantial difference from the Tiberian Books, where references to the succession are briefer, more scattered and less explicit. Even the very beginning of Nero’s eventual succession is signalled: the marriage of Agrippina and Domitius Ahenobarbus – the ‘product’ of which will be Nero – is placed at an emphatic point in the Tiberian narrative, in the last chapter of Book 4 (4.75).

Besides expanding these reports of the stages of Nero’s advancement, Tacitus endows them with particular prominence through repetition. Nero’s marriage to Octavia, for instance, is brought up three times: in 12.3-4, Tacitus describes Agrippina’s preparations for the betrothal (by having Claudius break off Octavia’s previous engagement to L. Silanus); some chapters later, in 12.9, Nero is engaged to Octavia at the Senate’s request; and in 12.58, the marriage is contracted – before the wedding actually takes place, Tacitus has already referred to it twice, using the designation Caesaris filia for Octavia both in 12.3.2 and in 12.58.1. Other verbal repetitions connect events to each other, or serve to contrast two situations; e.g. the use of maiora for Nero’s steps to power (12.3.2 and 12.9.1) increasing to summa (12.42.1, 12.67.2), fortuna (12.2.3, 12.26.2, 12.41.2), dominatio (12.4.1, 12.7.3, 12.8.2), vulgi studia (12.3.2, 12.41.2), miseratio/miserare (11.12.1, 12.41.2), domus + convelli (12.1.1 and 12.65.2). The reader is regularly reminded of Nero’s rise not just through such repetitions, but also by the placement of those mentions: all the narrative years in Book 12 open with an episode relating to the increasing power of

1075 I do not agree with Seif’s insistence (1973, 144) on the brevity of all these notices.
Nero and/or Agrippina, even if the events did not take place at the beginning of the year.\textsuperscript{1076}

Furthermore, the passages detailing Nero’s rise are linked to each other by the repeated occurrence of certain themes or elements. As said, at every step forward, Nero’s future succession and power are foreshadowed or explicitly mentioned, leaving the reader in no doubt as to where the narrative is heading, and representing the promotion in question as a deliberate move towards a clear and inevitable goal: supreme power.\textsuperscript{1077} These hints of the future are focalized by Tacitus himself, but also by those fearing Nero’s power (Narcissus) and those trying to secure it for him (Agrippina and her helpers), but never by the emperor: everyone is presented as being aware of Nero’s future power, except Claudius.\textsuperscript{1078} Indeed, Claudius’ ignorant witnessing of, and consent to, the promotion of Nero is repeatedly noted by Tacitus (see below, section 3.2.3). Moreover, Nero’s rise is accompanied by references to the growth in the status and influence of Agrippina, mostly by Tacitus

\textsuperscript{1076} Seif 1973, 144; Martin 1981, 158-159; Sage 1990, 989 and n.701; cf. Seif 1973, 144 on the regular recurrence of these episodes; the year beginnings are 12.5.1 (preparations for the marriage of Claudius and Agrippina), 12.25.1 (adoption of Nero), 12.41.1 (Nero’s assumption of the\textit{ toga virilis}), 12.58.1 (marriage of Nero and Octavia) and 12.64.1 (prodigies announcing the death of Claudius). As Seif 1973, 212 and Sage 1990, 989 n.701 observe, 12.52.1 is also linked to this theme, albeit more indirectly, since Scribonianus is being charged\textit{ quasi finem principis per Chaldaeos scrutaretur}, foreshadowing the impending death of Claudius. As touched upon before (notes 941 and 1015), Nero’s adoption and entrance into adulthood only took place two months after the start of the year, and Claudius was murdered only in October, although the narrative of the year AD 54 is dominated by his looming death from the beginning (Kienast 1996, 90; cf. Martin 1981, 159). Unfortunately, there are no other sources available to establish the exact dates of the marriages of Agrippina and Claudius and Nero and Octavia, and of the exile of Furius Scribonianus, so it is impossible to tell whether these events occurred later in the year and were deliberately moved forward by Tacitus.

\textsuperscript{1077} 11.11.2 \textit{favor plebis acrior i<n> Domitium loco praesagii acceptus est} (focalization: Tacitus); the implicit comparison of Nero to Alexander the Great at 11.11.3 (focalization unclear, but probably Agrippina’s party; see Malloch 2013 ad loc. on sources); 12.2.3 \textit{imperatoria fortuna} (Pallas); 12.3.2 \textit{struere maiora [sc. Agrippina] } (Tacitus), which is picked up again at 12.9.1 \textit{maiora patefactum} (probably Tacitus); 12.4.1 \textit{Vitellius ... inguentiumque dominationum previsor} (Tacitus); 12.7.3 \textit{dominationi} (Tacitus; this probably refers both to Agrippina’s own power and to Nero’s reign); 12.8.2 \textit{spem dominationis} (Agrippina; similar ambiguity as in the previous passage); 12.25.2 \textit{triennio maiorem nati Dominium filio anteponit} (Tacitus); 12.37.4 \textit{ipsa semet parti a maioribus suis imperii sociam ferebat [sc. Agrippina] } (Tacitus); 12.41.2 \textit{spectaret populus hunc decore imperatorio, illum puerili habitu, ac perinde fortunam utriusque praesumeret} (Agrippina and her supporters); 12.42.1 \textit{nondum tamen summa moliri Agrippina audebat} (Tacitus); 12.42.2 \textit{matrem eius qui rerum potitus sit} (Tacitus); 12.57.2 \textit{impotentiam muliebrem nimiasque spes eius arguerus} (Narcissus; again, probably referring both to Agrippina and Nero); 12.64.3 \textit{filio dare imperium} (Tacitus); 12.65.2 \textit{si Nero imperitaret} (Narcissus).

\textsuperscript{1078} See Keitel 1981 on the contrast between Tiberius’ insight and Claudius’ lack of it.
himself (see below, section 3.3.2). Tacitus matches these descriptions of Nero’s advancement by comments on the corresponding decline in Britannicus’ position, and hints of his later death at the hands of his adoptive brother. These foreshadowings and contrasts are much more explicitly and consistently teleological than in the Tiberian Books, where Tacitus hints at the fates of Germanicus and Drusus, but more sporadically, in a more implicit way, and less often in his authorial voice.\footnote{Where, for instance, Drusus’ fate is foreshadowed through parallelism with Germanicus’ (see section 2.2.1 above). Germanicus’ death is foreshadowed more explicitly, but not as repeatedly as in the case of Britannicus’ and Nero’s fates, e.g. in 2.5.1: \textit{dolo simul et casibus obiectaret}; the linking of Germanicus to his father Drusus, who also died prematurely while on campaign; 2.41.3: the people comparing Germanicus to Drusus and Marcellus, popular men snatched away in their youth; 2.43.4: \textit{ad spes Germanici coercedas}.} Moreover, unlike in the case of Drusus and Germanicus, Tacitus nowhere mentions or implies that Britannicus and Nero were treated equally by Claudius, or that there existed some kind of fraternal \textit{concordia} between the brothers.\footnote{Only Agrippina pretends that harmony exists between the boys, but only to get her way with Claudius (12.4.1.3); see section 2.2.1 on the relations between Drusus and Germanicus.} On the contrary, Nero openly shows his hostility towards Britannicus after his accession and ultimately murders his brother when his nearing adulthood threatens to turn him into a rival.\footnote{13.15-17; the lack of \textit{concordia} between Nero and Britannicus is also emphasized by the fraternal rivalry in the Eastern narratives: Keitel 1977, 191.} Furthermore, at nearly every step in Nero’s promotion, Tacitus, mostly in his own voice, notes the swiftness with which it is procured, thus portraying it as systematic and inexorable, especially when contrasted with Claudius’ sluggishness.\footnote{This is done through the use of words indicating swiftness or suddenness and the tying together of actions occurring some time after each other by connectors like –\textit{que}, \textit{quoque}, \textit{simul} or through asyndeton, all of which suggests simultaneity, uninteruptedness or quick succession. 12.3.2 \textit{nam ubi sui matrimonii certa fuit, struere maiora}; 12.4.3 \textit{Silanus … repente per edictum Vitelii ordine senatorio movetur … simul adfinitatem Claudius diremit, adactusque Silanus euriare magistratum, et reliquus praeturae dies in Eprium Marcellum conlatus est}; 12.5.3 \textit{summagque rem publicam agi obtestans veniam dicendi ante alias exposcit orbita turque}; 12.8.2 Agrippina \textit{… veniam exilii pro Annaeo Seneca, simul praeturam impetrat}; 12.9.1 \textit{placitum dehinc non ultra cunctari}; the brief statement \textit{despondetur} Octavia in 12.9.2; 12.22.1 \textit{idem consulibus} \textit{… Agrippina … molitur crimina et accusatorem; 12.25.2 Claudius is quickly convinced: his evictus}; \textit{12.41.1 viris toga Neroni maturata; 12.41.2 simul qui centurionum tribunorumque sortem Britannici misera- batur, remoti; 12.42.3 commotus his quasi criminibus optimum quemque educatorem filii exilio aut morte adficit datosque a noverca custodiae eius imponit}; 12.42.2 \textit{suum quoque fastigium Agrippina extollere altius}; 12.58.1 \textit{Nero Octaviam … in matrimonium accept: utque studiis honestis \[et\] eloquentiae gloria enitescerat, causa Illiensem sus- cepta \textit{… codem oratore} Bononiensi coloniae … subventum … largitione [asyndeton]; redita Rhodis libertas \textit{… tributumque Apamensis} \textit{… remissum}; 12.59.2 \textit{nec ille dii tius falsum accusatorem, indigas sordis perpessus vim}} However, Nero’s advancement and future power are also consistently
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associated with dubious – at times criminal – practices and autocracy, and Tacitus connects it with ominous prodigies twice (12.43 and 12.64). Through the recurrence of these common themes and elements, Tacitus links the episodes of Nero’s advancement to each other, keeping his rise constantly before the eyes of his readers and giving it a systematic and relentless impression. The sense of an unstoppable movement towards Nero’s accession is furthermore conveyed by the significant increase in narrative pace in the latter part of Book 12: the narrative years become progressively shorter, and the speed of the narration ever higher, as Claudius’ end approaches. At the end of the Book, Tacitus does not even pause for a moment.
THE CANDIDATES FOR SUCCESSION AND CRITERIA OF SELECTION

to consider the emperor’s death, or reflect upon his life and reign; even Galba, who
only figures in half a Book in the *Histories*, was accorded this much. Only a few lines
in Book 13 are devoted to a brief and ridiculed eulogy of the emperor, pronounced
by the son of his murderess. At the end of his reign, no time is wasted on the dead
emperor; instead, the narrative looks forward to events that will be related in 13.3-4:
Claudius’ funeral.

Tacitus, then, employs various, often subtle, techniques – extensive treatment,
summing up, repetition, omission, structure – to turn Nero’s advancement into the
main thread of the extant Claudian Books and to depict the latter part of Claudius’
principate as essentially the prelude towards Nero’s reign. In this, he differs notably
from the other ancient sources treating Claudius’ reign, which record many of the
same events. Suetonius, for instance, does not systematically describe Nero’s ad-
vancement in his biography of Claudius – the notices on this are scattered through-
out the text without much coherence or interconnection – and in his life of Nero,
he charts all the stages concisely, in one single chapter.¹⁰⁸⁵ Dio (or his epitomators)
does describe Nero’s rise step by step, but – apparently – not as elaborately as Tac-
itus: he provides more background information only in some cases.¹⁰⁸⁶ Moreover,
although his text very much resembles Tacitus’ in the central themes of his narra-
tive – Claudius as dominated by Agrippina, and Agrippina as ruthlessly promot-
ing Nero – Dio is much more straightforward in presenting his view, while Tacitus

6 for AD 53 (12.58-12.63), and 16 for AD 54, of which only 6 in Book 12 (12.64-13.10); cf. Syme’s remark
(1958, 260) ‘as though the historian, having exhausted his Claudian topics, was impatient to move forward’. Such a slowing down of the narrative pace may also be discerned in the Neronian Books, if we assume that the
¹⁰⁸⁵ References to Nero’s rise under Claudius are found in Cl. 26.3 (Agrippina’s marriage to Claudius), 27.2
(Nero’s marriage to Octavia and his adoption by Claudius), 39.2 (adoption of Nero), 43.1 (marriage to Agrip-
pina and adoption of Nero). Suet. Ner. 7 lists Nero’s participation in the *lusus Troiae*, his adoption by Clau-
dius, the installation of Seneca as his tutor, his adulthood/formal introduction into public life, several public
orations, his appearance as a judge during the Latin festival, his marriage to Octavia and his presiding at votive
games for the health of Claudius.
¹⁰⁸⁶ Dio lists Agrippina’s marriage to Claudius (60.31.6; 8), Nero’s engagement to Octavia (60.31.8; 32.2),
adoption of Nero by Claudius (60.32.2; 32.2.2), the installation of Seneca as Nero’s tutor (60.32.3), Nero’s
assumption of the *toga virilis* (60.32.2c), Nero’s marriage to Octavia (60.33.1), the murder of Claudius and
Nero’s succession (60.34.2-61.1.1). Although a comparison with Dio is more problematic since his account is
only preserved in epitome from AD 47 onwards, he does not seem to have said anything about other potential
wives for Claudius besides Agrippina, and the notices of Nero’s entry into manhood and his adoption are brief.

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achieves his purpose in a more varied and often indirect way.\textsuperscript{1087} Josephus is so brief in his treatment of matters at Rome, and at the imperial court in particular, that it is difficult to make fruitful comparison; however, he does note the essential steps: the marriage of Agrippina and Claudius, the adoption of Nero, his marriage to Octavia, and the murder of Claudius and subsequent accession of Nero.\textsuperscript{1088} Compared to the parallel sources, then, Tacitus seems to be particularly concentrated on Nero’s rise to power.

\textit{Britannicus’ marginalization}

Britannicus' depiction is entirely different: he is consistently marginalized in the narrative. After the introduction of Nero into the narrative in 11.11.2 – it is impossible to say anything about the preceding Books – Britannicus is never the focus of a passage by himself. He is always associated with others – Sosibius, Messalina, Claudius, Nero, Narcissus – and is almost never the person around whom the story revolves.\textsuperscript{1089} Moreover, whereas Agrippina, Vitellius, Pallas and Burrus are depicted as acting in favour of Nero, no supporters are mentioned for Britannicus, except for the unnamed slaves, tutors and officials that desert him or are removed by Agrippina (12.26.2, 12.41.2-3), and Narcissus, who also proves unsuccessful (12.65.2-3). Even his mother Messalina effectively abandons him by embarking on her affair with Silius.\textsuperscript{1090} Moreover, the expected treatment of Claudius' children by his future wife, though brought up by Callistus and Narcissus at 12.2.1-2, is left out by the winning parties Pallas and Vitellius (12.2.3, 12.5-6), who instead bring in Nero as one of the arguments in favour of Agrippina’s candidacy. In addition, the two descriptions of Sosibius as Britannicus’ tutor in 11.1.1 (Tacitus) and 11.4.3 (Vitellius) may be interpreted as foreshadowing the poisoning of Britannicus at the hands of his own tutors (13.15.3: \textit{primum venenum ab ipsis educatoribus accepit}). Note the contrast with Nero’s tutors, who provide him with counsel (Seneca) and aid him in

\textsuperscript{1087} E.g. 60.32.3 (Zonaras) and 60.33.9-10 (Zonaras).
\textsuperscript{1088} Jos. JA 20.8.1-2.
\textsuperscript{1089} In 11.1.1, as well as in 11.4.3, Britannicus is mentioned in connection with his tutor Sosibius; in 11.11.2, 12.9.2, 12.25.1, 12.26.2, 12.41.2-42.1, 12.69, 13.15-17 and 14.3.2 with Nero; in 11.26.2 with Silius and Messalina; in 11.32.2 and 11.34.2-3 with Messalina and Claudius; in 12.2.1-2 with Claudius and his future wife; in 12.65.1-3 with Narcissus; in 12.68, 13.14.2-3, 13.19.3 and 13.21.5 with Agrippina; in 13.10.2 with a Roman equestrian.
\textsuperscript{1090} Foueart 2010b, 359. As a consequence, Britannicus almost appears as an orphan, without anyone to rely on, whereas it was in fact Nero who had lost his father.
his crimes (Seneca and Anicetus).

At the first moment of constrast, at their appearance at the *lusus Troiae* (11.11.2), both boys receive applause, but the people’s enthusiasm is keener towards Nero; after Nero’s engagement to Octavia, he equals Britannicus (12.9.2); Nero’s adoption gives him precedence over Britannicus (12.25.2), who is gradually forsaken by everyone (12.26.2); Nero steals the show at the games for his *toga virilis* (12.41.2), after which the removal of Britannicus’ supporters is mentioned (12.41.3); the prefects loyal to Britannicus are removed (12.42.1); at the notice of Nero’s marriage to Octavia (12.58.1), Britannicus is not even mentioned anymore – his part is played out, and from now on, Claudius will form the main foil to Nero.\(^{1091}\) At Nero’s accession, only the absence of Britannicus is remarked upon (12.69.1), and in Book 13, sympathy with Britannicus becomes an actual reason for criminal accusations (13.10, 13.19, 13.21 etc.), and those around him are instructed by Nero to ‘hold neither law nor loyalty of being of any weight’ (13.15.3).

*An undisputed succession?*

The apparent impression created by Tacitus’ representation, then, is that Nero’s succession was unproblematic and inevitable – yet at the same time, the narrative also seems to cast some doubt on this, and to present Nero’s rise to power as unjustified. As noted above (section 3.1.2), the depiction of Nero’s actual accession at the end of Book 12 includes some hints that it was not so undisputed as it at first sight seemed to be. Moreover, immediately in the first chapter of Nero’s reign, Tacitus reports widespread criticism – note the *crebra* – on Nero’s youth and the criminal means through which he assumed power, while some chapters later, his age and dependence on Agrippina, Burrus and Seneca is censured.\(^{1092}\) Furthermore, Tacitus’ narration in Book 12 evokes a sense of injustice of Nero’s advancement and pity for Britannicus, with the repeated mentions of the latter’s increasing isolation, lagging behind and marginalization, the references to the *miseratio* felt for him, and the contempt for Claudius’ adoption of Nero while he already had a son of his own. But to what extent does all of this accord with the representations and perceptions in AD 54?

Tacitus’ representation makes Nero’s preferential treatment appear unfair; but

\(^{1091}\) Furneaux 1907 ad loc.; Seif 1973, 227-230; Hausmann 2009, 400.

\(^{1092}\) 13.1.1 and 13.6.2, treated in greater detail below, section 3.1.4.
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designating and promoting two potential heirs – and thereby having a potential back-up – was a safety measure for the succession, since there was a very real risk of one the pair dying prematurely, especially as these princes were actively involved in military campaigns.1093 Earlier experiences had proved these precautions necessary: all but one of Augustus’ and Tiberius’ potential successors had died before actually succeeding. As such, Claudius’ adoption of Nero in addition to his own son may not have seem very unnatural to contemporary observers. Moreover, when examining the careers and honours of these earlier pairs of princes, it can be noted that in most cases, they were advanced to the same positions at the same age, with the result that the eldest of the two was always a step ahead of his younger counterpart.1095 So, for instance, Gaius Caesar was portrayed together with Augustus on imperial coinage, whereas his younger brother was never depicted on his own; and a similar strategy of parallel advancement was used for Drusus the Younger and Germanicus by Tiberius.1096 Since Nero was the elder of the two, his public career was naturally more advanced than that of Britannicus. The earlier advancement of Nero, and the contrast between the two princes as sketched by Tacitus – most visibly in their different outfits during the games for Nero’s assumption of the toga of manhood at 12.41.2 – may therefore have appeared rather natural to most people at that time.1097 Tacitus’ insistence on the miserable lot of Britannicus, therefore, seems to be somewhat of an exaggeration, perhaps intended to heighten the impression that Nero came to power by illegitimate means.

Compared to Britannicus, the historical Nero did indeed occupy a higher position: he was celebrated on imperial and provincial coinage, in statuary and on other

1093  Levick 1990, 70, 73; cf. Osgood 2011, 215; Tacitus even makes Pallas draw attention to these earlier examples when trying to convince Claudius to adopt Nero in addition to Britannicus at 12.25.1. Amber Gartrell is currently preparing a DPhil thesis at the University of Oxford on the topic of joint heirs during the Julio-Claudian dynasty.
1094  Kornemann 1930, however, sees the ‘Doppelprinzipat’ as an ideological, rather than pragmatic construction.
1095  I would like to thank Amber Gartrell for pointing this out to me.
1096  RIC F Augustus 198-199; see above, section 2.2.1.
1097  Cf. Levick 1990, 72.
monuments, the assumption of his toga virilis was speeded up, and he was accorded various honours and privileges. Britannicus, on the other hand, had never figured on imperial coinage – although he did appear on some provincial issues – and had not been given any special treatment. After Agrippina’s marriage to Claudius, and especially following his own adoption, Nero had been systematically promoted, according to Augustan precedent. This must have been a deliberate decision on Claudius’ part, rather than merely the result of Agrippina’s scheming: Nero, with his Augustan lineage and his descent from the popular Germanicus, could bolster the legitimacy of Claudius’ reign and provide a well-liked successor. Moreover, the historical Claudius appears to have prepared the succession to himself rather thoroughly: not only did he advertise Nero in various media and allow him to gain popularity through public performances and the accordance of privileges, he also made financial and military provisions for the accession of the new emperor, and trained the young man for the imperial duties. Historically speaking, therefore, Nero’s succession was clearly inevitable, since he had the right background and powers, and as there was no real alternative: Britannicus was not

1098  He was made a sodalis Augustalis and a supernumary member of several priesthhoods; he was granted the title princeps iuventutis and the privilege to stand for the consulship before the normal age, in the meantime being designated as consul designatus and having proconsular imperium outside Rome; he was a prefect of the city at the Latin festival and presided at votive games for Claudius’ health; Levick, 73-75; Rose 1997, 42; Osgood 2011, 215-219, 231. Nero appears on RIC F Claudius 75-77, 79, 82-83, 107-108 (Claes 2013, 270).
1099  Rose 1997, 41-42. Some scholars argue that the imperial coins with Spes refer to Britannicus, but certainty is not possible; Claes 2013, 162.
1100  Meise 1969, 176-187; Osgood 2011, 226-227 and 229, drawing attention to the resemblance between the honours for Nero and for Gaius and Lucius Caesar.
1102  Levick 1990, 196 on Claudius as the first emperor since Augustus to have arranged for a smooth succession; Osgood 2011, 233-241, and 228: ’Claudius, and the court, it could be argued, smoothed the way for Nero, by avoiding expensive new financial commitments (except those undertaken on Nero’s behalf) and by trying to leave the new emperor free from problems on the borders of his realm.’ and 231: ’In all of this, Nero was not only getting the training Claudius never had; he was once more securing relationships with all of those most important elements of the Roman world beyond the imperial court. To summarize thus far: with the Senate his dealings were extensive from AD 51 onwards; for the equestrian order he served as symbolic head [as princeps iuventutis]; to the urban plebs he gave largesse in AD 51 and the votive games of AD 53; the army received donatives in AD 51 also; specific communities throughout the Empire received Nero’s aid; his image also, as seen, was made available to them for display, along with that of his mother Agrippina. The Empire was coming together around the young man, the grandson of Germanicus, great-great-grandson of Augustus.’
yet legally an adult.\textsuperscript{1103}

Nero’s priority with respect to Britannicus as well as Nero’s succession to Claudius were, then, unavoidable; nevertheless, Nero’s youth and the existence of Britannicus made the choice of new emperor and his method of succession rather problematic.\textsuperscript{1104} As Osgood observes, ‘for all the promotion that Nero had enjoyed, the reality was that his accession ended up looking more than a little like that of Claudius’, particularly with respect to the priority accorded to the military at the expense of the Senate (e.g. Nero’s acclamation by the Praetorians).\textsuperscript{1105} Tacitus’ narrative captures this duality perfectly, by presenting Nero’s rise to power as both inescapable and questionable. In particular the end of Book 12 and the beginning of Book 13 contain implicit criticism and raise relevant questions about the way in which the head of the Roman state is selected. It is not Tacitus’ style to make these objections explicit; Dio, on the other hand, does overtly discuss the matter, concluding his remarks on the problems and rightfulness of the succession with the simple observation that ‘no claim is stronger than that of arms’.

### 3.1.4 CRITERIA OF SELECTION: THE CHARACTERIZATION OF THE SUCCESSORS

Nero and Britannicus, then, are the only two candidates for the emperorship, and almost all signs point towards Nero’s succession. But on the basis of which qualities are Nero and Britannicus eligible, and what makes Nero’s claim to imperial power stronger than that of his brother?

\textsuperscript{1103} Meise 1969, 187; Wiedemann, 1996, 241-242: ‘At the moment of Claudius’ death, there was no question of any other candidate for the imperial office but Nero; he was his predecessor’s adopted son and the husband of his predecessor’s daughter (herself descended from Augustus’ sister); he had been designated to hold a consulship when he reached the age of twenty (for AD 58), and he had been granted proconsular powers in Italy extra urbem. In AD 52 he had been appointed to the symbolic magistracy of praefectus urbi feriarum Latinarum causa. Had Claudius died even a few months later, he might have made a public wish to leave the Empire to his natural-born son Britannicus; but the removal of Britannicus’ grandmother Domitia Lepida, and the temporary absence of Narcissus, left Agrippina supreme in the palace, and the transfer of power was as straightforward as it had been in AD 14 or 37.’

\textsuperscript{1104} Dio 61.1.1-2 (Xiphilinus) suggests that the succession was not considered indisputed, at least in retrospect; Suetonius does not provide any hint of contestation or questioning of Nero’s succession.

\textsuperscript{1105} Cf. Osgood 2011, 245).
The role of the candidates in the narrative

These questions are not easy to answer, since the candidates for the succession themselves are not very prominent in the Claudian narrative at all. Nero and Britannicus are not mentioned very often, and the descriptions of their characters and actions are accorded relatively few words. Considering the importance of the two heirs to the main theme of Book 12 – Agrippina’s efforts to secure the throne for Nero rather than Britannicus – the boys themselves have a remarkably low profile. They hardly play an active role in the narrative: they barely speak, and when they do, their speeches are paraphrased rather than rendered in *oratio recta* or *obliqua.*

They do not think – or at least Tacitus does not convey their views and thoughts to the reader, except for the brief notice that Britannicus understood his stepmother’s dutifulness as insincere: *intellegens falsi* (12.26.2). And they rarely act, apart from their appearances at the *lusus Troiae* and the games for Nero’s adulthood, and Nero’s speeches in the Senate and actions in the Praetorian camp after his succession; but all these performances were arranged for them by others. Instead, they are objects in other people’s hands: they serve to delineate sides (11.1.1, 11.4.3), are used by Messalina to evoke pity (11.32.2, 11.34.2-3), serve as arguments in favour or against the choice for a certain wife (12.2.1-3.2, 12.5.3-6.1), are used as pretext for accusing people (13.10.2, 13.19.3) or for attracting supporters (12.8.1), or they have no effect at all (11.38.3). This is certainly partly due to their age: Nero and Britannicus were still children during most of Claudius’ reign and could therefore not fulfill public functions, unlike their counterparts Drusus the Younger and Germanicus, who held political offices and military commands. Indeed, Nero becomes more active after his assumption of the *toga virilis* in 12.41.

However, Tacitus also seems to deliberately downplay the prominence and agency of the two potential successors. This is especially discernible in the case of Nero, where we can compare Tacitus’ account with the parallel sources. For instance, Suetonius, like Tacitus, mentions that Nero was guarded by snakes when he was young, and likewise places this anecdote in the context of the opposition between Nero and Britannicus, and immediately before Nero’s participation in the

1106  E.g. Nero’s speeches in the Senate in 12.58 and to the Praetorians in 12.69.2, and Britannicus’ greeting of Nero as Domitius in 12.41.3.
1107  An exception is Nero’s dissemination of the story about the appearance of a snake in his bedroom; however, since Tacitus states that he *narrare solitus est*, this may as well refer to a later habit of his.
1108  Cf. Osgood 2011, 229-231 on Nero’s more active public role after his entry into manhood.
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Game of Troy. However, the origin of the ‘guardian snake’ tale in Suetonius derives from the story that Messalina sent snakes to kill Nero because he was a rival to her son Britannicus. Tacitus, by contrast, although he must have been aware of the story of the failed murder attempt from the oral or literary tradition, omits this detail entirely, but instead mentions, some sentences later, that Messalina wanted to attack Agrippina. By doing so, he shifts Messalina’s hostility from Nero to his mother Agrippina, minimizing Nero’s menace, and making Agrippina into the real threat to the power of Messalina. Furthermore, Tacitus leaves Nero out of his narration of the naval battle staged by Claudius at the Fucine Lake. Dio reports that Claudius and Nero wore military clothing while Agrippina was dressed in a chlamys woven of golden threads; Tacitus mentions the same details of Claudius’ military cape and Agrippina’s golden chlamys, but omits Nero’s presence. While Tacitus makes Agrippina protest about Britannicus’ incorrect greeting of Nero as Domitius or Ahenobarbus, Suetonius relates the same anecdote, but has Nero complain to Claudius. In the episode of the destruction of Domitia Lepida, Tacitus recounts Agrippina’s accusations, but leaves out the salient detail that Nero himself gave public testimony against his aunt. Whereas in the versions of Suetonius and Dio, it is Claudius’ regret about his adoption of Nero that drives Agrippina to murder him, in Tacitus’ account Agrippina is made to act out of fear for her own position. Narcissus’ hostility in his last, fatalistic attempt at opposition is directed firmly at Agrippina, not at Nero, who seems to play no role other than that of the vehicle for Agrippina’s way to power: Agrippina is the one who is suspected by him, she is tearing apart the domus with her machinations, and she is selling herself to gain power. Suetonius calls Nero privy to Claudius’ murder, whereas Tacitus ignores any knowledge or participation of him in the crime and focuses on Agrippina’s preparations for Nero’s succession and tactics to delay the announcement of Claudius’ death, which are not prominent in Suetonius’

1109  11.11.2 and Suet. Ner. 6.4.
1110  See Malloch 2013, 190-194 for an extended comparison of the different versions.
1111  Mehl 1974, 52-53; Malloch 2013 ad loc.
1112  Dio 60.33.3 (Xiphilinus).
1113  Suet. Ner. 7.1; Martin 1990, 1552.
1115  Cf. Seif 1973, 273. In fact, at the notice of Narcissus’ suicide at the beginning of Book 13, Tacitus even states that Nero did not agree with his enforced death, since he got along well with the freedman due to their shared vices: 13.1.3.

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version. Both Suetonius and Dio relate Nero’s address to the Senate at his accession, after his visit to the Praetorian camp, but Tacitus omits this completely. Tacitus does not mention Nero’s staging of the votive games for Claudius’ health nor his performance as a judge during the Latin festival, but he does explicitly cite the aid of Burrus and Seneca in Nero’s succession.

Nero’s lack of agency is continued in the first part of the narrative of his reign, where Tacitus attributes several actions to Agrippina which Suetonius ascribes to Nero himself, for instance the initiative for the incestuous intimacies between mother and son. Tacitus also emphasizes that Agrippina eliminated M. Silanus and Narcissus without the knowledge of Nero (13.1.1: ignaro Nerone) or against his wishes (13.1.3: invito principe). And when Nero is first depicted as acting autonomously, pronouncing a eulogy of Claudius, Tacitus explicitly notes that the address was written for him by Seneca, and emphasizes Nero’s dependence on a ghostwriter by reporting that unnamed seniores compared the eloquence of earlier emperors with Nero’s lack of it (13.3). Tacitus, then, minimizes Nero’s agency, with the effect of playing up Agrippina as the driving and scheming force behind the course of events. Only slowly does this balance of power start to change from 13.12.1 onwards: ceterum infracta paulatim potentia matris; and after Nero’s murder of Britannicus, the roles are effectively reversed.

Moreover, Tacitus does not report public opinion on the question of the suc-

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1116  Suet. Ner. 33.1; Cl. 45.1; cf. Martin 1990, 1552.
1117  Suet. Ner. 8.1; Dio 61.3.1; Jos. AJ 20.8.2.
1118  These two actions are related in Suet. Ner. 7.2, while Suetonius does not mention the involvement of Seneca and Burrus.
1119  Tacitus has Agrippina offer her bedroom and lap to Nero (13.13.2) and seduce him with inlecebrae (14.2.1, on the authority of Cluvius Rufus and several other sources, although Tacitus states that Fabius Rusticus gives Nero the initiative), while Suetonius (Ner. 28.2) places the desire with Nero himself.
1120  Martin 1990, 1552, pointing out that Pliny the Elder attributes Silanus’ murder to Nero rather than to Agrippina (NH 7.58). As Keitel 2009, 130 observes, this thread is picked up again in the episode of Nero’s murder of his mother, where Nero’s lack of agency and insight is contrasted with Agrippina’s initiative and self-awareness.
1121  Cf. Martin 1990, 1552.
1122  Cf. Martin 1981, 159 with regard to 12.64: ‘Tacitus does not wish to give Nero any individuality ... all initiative issues from his mother’; see also Martin 1990, 1551-1552.
1123  Cf. Martin 1990, 1552: ‘Nero’s reign begins with Agrippina in effective control; the manner in which Nero, abetted by Burrus and Seneca, emancipates himself from his mother is the basic motif of the first section of Book 13.’
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cession or the suitability of the candidates very often. In the Tiberian narrative, Tacitus relates rumours about the suitability of Tiberius and Agrippa Postumus as successors to Augustus, reports the popularity of Germanicus and his family, and recounts the division of loyalties between the two princes among the members of the imperial court.\footnote{In the Claudian Books, he restricts himself to noting Nero’s popularity due to his descent from Germanicus (11.12.1), and widespread pity for Britannicus (12.26.2, 12.41.2).\footnote{Dio (60.33.9) does remark that Nero ‘became a person of importance and his name was on everybody’s lips’.}}\footnote{He characterizes Drusus and Germanicus, as well as Otho and Piso, much more often.} In the Claudian Books, he restricts himself to noting Nero’s popularity due to his descent from Germanicus (11.12.1), and widespread pity for Britannicus (12.26.2, 12.41.2).\footnote{At 11.11.2, Nero is described as haudquaquam sui detractor by Tacitus; he speaks facunde in 12.58.1.}\footnote{12.26.2; see section 3.1.1 above in greater detail. Dio 60.33.9 recounts that Agrippina disseminated the story that Britannicus suffered from epilepsy; Suetonius (Ner. 33.3) and Tacitus (13.16.3) on the other hand} Nor does Tacitus himself describe the princes in detail, either directly in a character sketch, or indirectly, through a narration of their actions.\footnote{He characterizes Drusus and Germanicus, as well as Otho and Piso, much more often.}\footnote{12.26.2; see section 3.1.1 above in greater detail. Dio 60.33.9 recounts that Agrippina disseminated the story that Britannicus suffered from epilepsy; Suetonius (Ner. 33.3) and Tacitus (13.16.3) on the other hand} The result of all this is that the two candidates for the succession are barely characterized or commented upon, and are hardly depicted as acting in Tacitus’ representation.

Characterization and qualities

As a consequence of this near-invisibility, very little can be discerned about the criteria employed in the selection of these potential successors, and about the reasons for Nero’s precedence over Britannicus. Very few particular characteristics can be attributed to the boys. Neither of them is practised in politics or warfare, although Nero does gain some oratorical experience towards the end of Book 12. Agrippina’s party tries to convince the audience at his adulthood spectacle that Nero is ready to undertake public duties (12.41.1), but the formulation quo capessenda rei publicae habilis videretur implies both that the public was not yet convinced, and that it was not about showing that Nero was capable, but about making him appear as such. Nero’s character is sketched in great detail in the narrative of his own reign; in the Claudian Books, however, the only features mentioned are his boasting and his eloquence.\footnote{At 11.11.2, Nero is described as haudquaquam sui detractor by Tacitus; he speaks facunde in 12.58.1.} Features such as his cruelty and theatricality, so prominent in the Neronian Annals and in Suetonius’ biography of Nero, are not yet present. As for Britannicus, he is credited with seeing through Agrippina’s deceit, although Tacitus immediately questions his reputation as a sharp observer.\footnote{12.26.2; see section 3.1.1 above in greater detail. Dio 60.33.9 recounts that Agrippina disseminated the story that Britannicus suffered from epilepsy; Suetonius (Ner. 33.3) and Tacitus (13.16.3) on the other hand}
The two main differences between the candidates are their age and their ancestry. Although Nero is only three years older than Britannicus, the latter is consistently portrayed as young or boyish in comparison with his adoptive brother. Some of these passages are focalized through Tacitus, but in several cases, it is the helpers of Agrippina (Vitellius, Pallas and others) who seek to make Britannicus appear much more immature than Nero. Interestingly, we have seen a similar dynamic at work in the portrayal of Drusus the Younger and Germanicus (see section 2.3.3), but unlike in the Tiberian case, here it is part of strategy of Britannicus’ opponents to make him appear less capable of succeeding to the emperorship. Still, both Nero and Britannicus are clearly too young to govern the state, and Tacitus reports popular criticism on Nero’s age after his accession. The other difference between the two boys, which is likewise played up by Agrippina’s supporters, is Nero’s descent from the still immensely popular Germanicus. Tacitus explicitly states that the people’s favour, as expressed during the *lusus Troiae*, depended upon the memory of Germanicus, whose last male descendant Nero was. Indeed, as Hausmann notes, after relating Nero’s snake story and the fantastic stories that were told about the boy, Tacitus reverts to the real reason (verum) of their preference for Nero, which had nothing to do with his own accomplishments or divine protection, but everything with his renowned grandfather. What seems determining state that this was the explanation Nero provided for Britannicus’ seizure after being poisoned, making it look more like an impromptu pretext.

1129 E.g. Britannicus is connected to his tutors several times (11.1.1, 11.4.3 and 12.41.3); he is called *puer* in 11.11.2 (so is Nero); included among the *parvi liberi* in Vitellius’ speech (12.5.3); his *pueritia* is contrasted with Nero’s *robor* by Pallas, while Nero is called *juvenis* there (12.25.1, where Britannicus is also compared to Gaius and Lucius Caesar while Nero is likened to Augustus’ stepsons Drusus and Tiberius, who were up to 25 years older than Augustus’ grandsons); he is called *puer* again in 12.26.2; wears the *toga praetexta*, emphatically described as *puerilis habitus* in 12.41.2; and Narcissus’ urges to Britannicus to grow up (12.65.3: *robur actatis quam maturrimum precari* and *adolesceret*) only highlight the contrast with Nero, whose toga of manhood was in fact *maturata* (12.41.1). By contrast, Nero’s *pueritia* only comes up in the Claudian Books at 12.8.2.

1130 Notably, Suetonius (Cl. 43.1) states that *cumque impubi teneroque adhuc, quando statura permitteret, togam dare destinasset* (sc. Claudius).

1131 In the narrative of his own reign, Nero’s young age is referred to in popular criticism at 13.1.1 and 13.6.2; in 14.3.3, 14.52.4 and 14.55.3, his boyhood is referred to as being over. Britannicus’ boyhood figures in 13.15.2 and 13.17.2.

1132 11.12.1: *verum inclinatio populi supererat ex memoria Germanici, cuius illa reliqua suboles virilis.*

1133 Hausmann 2009, 202: ‘Nero scheint nicht aufgrund seiner eigenen Persönlichkeit oder Ausstrahlung die Sympathien des Volkes zu genießen, sondern einzig und allein deshalb, weil er der letzte männliche Nachfahre des beliebten Germanicus ist. Dieser Eindruck wird durch das Verb *supererat* gestützt, welches das Fortle-
for their status as heirs apparent, then, is found in their portrayal at the occasion of their first juxtaposition and contrasting: Britannicus is *imperatore genitus*, while Nero is *illa reliqua suboles virilis* of Germanicus. Ultimately, Nero gains precedence over Britannicus due to his slightly older age, but, more importantly, due to the – not very honourable – actions of his mother. Nero, then, is portrayed as owing his succession not to his own intrinsic qualities – he does not seem to have any – but to external factors. So, whereas Dio accepts Nero’s more powerful claim as such, and Suetonius does not discuss the issue, Tacitus indirectly questions this route to the emperorship, and Nero’s qualifications for his position.

But the result of keeping the characters of Nero and Britannicus so ‘flat’ in Book 12 is not just implicit criticism on Nero’s succession through the suggestion that he had no qualities to recommend him for the emperorship; it also serves to keep the focus firmly on Agrippina, who is characterized elaborately (see also below, section 3.3.1). She is the driving force behind the narrative of Book 12, and playing down the other figures brings out her features and deeds even more. Indeed, as remarked upon above, the depiction of Nero and Britannicus changes radically after Nero’s succession, when the young emperor becomes the focus of the story. Nero’s character is more marked from Book 13 onwards, and he starts to become more active and to liberate himself from the influence of his mother. Britannicus, too, emerges as a less passive and more clearly-outlined character, when he stands up to Nero’s challenge of singing a song at the Saturnalia, steadfastly (*constanter*) striking up a poem about his unjust exclusion from imperial power (13.15.2). After concentrating so much on Agrippina in Book 12, Tacitus has to construct the décor anew after this ‘chance of scene’, when Nero takes centre stage after his accession – and it is only then that the young man starts to get features of his own.¹¹³⁴ Nero’s image in the narrative does not really benefit from this, however, for his portrayal is largely negative. In particular, immediately after his accession, Tacitus reports widespread...
open doubts about Nero’s capacity to rule, criticism on his age, dependence on others, and illegitimate rise to the emperorship, as well as favourable views of M. Silanus as being considered more capable to rule.\textsuperscript{1135} Notably, the main point of disapproval does not seem to be Nero’s preference to the ‘rightful heir’ Britannicus, but Nero’s age and inexperience.\textsuperscript{1136} This may reflect actual criticism at that time: people might have expected Claudius to live longer, and thus Nero to be older at the moment of his accession. However, one of the very few qualities attributed to Nero in Book 12 – his eloquence, mentioned when he is said to speak \textit{facunde} in 12.58 – is explicitly denied to him in Book 13, where Tacitus stresses that he was the first emperor to have to depend on \textit{aliena facundia} (13.3.2).\textsuperscript{1137} The use of the same term \textit{facundia} implies a more general, sudden reversal of appreciation of Nero after his accession: whereas he was the popular heir apparent in the Claudian Books, he is heavily criticized in the narration of his own reign.\textsuperscript{1138} Perhaps this reflects the initial popular excitement of the accession of descendant of Germanicus’, and high expectations for Nero’s reign – as well as the eventual very bitter disappointment of these hopes, at least from the perspective of the Senate.\textsuperscript{1139} Perhaps Tacitus has to portray him in such a bad light in order to explain his murder of his mother, because someone like Agrippina can only be overcome by someone who is even worse than she is. It may also, more indirectly, suggest the corrupting force of absolute power, which changes its holders for the worse. In any case, it is worth noting that

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{1135} 13.1.1: \textit{crebra vulgi firma anteponendum esse visidum pueritiam egresso Neroni et imperium per scelus adepto virum actate composita, insontem, nobilem et, quod tunc spectaretur, e Caesarum posteris: quippe et Silanus divi Augusti abnepos erat}; 13.6.2: \textit{igitur in urbe sermonum avida, quem ad modum princeps vis septem decem annos egressus suscipere cem molem aut propulsare posset, quod subsidium in eo, qui a femina regeretur, num proelia quoque et obpugnationes urbium et cetera belli per magistros administrari possent, acquirebant. Cf. Morford 1990, 1602 on the opening of Nero’s reign and Tacitus’ sketching of the main characters and influences on Nero.}
\item \textsuperscript{1136} The ‘rivals’ presented – and eliminated – in the Neronian 
\textit{Annals} are mostly mature, more experienced men with an illustrious ancestry. Cf. Osgood 2011, 247-249 on Nero’s youth being used, for instance in Sen. \textit{Apolol.} 4, to allude to the dawning of a new golden age and to provide a contrast with the old Claudius as ‘an effective way of turning Nero’s greatest liability into an advantage’.
\item \textsuperscript{1137} Cf. Martin 1981, 232; Jones 2000, 454; see Scott 1998 on Tacitus’ denial of (competent) speeches to Nero as a way to denigrate the emperor’s character; Jones 2000 on the historical Nero’s public pronouncements.
\item \textsuperscript{1138} Cf. also Martin 1990, 1553 n.146.
\item \textsuperscript{1139} Cf. the optimistic presentation of Nero in the \textit{Apocolocyntosis}; but see Hist. 1.4.3 and Suet. \textit{Ner.} 57 for hints about Nero’s continuing popularity with large parts of the people.
\end{enumerate}
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Nero was the only one of all the Julio-Claudian succession candidates who actually became emperor, and therefore was the only one able to either confirm or disprove the reputation he had held as heir apparent – the reputations of Germanicus, Drusus the Younger and Britannicus were untainted by the inevitable resentment and problems of the great responsibilities and laborious tasks of the Empire.

To summarize, succession is again represented as firmly dynastic: Claudius’ two sons Britannicus and Nero are depicted as the only serious candidates in Tacitus’ account, on hardly any other grounds than their kinship relation to the emperor. The extant Claudian narrative is essentially the story of the road to Nero’s succession, charting his swift, systematic and ominous rise to power through the efforts of Agrippina and her supporters. At the same time, it is a depiction of the gradual fall of Britannicus, whose increasingly miserable fate is juxtaposed with Nero’s advancement at the latter’s every step forward. Considering Tacitus’ focus on the fortunes of these two potential successors, it may seem remarkable that Britannicus and Nero are not given a very active or prominent role in the narrative. However, as this section has suggested, Tacitus makes them function as objects in the power game played out at the imperial court between Claudius, his wives, and his freedmen. Accordingly, the question of the candidates’ abilities or suitability for the emperorship barely comes into play.
The previous two chapters have discussed at length Tacitus’ depiction of emperors’ involvement in the imperial succession. The Tacitean Galba is described as actively attempting to break away from the pattern of dynastic succession, while Tiberius is represented as deliberating about, and making arrangements for, the future transmission of his power. By contrast, the most noticeable aspect of Claudius’ handling of question of the succession in Tacitus’ account is exactly the absence of any active involvement in the matter on the part of the emperor. Claudius is portrayed as essentially passive, and Tacitus hardly credits him with any thoughts about the issue, or preparations for it – the majority of the actions, utterances and conflicts with regard to the succession are attributed to Claudius’ wives and freedmen. This section investigates the emperor’s general characterization in the narrative, and then proceeds to examine the consequently marginal and inactive role of Claudius in the arrangements for the succession.

3.2.1 CLAUDIUS’ PASSIVE CHARACTERIZATION

Claudius’ passivity – including his lack of agency, subordination to others, weakness and ignorance – is generally recognized to be one of the central features of Tacitus’ characterization of both the emperor and his reign, at least in the extant parts of the Claudian Books. Through the use of various techniques Tacitus

1140 Koestermann 1967, 10; Keitel 1977, iii; Malloch 2013, 4; Malloch 2009, 116; Sage 1990, 987; Vessey 1971. However, it should not be forgotten that more than half of the original narrative is lost, resulting in the
makes the image of Claudius as passive pervade his whole narrative. A chief aspect is scale, or the scope given to imperial activity: the scarcity of actions attributed to Claudius throughout the two extant Books, the relatively small number of words devoted to his actions and to events that are brought about by his own agency, and generally his absence from many episodes. Most events described in Tacitus’ account – in any case, most of the events marked as important by their detailed and colourful narration – are brought about through the agency of other characters than the emperor. Claudius plays no role of note in the provincial affairs which occupy up to a half of the whole narrative, he is mostly ignorant and passive in the episode of the affair of Messalina and Silius, which takes up close to one third of Book 11, and nearly all the actions connected to Agrippina’s marriage to Claudius and Nero’s advancement are carried out by others. Moreover, when comparing the number of chapters in which the different main characters of the story – Claudius, Messalina, Agrippina, Pallas, Narcissus and Callistus – are present (even regardless of their agency), it quickly becomes clear that Claudius far from dominates the narrative. Messalina and Agrippina each appear in about a quarter of the little over a hundred chapters which the Claudian narrative comprises, while the freedmen are present in a fifth of all chapters. There are only thirty chapters in which Claudius – who should, as emperor, theoretically be the centre of attention – is mentioned without one of his wives or freedmen also featuring, while almost half (45, to be precise) of the chapters in the whole Claudian narrative star individuals without formal political influence. There are, then, many more chapters in which his wives and freedmen appear alongside the emperor, or in which Claudius does not figure at all.
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(e.g. large parts of the narrative of foreign events), than there are in which Claudius is depicted on his own. This stands in stark contrast with the presence of the Tacitean Tiberius, who appears very often as acting on his own, and whose dominance of the narrative is even tangible in episodes in which he does not actually participate (see above, section 2.3.1). Moreover, while the episodes of Messalina’s affair and Agrippina’s promotion of herself and of Nero constitute (near-)continuous narratives in which these women clearly dominate the story, references to Claudius are mostly scattered and brief, he is only seldom the focus of the event narrated, and is even omitted from episodes relating directly to himself.1143 Both in amount of text and frequency of action, then, the Claudian Books are notable for ‘the absence of a single towering figure and the emergence of a number of dominating personalities’, as Sage observes.1144

Another way in which Tacitus brings this marginality and passivity to the fore is explicit comment. To contrast the emperor’s inactivity with the active role played by others, Claudius’ ignorance, stupidity and passivity, and the (mis)use made of it by others, is regularly noted or explicitly remarked upon.1145 Rather than having a keen eye for the business of the state and the workings of power, Claudius is occupied with antiquarian interests.1146 In fact, ‘[n]one of the key political words of the principate is applied to the princeps: potentia, libido dominandi, regnum and dominatio are the property of those who rule in his name’ – Agrippina, Vitellius and the imperial freedmen.1147 The emperor is also associated with words relating to

1143 Malloch 2013, 5 notes Claudius’ practical omission from the narration of his censorship, and interprets the practical absence of Claudius from the Tiberian narrative as ‘prefigur[ing] his marginality in his own reign’ (Malloch 2013, 4).
1144 Sage 1990, 990.
1145 E.g. 11.1.2: *Claudius nihil ultra scrutatus* (authorial focalization); 11.2.2: *adeo ignaro Caesar*, ut paucos post dies epulantem apud se maritum eius Scipionem percontaretur, cur sine uxore discubuisset, atque ille functam fato responderet (Tacitus); 11.13.1: Claudius, *matrimonii sui ignarus* (Tacitus); 11.25.5: *isque illi finis inscitiae erga domum suam fuit* (Tacitus); 11.26.2: *Claudium, ut insidiis incautum, ita irae properum* (Silius); 11.28.2: *repuantes hebetem Claudium et uxori devinctum* (those in power at the court); 11.35.1: *omnia liberto oboediebant* (Tacitus); 11.38.2-3: *nuntiatumque Claudio epulanti perisse Messalinam, non distincto sua an aliena manu; nec ille quaecivit* (Tacitus); 12.7.3: *cuncta feminae oboediebant* (Tacitus). As Malloch 2013 ad 1.3 notes, his subordination recurs at 13.6.3: *servilibus iussis obtemperatus* (focalizers: undefined alii).
1146 As evidenced in the emperor’s proposals and historical digressions at 11.13.2-14.2, 11.15.1, 11.24, 12.61; see Malitz 1994 on the historical Claudius’ interest in historical studies.
1147 Keitel 1981, 209.
hesitation and sluggishness several times. His inclination towards earthly pleasures, such as lust and love of food and drink – not very lofty and becoming of an emperor – are noted frequently, whereas Tacitus had not diminished the dignity of his Tiberius by mentioning these. Claudius’ passivity and his unawareness of it is forcefully suggested through the ironic description of Claudius’ censorial actions in chapter 11.15, where he proposes measures to rescue the college of *haruspices* from inertia, sluggishness, listlessness, obsolescence and oblivion. Indeed, his whole censorship is ridiculed by the contrast with his ignorance of his wife’s adultery and lascivious behaviour. These comments are focalized by Tacitus and by the characters in the narrative, implying that everyone is aware of it. Furthermore, whereas Tacitus often scrutinises Tiberius’ outwards behaviour for its hidden causes, and provides alternative explanations for that emperor’s actions – thereby bringing out the complexity of Tibrius’ character – he never questions Claudius’ conduct or examines his deeds for deeper motives beyond factors such as stupidity and obedience.

In addition, Tacitus employs various subtle structural, narratological and grammatical devices to marginalize Claudius’ presence and agency and to emphasize his passivity, such as word order, significant juxtaposition and contrast, and ring composition. As Keitel notes with respect to such ‘ironic collocation’, ‘[b]y juxtaposing a positive action of Claudius’ with a silly or sinister one in the same area, Tacitus consistently undoes all the good the emperor did in the act of narrating it. … These devices enable the historian to include Claudius’ positive acts while presenting them in an unfavorable light’. Note that this is a device also used by

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1148 E.g. 11.15.1: desidiam and segnus (focalization: Claudius); 11.29.3: *longa apud Ostiam Caesaris mora* (Tacitus); 12.5.1: *necdatum celebrare sollemnia nuptiarum audebant* (Tacitus); 12.5.2: *cunctatio* (Tacitus); 12.7.1: *si cunctaretur Caesar* (senators); 12.22.2: *multa ... apud senatum praefatus* (Tacitus); 12.67.1: *nec vim medicaminis statim intellectam, socordia ne an Claudii vinolentia* (writers of those times).

1149 E.g. 11.2.2, 11.29.3, 11.37.2, 11.38.2, 12.3.1, 12.5.1, 12.64.2, 12.67.1-2; Aubrion 1985, 478 on Tacitus’ near-omission of Tiberius’ fondness for these things, which is reported in other ancient sources.

1150 11.15.1-2: *ne ... per desidiam exolescerat; segnus; socordia; oblitterarentur*.

1151 Vessey 1971, 393-398.

1152 Aubrion 1985, 167-168, and 169-170 for a contrast with Tacitus’ portrayal of Seneca; cf. 167: ‘Les personnages ne méritent l’enquête du narrateur que dans la mesure où ils ont une personnalité.”


1154 Keitel 1977, iv.
Tacitus in his depiction of Tiberius, where constructive deeds are regularly cast in a negative light by being juxtaposed with episodes testifying to the emperor’s cruelty or arrogance – but these are active features, in contrast to Claudius’ ignorance and inactivity (see above, section 2.3.1). The only, but notable, exception to this practice is the speech Claudius is accorded in the debate about the entrance of Gauls to the Senate, which comes across as independent and convincing, especially when compared to the original speech inscribed on a bronze tablet found in Lyons.\textsuperscript{1155} However, that the impression of strength and action conveyed by the speech is an exception – and that Tacitus does not add any authorial praise to the episode – says much about the portrait Tacitus intends to paint of Claudius.\textsuperscript{1156} The measures and initiatives that Tacitus does attribute to Claudius, or episodes which might conflict with his characterization of the emperor as passive, are downplayed by the brevity of their description, authorial comment, or the context in which these passages are placed.\textsuperscript{1157}

Tacitus also imbues Claudius with grammatical passivity. Repeatedly, he avoids making Claudius the (active) subject or focalizer of a sentence; instead, he focalizes observations through others, turns other individuals or even things into the grammatical subject of a sentence, uses passive verbs or impersonal constructions, refers to Claudius indirectly (thus avoiding the mentioning of his name), or only mentions him in a subordinate clause.\textsuperscript{1158} Furthermore, Claudius hardly speaks in the account of his own reign: he is only given one speech in oratio recta in the extant Claudian Books, whereas Tiberius speaks many times in the narrative in his own reign.\textsuperscript{1159}

\textsuperscript{1155} See Martin 1981, 147-150; Griffin 1982; Malloch 2013, 338-342, all with references to further literature. See also Griffin 1990 on the interpretation of Tacitus’ use of ‘Claudian material’.
\textsuperscript{1156} Malloch 2013, 7 on the absence of praise; also Aubrion 1985, 573-579 on Claudius’ characterization through his speeches.
\textsuperscript{1157} Ryberg 1942, 404 n.83; Vessey 1971, 393-395; Martin 1981, 144-147; Malloch 2013, 7-9.
\textsuperscript{1158} Ryberg 1942, 404 n.83; Malloch 2013, 5 n.14 and ad 11.3.1 secuta sunt. Claudius’ name seems to be mentioned less often than that of Tiberius or Nero: the Tiberian hexad (roughly 48,000 words) contains 250 mentions of Tiberius’ name, the Claudian Books (ca. 12,000 words) list Claudius’ name 47 times, and Nero’s name is mentioned 176 times in the narrative of his reign (almost 29,000 words). When converting these numbers into the frequency of an emperor’s name per 10,000 words of the narrative of his reign, Claudius scores relatively low (39) compared to Tiberius (52) and Nero (61).
\textsuperscript{1159} The only speech in oratio recta is that pronounced by Claudius on the admission of Gauls to senatorial offices (11.24). However, the Claudian narrative in general includes relatively few speeches compared to the surrounding Books (Walker 1960, 259-262, though remarkably, she leaves out several speeches, such as Clau-
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Allusions and other kinds of colouring reinforce this impression. There are elements of the comic and the satiric in Tacitus’ portrayal of Claudius.\textsuperscript{1160} Moreover, the emperor recalls several other Tacitean characters, both comparable and dissimilar. His imperial predecessor Augustus is evoked many times, directly and through more indirect allusions. The parallels are especially clear in the last chapters of the Claudian Books, where the depiction of Agrippina’s behaviour resembles that of the Tacitean Livia – and Claudius is as a result indirectly likened to Augustus – in the opening chapters of the \textit{Annals} (see below, section 3.3.2), and Claudius’ funeral is said to have been celebrated in the manner of Augustus, with Agrippina as a kind of second Livia (12.69.3). But also at other points in the narrative, Claudius is repeatedly compared to Augustus, but he always comes off much worse – harshly ironic, since the historical Claudius often referred to the example of Augustus.\textsuperscript{1161}

The contrast with the portrayal of Tiberius in the first hexad of the \textit{Annals} is clear: not only does that emperor act and speak much more often, he is also credited with insight and control.\textsuperscript{1162} In fact, Tacitus appears to construct a sustained compariso...
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son between Book 6 and Book 12, and thereby between Tiberius and Claudius, in which the latter is systematically represented as worse.\textsuperscript{1163} Perhaps unsurprisingly, Claudius shares some traits with his own brother, Tiberius’ polar opposite Germanicus, who is also credited with a keener interest in (and knowledge of) antiquarian matters than in contemporary politics, and whose high-spirited wife – the mother of Claudius’ spouse – likewise displays a kind of ambition unfitting to a woman. Claudius’ lack of control, his obedience to his inferiors and his old-fashionedness is reminiscent of Tacitus’ Galba – and so are Tacitus’ methods for downplaying his agency.\textsuperscript{1164} His sluggishness, gout and drinking may remind the reader of the Annals of Vitellius’ portrayal in the Histories.\textsuperscript{1165} Tacitus’ audience, familiar with his earlier writings, will presumably have read his portrayal of Claudius through these characterizations of other figures – and will have noticed that in all cases, Claudius comes off decidedly worse than his counterparts. Tacitus works hard to emphasize Claudius’ marginality through devices such as scale, explicit comment, structure, lexical connotations, grammatical constructions, the denial of speech, and the use of comic language; these techniques combine to virtually ‘displace [Claudius] as the focus of his own history’, in the words of one commentator.\textsuperscript{1166}

3.2.2 CLAUDIUS CHOOSES AGrippina AS His NEW WiFE

This general lack of agency of the Tacitean Claudius is also brought out forcefully in the depiction of his behaviour in the matter of the succession. This image is decisively set up right at the beginning of Book 12 with Tacitus’ representation of Claudius’ choice for Agrippina as his new spouse, an episode that may be consid-

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Keitel 1977, 230-248.
\item For instance, just like Galba is placed in a sedan chair at Hist. 1.35.2, so Claudius is depicted as sitting (11.11.2); and the lack of Claudian focalization, named presence and grammatical agency resemble Tacitus’ devices for minimizing Galba’s activity; see above, section 1.3.3.
\item The word \textit{temulentus}, used for Claudius in 12.64.2, is a very Vitellian word (see Hist. 1.62.2, 2.68.1, 3.56.2). Syme 1958, 196 n.2 links the absence of a speech on the part of Vitellius in the Histories to that character’s passivity in the work. Cf. also 1.62.2 on Vitellius: \textit{torpebat Vitellius et fortunam principatus inerti luxu ac prodigis epulis praesumebat, medio diei temulentus et sagina gravis, cum tamen ardor et vis militum ultra ducis munia implebat, ut si adesset imperator et strenuis vel ignavis spem metumve adderet.} Vessey 1971, 389 notes that the death of one of Claudius’ victims, Asiaticus, resembles Otho’s suicide in the Histories.
\item Malloch 2013, 5 resp. 4 (slightly adapted): ‘Claudius ends up a character in other people’s stories’.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
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erved exemplary for his use of diverse methods to emphasize the emperor’s passivity. As such, this event will first be treated in detail; then, more examples of the separate devices are provided. After Messalina’s execution at the end of Book 11, Book 12 opens with a contest among the three main imperial freedmen over who will choose a new spouse for the emperor (12.1.1). Each of them supports a different candidate, while the women themselves (Agrippina, Lollia Paulina and Aelia Paetina) try their best to impress with their ancestry, beauty and wealth (12.1.1-2). Claudius himself has no active role in this; he is merely the indirect object of his freedmen’s internal rivalry, as the formulation quis deligeret uxorem Claudio shows – nowhere is the decision to take a new wife explicitly said to be Claudius’ own. Suetonius, by contrast, accords Claudius more agency: the emperor himself is the one to plan a new marriage, and no freedmen are involved.1167 The Tacitean Claudius is stated to be intolerant of celibate life (Claudio, caelibis vitae into<le>ranti) and obedient to his wives’ commands (coniugum imperiis obnoxio). The word imperiis highlights the paradoxical fact that the person possessing supreme imperium is obedient to the commands of his wives.1168 Moreover, it suggests that it is power over the emperor that elicits the competition among the freedmen and the women: the status and the influence of the ‘winning’ freedman will be enhanced considerably, since both Claudius and his new partner will be indebted to him, while the new wife will be able to control the submissive Claudius.1169 In fact, the efforts of supporters and candidates are described by Tacitus in the language of political campaigning for offices.1170 As Keitel notes, the verb exarserant recalls the passions of Messalina for Sil- ius (11.12.2: exarserat) and Claudius for Agrippina (11.25.8: ardesceret), but is here used for political, rather than sexual, ambitions: ‘the shift of use between Books 11 and 12 reflects the shift of interest: now the heat of the struggle focuses on who will rule Claudius. Love and desire play no part in the calculations’.1171

Claudius, indecisive, calls the freedmen to a council and orders them to present

1167 Suet. Cl. 26.3; Seif 1973, 151.
1170 Ginsburg 2006, 22 notes the political language (ambitus, contendere, fautores). Notably, in Dio (60.31.6 (Xiphilinus) and 60.31.8 (Zonaras) the freedmen act in concert, instead of competing with each other; Seif 1973, 151.
1171 Keitel 1977, 141.
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their cases. However, his seemingly firm action of convoking the freedmen (*vocat*) and ordering them to state their cases (*iubet*) appears somewhat ridiculous after his portrayal as convinced by whatever advice he heard last (*ipse huc modo, modo illuc, ut quemque suadentium audierat, promptus*) and by the omission of Claudius’ name as subject of the sentence – he is merely *ipse*. The proceedings of the *consilium*, and Claudius’ choice for Pallas’ candidate Agrippina, further illustrate Claudius’ passivity and ignorance. Most simply, by the fact that it is again the last speaker who manages to win him over, no different from before the council meeting. Moreover, the easiness with which Claudius overlooks the fate of his biological son Britannicus after his remarriage foreshadows the willing consent that he will repeatedly exhibit in the remainder of the narrative to measures putting his own son at a disadvantage. As noted earlier (section 3.1.1), Tacitus has both Narcissus and Callistus draw attention to the risk that a new wife might want to advance her own children at the expense of Claudius’ son – yet Claudius disregards these sound warnings, even if he himself had been subjected to similarly unfavourable treatment in his own youth.

Furthermore, the reasons that Tacitus provides for Claudius’ preference for Agrippina portray the emperor as guided by emotional or physical motives rather than rational, strategic ones. At first sight, Tacitus attributes Claudius’ choice to dynastic considerations: he makes Pallas emphasize the importance of Agrippina’s and Nero’s connections to Augustus and Germanicus, and presents Claudius as being convinced by this. These arguments seem to make sense, both on the level of Tacitus’ narrative – Germanicus’ continuing popularity and the people’s ensuing inclination towards Nero were mentioned in 11.12.1 – and with regard to the historical situation, where an emperor who lacked any direct descent from the first *princeps* will have profited from such connections in terms of legitimacy. As can be inferred from ancient evidence – both contemporary and later – the historical Claudius tried to link himself to Augustus and Germanicus, as well as other (deceased) members of the *domus Augusta*, to bolster his position, for instance by displaying his celebrated relatives on imperial coinage and gems and in monuments (see below, section 3.5.1). It is highly likely that, historically, dynastic considera-

1172 12.1.2: *ipse huc modo, modo illuc, ut quemque suadentium audierat, promptus, discordantes in consilium vocat ac promere sententiam et adicere rationes iubet.*
1174 Clark 2011, 224.
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tions determined the marriage: Agrippina’s ancestry could enhance the emperor’s status, while Claudius’ marriage to her circumvented the risk of someone else attaching himself to her and making claims to imperial power on the basis of that. The other literary sources deny Claudius such a rational and strategic motivation: Suetonius ascribes it to Claudius’ lust and Agrippina’s seductions, while Dio mentions both Agrippina’s charms and the freedmen’s desire to have Nero in power, lest Britannicus would seek revenge for their involvement in the death of his mother. Tacitus, then, seems the only source to credit Claudius with a deliberate and independent choice for a new wife – but he is quick to minimize this impression in various ways. Immediately after stating that Pallas’ dynastic appeal carried the day, Tacitus adds that Agrippina’s enticements played a role as well, and elaborates on her tactics of seducing him (taking advantage of their kinship connection to pay frequent visits to her uncle). Whereas he gives no explanation for Claudius’ choice, and expresses it through impersonal constructions (praevaluere haec, praelata ceteris) without even so much as mentioning Claudius’ name, he does name Agrippina, gives her an active role (per speciem necessitudinis, pellicit, crebro ventitando – note the frequentative form, implying that it was a well-planned strategy) and provides details on her methods. Furthermore, the theme of (incestuous) lust recurs repeatedly in the following narrative: in the charge of incest cast on L. Silanus in 12.4.1-3, Tacitus’ report of the ‘illicit love’ between Claudius

1175 Levick 1990, 69-72; Barrett 1996, 95-98; Osgood 2011, 213-216. See also Koestermann 1967 ad loc. As Wiedemann 1996a, 240-241 and Osgood 2011, 233 note, it did work: the years following Claudius’ marriage to Agrippina saw fewer conspiracies and challenges to Claudius’ position.
1176 Suet. Cl. 26.3, Dio 60.31.6 (Xiphilinus) and 60.31.8 (Zonaras); Jos. AJ 20.8.1 does not name a reason for the marriage, but he does elsewhere mention Agrippina’s ancestry and her son Nero. Dio’s argument of the freedmen’s fear for revenge from Britannicus is incompatible with Tacitus’ presentation of Narcissus as supporter of Aelia Paetina; however, he does mention a similar argument for the efforts of others besides Agrippina in advancing Nero, but in a different context (12.9.2, the engagement of Nero to Octavia; cf. Mehl 1974, 106).
1177 Cf. Clark 2011, 224; see also Mehl 1974, 98-99 on iubet.
1178 12.3.1: praevaluere haec adiuta Agrippinae inlecebris, etenim per speciem necessitudinis crebro ventitando pellicit patruum, ut praelata ceteris.
1179 Cf. Mehl 1974, 101 on the scheming implied in these words. Cf. Whitehead 1979, Develin 1983; Martin 1981, 221-223 on Tacitus’ use of alternative explanations: although he does not explicitly indicate a preference, there is usually an inclination towards the the second, longest and most detailed alternative.
1180 Notably, Dio 60.31.8 (Zonaras) states that Silanus was accused of plotting against Claudius, not of incest: a political rather than moral charge. That Tacitus names incest as the pretext may be due to the bitter contrast it poses to the actual incestuous marriage of the emperor himself (Seif 1973, 168).
and Agrippina in 12.5.1, the couple’s worries about their incestuous relationship in 12.5.1-2, the passing of a new law allowing marriages between uncle and niece on the initiative of Vitellius in 12.5.3-7.2, and the references to Silanus’ accusation and Claudius’ incestuous marriage in 12.8.1.1181 Moreover, Claudius’ burning love had been foreshadowed in the previous Book.1182 The motive of the legitimating power of Agrippina’s and Nero’s ancestry, by contrast, is not taken up again in the ensuing narrative, except in Vitellius’ speech to the Senate, and then only as one of several other – not very credible – qualities of Agrippina’s (12.6.1). Moreover, his speech is so clearly an inversion of the truth that the reader cannot attach much value to it (see more in detail below). So, although at first sight Claudius’ choice for Agrippina seems a calculated attempt to reinforce his position, Tacitus downplays this aspect and conveys the impression that the emperor was carried away by his own lusts, encouraged by Agrippina and Pallas.1183

Furthermore, the passive and ignorant impression of Claudius in the matter is reinforced by the allusions and images evoked by Tacitus’ setting of the marriage council. The depiction of the rivalry between the freedmen and their candidates reminds the reader of the competition between the ‘factions’ of Livilla and the elder Agrippina under Tiberius’ reign, which Tacitus had portrayed in similar terms earlier in the Annals, in Tiberius’ reply to Sejanus’ request for permission to marry Livilla (4.40.3). Both episodes deal with a dispute regarding a marriage (Livilla’s and Claudius’, respectively) in which women compete with each other in burning rivalry, with the result of tearing apart the imperial house; moreover, the episodes are linked by an Agrippina figuring as one of the contenders – the Elder in the first, and her daughter the Younger in the second passage. Furthermore, verbal similarities connect the two passages.1184 However, these apparent similarities serve to em-

1181 12.4.2: fratrumque non incestum, sed incustoditum amorem ad infamiam traxit; 12.5.1: pactum inter Claudium et Agrippinam matrimonium iam fama, iam amore inlicito firmabatur; necdum celebrare sollemnia nuptiarum audebat, nullo exemplo deductae in domum patrui fratris filiae: quin et incestum ac, si sperneretur, ne in malum publicum erumperet metuebatur; 12.8.1: inridentibus cunctis quod poenae procurationesque incesti id temporis exquirerentur; remarkably, Keitel 1981, 209 states that Claudius’ sexual desire is played down by Tacitus.
1182 11.25.5: ut deinde ardescet in nuptias incestas; Seif 1973, 163.
1183 Seif 1973, 162-163.
1184 12.1.1: certamine vs. 4.40.3: certamen; 12.1.1: quis deligeret uxorem Claudio ... coniugum imperis obnoxio vs. 4.40.3: tali coniugio; 12.1.1: tanto matrimonio vs. 4.40.3: matrimonium; 12.1.1: nec minor ambitu feminae vs. 4.40.3: aemulationem feminarum; 12.1.1: exarserant vs. 4.40.3: arsuras; 12.1.1: principis domus vs. 4.40.3: domum Caesarum; 12.1.1: convulsa vs. 4.40.3: convelli; 12.1.2: discordantes vs. 4.40.3: discordia. The metaphor of the
phasize the differences between the two situations. Tiberius shows an acute awareness of the troubled situation within his *domus*, and actively tries to curb the rivalry within the imperial house and prevent his grandsons from being wrenched apart, by not allowing either of the women to remarry. Moreover, although initially blind to Sejanus’ plans, Tiberius eventually takes control of the situation by prohibiting a further increase in Sejanus’ position and later eliminating him entirely. Claudius, by contrast, is ignorant, passive and indecisive; his house is torn apart not just by female rivalry, but by a struggle between freedmen as well; he actively encourages competition by having the *liberti* present their arguments, and gladly consents to them taking the lead; and he dupes his own children by his choice for Agrippina. Whereas Tiberius managed to keep a hold on his family and on the ambitions of his daughter-in-law the Elder Agrippina, Claudius lets himself be overruled completely by the latter’s daughter Agrippina the Younger and her co-conspirator Pallas.

Moreover, Claudius’ convocation of a *consilium* in which different speakers represent their opinions conjures up connotations with several other councils, none of which cast Claudius’ appearance and performance in a very favourable light by comparison. First of all, the scene mimics a gathering of a *consilium principis*, a group of senators and equestrians advising the emperor. By employing the language of such *consilia* – 12.1.2: *in consilium vocat ac promere sententiam et adicere rationes iubet* – and by having the three speakers present their cases in turn, Tacitus mockingly imitates a meeting of the emperor’s privy council. Generally convened to discuss matters of state, and under the direction of the emperor, Claudius’ *consilium* appears rather ridiculous: not only does it deal with the business of choosing a wife, it is also clear that Claudius is not in charge. The scene, furthermore, echoes the judgment of Paris, with Claudius as a ‘comic Paris, able to choose only one of the contestants, overwhelmed by claim and counterclaim, [and making] the worst possible choice’, with disastrous results. There are also reminiscences of the mocking *consilium* in the fourth Satire of Juvenal, where the council debates imperial house torn to pieces in connection with Agrippina returns in Narcissus’ speech in 12.65.2: *novercae insidiis domum omnem convelli*; Koestermann 1967 ad 12.1.1.

1185 Clark 2011, 221-226 discusses similarities with the council convened by the Parthian king Vologaeses to crown Tiridates king of Armenia at the beginning of Book 15.
1186 On the *consilium principis*, see Crook 1955.
1187 Syme 1958, 539; Koestermann 1967 ad loc.; Martin 1981, 151 n.17; Crook 1955, 42.
1188 Vessey 1971, 401.
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what to do with a giant turbot offered to the emperor Domitian, and, more clearly, to the divine assembly in Seneca’s satiric *Apocolocyntosis*, where the gods deliberate about Claudius’ deification.\(^{1189}\) Whereas Tacitus had depicted Tiberius as occasional satirist, the Tacitean Claudius is merely the object of satire and mocking.\(^{1190}\) Finally, Tacitus’ audience may also have been reminded of a similar scene in his previous work, the *Histories*: Galba’s *consilium eligendi successoris* at Hist. 1.13. There, the weak emperor is likewise portrayed as completely dominated by his three advisers (Titus Vinius, Cornelius Laco and the freedman Icelus) who effectively wield imperial power (*potentia principatus*), and who are likewise described as *discordes* and only interested in personal gain (1.13.1). A comparison with Galba and his choice for Piso is evidently not a compliment to Claudius.

Also in the preparations for the marriage, Tacitus’ Claudius is much less active than Suetonius’, or than the historical emperor might have been. In Tacitus’ representation, Claudius and Agrippina do not dare to announce their engagement for fear of public censure, after which Vitellius procures the consent of the Senate (12.5-6). In Suetonius, by contrast, it is the emperor, not Vitellius, who speaks in the Senate and has some members propose that he be compelled to marry Agrippina.\(^{1191}\) Since Suetonius’ account of Claudius’ marriage to Agrippina resembles Tacitus’ closely – for instance, in the elements of the interests of the state, the fact that hardly anyone imitated their example, the use of the same terms *inlecebris* and *pellectus* for Agrippina’s seductions – the difference in agency is remarkable.\(^{1192}\) Moreover, Vitellius’ address indirectly depicts the Tacitean Claudius as particularly passive, by drawing attention to Claudius’ obedience to others,\(^ {1193}\) and by making the speech a masterpiece of deceit and dramatic irony: it is an almost complete

\(^{1189}\) Vessey 1971, 401; Crook 1955, 50-51.

\(^{1190}\) On Tiberius as a satirist, see Morello 2006; Ash 2013.

\(^{1191}\) Suet. Cl. 26.3; cf. Mehl 1974, 120; Dio makes Vitellius responsible as well: Dio 60.31.8 (Zonaras). There seems to be a crescendo as well: 12.1 ends with an active role for Claudius: *iubet*; 12.3 ends with *iusa* applied to the emperor, and in 12.5.2 Claudius is obedient to the *iusa* of both people and Senate – practically the whole state; Mehl 1974, 98-99.

\(^{1192}\) Koestermann 1967 ad loc.

\(^{1193}\) The Tacitean Vitellius asks the emperor (12.5.2) *an iussis populi, an auctoritati senatus cederet, ubi ille [Claudius] num se civium et consensui imparem respondit, opperiri intra palatium iubet*; and later states (12.6.2) *statueretur immo documentum, quo uxorem imperator <a patribus> acciperet.* In addition to being obedient to his wives and freedmen, Claudius gladly consents to submitting to the will of the people and senators, as well as to Vitellius, who orders him to wait within the palace while he takes care of things.
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inversion of everything Tacitus has told the reader so far, or will proceed to relate, and prefigures some later events.\textsuperscript{1194} But as ridiculous as Vitellius’ speech comes across to Tacitus’ readers, so gladly does Claudius consent to it, and enthusiastically does the Senate react: \textit{postquam haec favorabili oratione praemisit multaque patrum adsentatio sequubatur} (12.6.1).

3.2.3 CLAUDIUS’ LACK OF AGENCY IN THE QUESTION OF THE SUCCESSION

By various different techniques, Tacitus makes Claudius appear particularly passive in the matter of his own remarriage, and similar methods are used in the descriptions of the other succession episodes. Tacitus depoliticises some of Claudius’ actions, ascribing them instead to personal, more emotional drives, or suggesting as much. For instance, by omitting information about the brilliant lineage and career of L. Silanus in 12.3.2, Tacitus avoids presenting Claudius as making a conscious, strategic choice in the matter of his daughter’s engagement. A similar dynamic seems present in the episode of Silanus’ removal. Tacitus attributes Claudius’ readiness to believe the charges of incest to his affection for his daughter: \textit{accipiendis adversus generum suspicionibus caritate filiae promptior} (12.4.2). As argued above (section

\textsuperscript{1194} Cf. Vessey 1971, 402; Seif 1973, 178-179; Mehl 1974, 112-113; Devillers 1994, 248; Shannon 2012, 170-171. The description of Claudius’ imperial tasks is dramatically exaggerated; the portrayal of his love life unduly chaste (he had, after all, gone through five wives and fiancées, and is about to marry his own niece – hardly appropriate for the leading man of the state, honoured with the titles of \textit{pater patriae} and \textit{censor}); Agrippina would indeed try to become his \textit{socia}, but not as a companion in his good and bad times, but as sharer of his power (cf. 12.37.4); instead of confiding his inmost thoughts to his new wife, Claudius lets her dictate his thoughts, while she deliberately keeps him in ignorance of her plans, and finally murders him; the children he entrusts to her care will suffer from her hands; Agrippina’s excessive pride in her ancestry, the product of her fertility, and her \textit{artes} would all bring disaster to her husband and the Roman state (Furneaux 1907 \textit{ad loc.} notes that Tacitus only uses the term \textit{sanctimonia} when referring to Vestals, i.e. in 2.86.1 and 3.69.6; this is the only other instance of the word in the \textit{Annals}; cf. Seif 1973, 176; Hausmann 2009, 337); Tacitus refers to Agrippina’s chastity at 12.7.3: \textit{nihil domi impudicum, nisi dominationi expediret}; and Claudius’ extreme interest in judicial matters and his denial of fair trials to several defendants was a subject of mockery and criticism (cf. 11.2-4, 13.4; Suet. \textit{Cl.} 14-15 with Hurley 2001, 116-118 and \textit{ad loc.}; Sen. \textit{Apocol.} 10.4 and 14; Levick 1990, 115-126; Osgood 2011, 190-205).
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3.1.1), Claudius’ betrothal of his two-year old daughter to a direct descendant of Augustus was not a matter of affection, but of consolidating the position of himself and his family. Since it was the legitimacy of his domus that was at stake, one could well understand Claudius’ concern with the reputation of its members; but this is a point Tacitus emphatically does not make. By contrast, he denies the emperor political calculation, replacing it with personal affection – a factor which the narrative had stressed several times before. Also in other places, Tacitus suggests that the emperor’s children are important to him not for dynastic, but for emotional reasons, which leads him to disregard the significance of Nero’s advancement.1195 This nicely contrasts with Agrippina, whose maternal love for Nero goes as far as to sacrifice herself for his power: occidat dum imperet (14.9.3).

Claudius is portrayed as easily swayed or misled by Agrippina and her supporters, as epitomized in their judgement of the emperor, that nihil arduum videbatur in animo principis, cui non iudicium, non odium erat nisi indita et iussa (12.3.2). While Agrippina and the freedman Pallas are bound to each other through adultery (12.25.1), Claudius proposes a motion in the Senate about punishment for free women uniting themselves to slaves – a motion which is explicitly noted to have been devised by Pallas.1196 Several times, Tacitus shows Claudius being convinced by arguments that are – to his readers – obviously incorrect or deceitful. Despite his interest in history, the emperor is depicted as swallowing Pallas’ invention of precedents for imperial adoptions at 12.25.1197 He shows himself worse than Tiberius: unlike his predecessor, Claudius is not forced to replace his biological son with an adoptive one, but nevertheless does so voluntarily.1198 To aggravate the outrage, Tacitus adds that experts noted that this was the first adoption within the patrician line of the Claudii, which was otherwise uninterrupted until now.1199 Suetonius also reports the statement, but credits Claudius himself with boasting about the novelty of the situation.1200 Tacitus not only denies the emperor his speech, but also indi-

1195 E.g. at 11.32.2, 11.34.1, 11.34.2, 12.4.2, 12.5.3.
1196 12.53.1; cf. Devillers 1994, 177.
1197 Mehl 1974, 131 n.297 points out that Claudius, stated to be his evictus, is thereby likened to the ageing Augustus, whom Tacitus states precibus uxoris evictus ... sibi Tiberium adscivit in 4.57.3.
1199 12.25.2. This is not exactly true: there had been adoptions, both of Claudii into other families, and by Claudii into their own gens – but these last had been cases of intra-familial adoption: Kunst 2005, 50-51.
1200 Suet. Cl. 39.2, although Suetonius reports the statement in what Hurley (2001, 221) terms the rubric of ‘ineptitude’: ‘C[laudius] seems not to have understood when his words were inappropriate. This rubric is
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rectly mocks him by recalling his own claims about the history of the gens Claudia in his speech about the Gauls. 1201 The balance of power is completely turned around, with the emperor obeying his freedman, who is seen to have assumed imperial auctoritas (12.25.1). 1202

Claudius is also won over by Agrippina’s clearly exaggerated and dramatic complaints about Britannicus’ treatment of Nero in 12.41 – cf. Tacitus’ disapproving formulation commotus his quasi criminibus optimum quemque educatorem filii exilio aut morte adficit. 1203 Claudius is, in fact, repeatedly depicted as ignorant and naïve with regard to the struggles being fought out over the succession and the implications of the decisions he is making. At the Lusus Troiae, Tacitus states that indefinite focalizers – presumably, everyone present – recognized the people’s greater favour towards Nero as an indication of the future: loco praesagii acceptus est (11.11.2). Claudius, however, does not seem to understand the implications of this, even though he is explicitly mentioned as present (sedente Claudio). As mentioned before, throughout the narrative, Tacitus reports repeated and obvious signs with regard to the future fates of Nero and Britannicus which he focalizes through several different characters, implying that everyone saw what was coming, except the emperor himself (see above, section 3.1.3). 1204 Tacitus even has Narcissus criticize Agrippina for her impotential muliebris and nimiae spes in the presence of Claudius

unique, an inversion of the eloquence rubrics in other Lives (Iul. 55; Aug. 84; Calig. 53).’ But although he does not value it very positively, Suetonius, contrary to Tacitus, at least allows Claudius the agency of pronouncing the statement.

1201 Keitel 1977, 68, 167; Griffin 1990, 488-489 and Hurley 2001 ad loc. convincingly argue that it must have been Claudius’ statement, and that it is Tacitus who has transferred it to the periti.

1202 Koestermann 1967 ad loc. observes Tacitus uses the term only very sparingly in the Annals; Mehl 1974, 131 points out that Tacitus uses the words mainly for those who pull the strings behind the scenes: Sejanus, Pallas, Polyctitus. Woodman’s 2004 translation ‘on the instigation of Pallas’ is too weak a rendering for the strong auctoritas.

1203 Koestermann 1967 ad loc. Cf. the dramatic language of molto questu, pravitas and eruptura in publicam pernicem; the assertion of the existence of fraternal concordia before to the incident (contrary to Drusus and Germanicus, the two brothers are never stated by Tacitus to be harmonious); the claim that the Senate and people had ordained the adoption (for which Pallas alone was responsible); cf. Hausmann 2009, 361-362. Moreover, the language used by Agrippina to warn Claudius – 12.41.3: sperni ... adoptionem ... eruptura in publicam pernicem – is reminiscent of that describing the couple’s fears about public opinion regarding their relationship: ac si sperneretur, ne in malam publicam erumperet, metuebatur (12.5.1); Koestermann 1967 ad loc.; Shannon 2012, 178.

1204 As Keitel 1981, 212-213 notes, even Claudius’ son Britannicus is presented as seeing through Agrippina’s designs (12.26.2).
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at 12.57.2, but these warnings are lost on the emperor, who can only see clearly when he is drunk (12.64.2). The dramatic irony of Claudius’ ignorance is also expressed in his efforts to honour his doctor Xenophon, *cuius scientia ipse uteretur*, in 12.61, which acquire a nasty aftertaste retrospectively, since it is Xenophon that administers the deadly poison to Claudius, after Agrippina’s first attempt has failed.

In addition to making Claudius overly emotional and ignorant, Tacitus also frequently makes him passive. Several actions which Suetonius attributes to the emperor in his biography, or which one may reasonably assume were carried out by the historical Claudius, are ascribed to other characters by Tacitus. While Suetonius reports that it is Claudius who removes Silanus, Tacitus blames Agrippina. In Suetonius, Claudius is portrayed as knowing about Messalina’s execution but forgetting it, while Tacitus makes Narcissus deliberately keep Claudius in the dark about how she died. In the same chapter in Claudius’ *Life*, he is stated to have uttered the remark about the absence of adoption in the Claudian gens prior to his adoption of Nero – a statement that Tacitus ascribes to the *periti*. And, most significantly perhaps, both Suetonius and Dio report that Claudius, towards the end of his life, came to regret his adoption of Nero, and that this expression of regret was the immediate cause for Agrippina’s murder of her husband. By contrast, Tacitus does not credit Claudius with (belated) insight about the consequences of his marriage and adoption except for in a state of intoxication, nor with attempts to remedy the situation. Instead, it is a drunken remark which prompts Agrippina to action, it is a freedman rather than the emperor himself which sees through the empress’ intrigues, and Claudius’ son finds his only supporter in the murderer of his mother, rather than in his own father – it seems like a travesty of the other accounts. These divergences, the ways in which Claudius is deliberately written out of the story by Tacitus, are all the more notable given the strong similarities between the three accounts. The Tacitean Claudius is portrayed as perceiving Agrippina’s
true nature and aims for the first time only in a state of inebriety (temulentus).\textsuperscript{1212} The import of the element of drunkenness does not, as Seif proposes, lie in the necessary courage it provides Claudius to utter such a statement; rather, it creates the ironical impression of a dull emperor only able to see clearly when intoxicated.\textsuperscript{1213} Moreover, the factor of alcohol links this scene to the passage concluding the episode of Messalina’s elimination, when Claudius is notified of her death while banqueting, and is presented as asking for a cup in response.\textsuperscript{1214} But whereas in that case, Claudius’ blissful ignorance with regard to the fate of his spouse did not do him much harm, this time his alcohol-induced insights about his wife will have fatal consequences. Tacitus makes Claudius look all the more stupid: the generally passive emperor, always submissive to his wives, causes his own ruin by this single drunk moment of insight and expression of independence.\textsuperscript{1215} The Tacitean Claudius, then, is much more ignorant and passive, and less capable of clear independent thought and action.\textsuperscript{1216}

This image of passivity is strengthened by Tacitus’ use of grammatically passive constructions and the omission of his name when describing the actions that Claudius does perform, and sometimes even by the complete exclusion of Claudian involvement in matters that do concern him. The only role accorded to him at the Lusus Troiae is that of an inactive spectator, where the formulation – sedente Claudio – indicates passivity with its impersonal absolute ablative and the immobility of the word ‘sitting’.\textsuperscript{1217} Although Claudius is the active and named subject in the engagement of his daughter to L. Silanus and in the promotion of the latter – 12.3.2: desponderat ... Caesar ... protulerat – this impression of agency is discarded as quickly as it was created, for in the next chapter, Tacitus recounts how the emperor is willingly (promptior) lending his ear to Vitellius’ lies, and singlehandedly cancelling his only independent action: adfinitatem Claudius diremit (12.4.2).\textsuperscript{1218} Claudius’ consent to Agrippina’s request for remission from exile for Seneca is not mentioned

\textsuperscript{1212} In Suetonius (43.1), Claudius is made to utter the statement in a conversation about a trial in which he had condemned a woman of adultery; there, Claudius is clearly in his right mind.
\textsuperscript{1213} As interpreted by Mehl 1974, 161; Keitel 1977, 208 and Hausmann 2009, 419; see Seif 1973, 266 for a different reading.
\textsuperscript{1214} 11.38.2; Mehl 1974, 161; Hausmann 2009, 420.
\textsuperscript{1215} Seif 1973, 266.
\textsuperscript{1216} Seif 1973, 277; Hausmann 2009, 420.
\textsuperscript{1217} Hausmann 2009, 200-201.
\textsuperscript{1218} Cf. Seif 1973, 166-167.
Claudius’ passivity (12.8.2), nor is his decision to betroth his daughter to Nero in 12.9.2, which has to be inferred from the factual despondereturque – it is as if it were so self-evident that Claudius would yield to Agrippina’s wishes that it does not even need to be mentioned anymore. When Claudius’ name is mentioned in the adoption episode, he is the object (12.25.1: stimulabat Claudium); his approval is signalled with the impersonal and brief his evictus (12.25.2), and in the following sentence he does not actively pronounce an address – which is written for him by Pallas – but the speech itself is the subject. His involvement in Nero’s assumption of the toga virilis is limited to agreement to senatorial flattery (12.41.1: et Caesar adulationibus senatoribus libens cessit); the toga itself is maturata, but there is no suggestion of Claudian agency there, nor in the donative presented in Nero’s name, which must have been offered by Claudius himself (additum nomine eius donativum militi, congiarium plebei). At the accompanying circus games, Claudius’ presence is neglected (in contrast to 11.11.2). He is denoted merely as Agrippina’s maritus in 12.41.3 – not Caesar, not Claudius, not imperator, but a man defined by his wife – and his consent is conveyed by commotus his quasi criminibus, where Claudius remains unnamed and is cast in the grammatically passive role. His decision to replace the two Praetorian Prefects with Burrus is noted by the impersonal transfertur (12.42.1) and a passive construction is used again in 12.42.3: mutatus esset. Claudius is absent from the narration of Nero’s marriage to Octavia and his speeches in the Senate at 12.58, and he is passively forced to action in 12.59.1: Claudius ... adigebatur eiusdem Agrippinae artibus. In 12.64.2, it is not Claudius, but a vocem Claudii which terrifies Agrippina, and the emperor’s role in the condemnation of Lepida is omitted. Claudius is absent as subject in the scene of his own murder: the only indication that he actually took in the poison is the very indirect virus, cuius minister ... fuit Halotus (12.66.2). Claudius himself does not react to the poison: it is only a part of him, his bowels, which respond (12.67.1: soluta alvus).

After all the preparations for the murder as described in detail in chapters 12.66-12.67, Tacitus does not even note that Claudius actually died, let alone how – whether immediately, in pain, aware of the deceit of his wife, or uttering which last words, details which are reported by the other sources. The reader is left to infer the emperor’s death from iam exinimis in 12.68.1, a single adjective in a subordinate

1219 12.25.2: habita apud senatum oratione eundem in quem a liberto acceperat modum.
1220 Hausmann 2009, 359.
Claudius clause, almost as an aside to the main story line of Agrippina making preparations for Nero’s succession.\textsuperscript{1221} Moreover, the description of his last moments shows the emperor at his worst, associated with drunkenness, ignorance, vomiting and diarrhoea.\textsuperscript{1222} After all this, Claudius is even denied a formal obituary or reflection on his life and reign, such as Tacitus appends to the reigns of Tiberius, Galba, Otho and Vitellius.\textsuperscript{1223} It is not until after Nero’s succession that Tacitus inserts something of a retrospect; there, a few lines are devoted to him, but not even in Tacitus’ authorial voice, but in a eulogy pronounced by Nero and ridiculed by the audience (13.3.1).\textsuperscript{1224} Instead of looking back on Claudius’ reign, the last chapter of the Claudian \textit{Annals} looks forward towards later events: Claudius’ funeral and Agrippina’s emulation of Livia.\textsuperscript{1225} As such, Tacitus represents Claudius’ death as merely the last hurdle to be taken on the road towards Nero’s accession.\textsuperscript{1226}

3.2.4 THE TACITEAN PORTRAIT IN CONTEXT

An examination of the parallel sources on Claudius and his reign – Suetonius’ biography, Dio’s history and Seneca’s \textit{Apocolocyntosis} – shows that passivity is an important aspect of the emperor’s characterization in the (extant) literary tradition.\textsuperscript{1227} A closer comparison of Tacitus with the parallel accounts, however, suggests that this element is particularly prominent in the Tacitean narrative, which turns Claudius’ passivity into his defining characteristic. Dio’s representation resembles that of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1221} Hausmann 2009, 434-435.
\item \textsuperscript{1222} Keitel 1977, 212 on Claudius’ degrading end.
\item \textsuperscript{1223} Koestermann 1967 \textit{ad loc}; Seif 1973, 295-298; Hausmann 2009, 434-435. Obituaries of the other emperors in Tacitus’ historical works are stated in his authorial voice: Tiberius: \textit{Ann}. 6.51; Galba: \textit{Hist}. 1.49; Otho: \textit{Hist}. 2.50; Vitellius: \textit{Hist}. 3.86; even Augustus is given an evaluation at \textit{Ann}. 1.9-10, albeit through indefinite focalization.
\item \textsuperscript{1224} See Seif 1973, 295-298 for a discussion of that passage.
\item \textsuperscript{1225} Martin 1981, 160.
\item \textsuperscript{1226} Cf. Griffin 1990, 483.
\item \textsuperscript{1227} Syme 1958, 259-260; Martin 1981, 144 and 1990, 1579; Sage 1990, 987 with n.692; Hurley 2001, 14-17; Malloch \textit{ad} 11.1.3 on Claudius’ subordination and \textit{ad} 11.2.2 \textit{ignaro Caesare} on ignorance, with references to other authors such as Pliny and Aurelius Victor. On Claudius’ image in the literary tradition more in general, see Levick 1990, 187-197; Timpe 1994; Griffin 1994; Osgood 2011, 14-16, 191-193. Griffin 1990, 484 points out that some of the elements of the later literary tradition have their origin in contemporary perceptions of Claudius, as the letters quoted by Suetonius (\textit{Cl}. 4) show.
\end{itemize}
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Tacitus in his emphasis on the influence of his wives and freedmen on Claudius. Suetomius and Seneca, on the other hand, do not stress Claudius’ passivity as much as Tacitus, and accord Claudius more agency, especially in the context of the succession issue, as pointed out above. For instance, Tacitus and Suetonius report a similar anecdote in which Claudius asks why a woman had not come for dinner, apparently unaware of the fact that she had been put to death on the orders of those around him. Whereas Suetonius recounts the story to illustrate Claudius’ own absent-mindedness, Tacitus uses it to point out the abuse and wilful misinformation of the emperor by Messalina and her helpers. Furthermore, the parallel sources add other traits to their portrait of the emperor, which are not very marked in Tacitus’ depiction. Cruelty, for instance, is one of the main qualities of Claudius in Seneca’s satire, but is much less pervasive in the Tacitean narrative: many of the emperor’s cruel deeds – for instance the numerous executions summed up by Seneca – are attributed by Tacitus directly or indirectly to the freedmen and wives. Claudius’ physical impairments – e.g. his limping gait and speech defect – and his stupidity are likewise pronounced in Seneca and Suetonius, but mostly absent in Dio and Tacitus. That Claudius’ subordination to his wives and freedmen is hardly mentioned in the Apocolocyntosis is perhaps not surprising, considering the continued prominence of Agrippina and Pallas at the time Seneca wrote his sat-

1228 Dio 60.2.4–7, 60.8.4–6, 60.14.1–4, 60.15.5, 60.16.2, 60.17.5–10, 60.18.1–4, 60.19.2–3, 60.21.3–5, 60.27.4, 60.28.2–5, 60.29.3, 60.29.6–6a, 60.30.6b, 60.31.1–5, 60.31.8, 60.32–35 (an almost continuous narration of Agrippina’s influence over Claudius). See Levick 1990, 193–194 on the conflicting picture drawn up by Dio.
1229 Claudius’ weakness, subordination and ignorance is mentioned at Suet. Cl. 25.4, 28–29, 37, 39–40; Dio 60.2.4–6, 60.14.1, 60.18.2–3, 60.28.2, 60.29.3, 60.30.6b, 60.31.4–5, 60.31.8, 60.32.1–2, 60.33.1–3a; Sen. Apocol. 6.2, 11.1, 13.6, 15.2. Osgood 2011, 15 (referring to Momigliano 1961, 78) points out that Suetonius himself supplies evidence that contradicts Claudius’ complete subordination to others.
1230 11.2.2; Suet. Cl. 39.1. In Tacitus, Claudius asks Scipio why his wife Poppaea (recently driven to death by Messalina) had not accompanied him to dinner; in Suetonius, Claudius asks why his own wife Messalina (executed on his own orders: 26.2) does not join him.
1231 Seif 1973, 31–32.
1232 Claudius’ cruelty in the Apocolocyntosis: 5.4, 6.2, 8.1–2, 10.3–4, 11.1–5, 12.3, 13.4–6, 14.1–2; in Suetonius: Cl. 34; in Dio: 60.11.8, 60.13.1–4, 60.14.1–15.1, 61.15.4–16.1, 60.16.7, 60.29.2, 60.29.6a, 60.31.8, 60.33.4. Cf. Tac. Ann. 12.59.1 and Keitel 1977, 202.
1233 Mental and physical defects in Seneca: 1.1–2, 4.1, 5.2–3, 6.2, 7.3, 8.1–2, 11.3, 11.5, 14.2; on the implicit criticism conveyed on Claudius’ suitability as an emperor through repeated references to his defective voice, see Osgood 2007. In Suetonius: Cl. 2.9, 15.4, 38.3, Ner. 6.2, 33.1; in Dio: 60.2.1–2, 60.2.4. See Levick 1990, 13–15 on the historical Claudius’ disabilities.
Claudius’ physical defects and alleged stupidity are evidently material better suited to satire than to serious history. And for Suetonius, wanting to provide a complete character-sketch of the emperor in his biography, passivity is only one of Claudius’ many features. It is especially in Tacitus and Dio, then, that Claudius’ weakness, ignorance, passivity and subordination to his wives and freedmen constitute the emperor’s defining characteristic and a central thread in the narration of his political deeds.

There is an evident historical explanation for the image of Claudius dominated by his wives and freedmen in the literary tradition. The historical Claudius’ lack of political skill, experience and senatorial support at the moment of his accession necessitated an even greater reliance on skilled court administrators – his personal slaves and freedmen – than had been the case under previous emperors. At the same time, Claudius seems to have drawn parts of the imperial administration towards himself and his house, resulting in a certain measure of corruption, and to have preferred new men over senators of distinguished lineage. Moreover, the unexpectedness of his succession, his lack of Julian blood and his consequent need for dynastic legitimation gave rise to a more public prominence of his wives, especially Agrippina, who was probably wedded to Claudius to make up for this. The result was an increase in power and prominence of the imperial court. None of these developments were entirely unprecedented: the imperial household of family members, slaves and freedmen had been important since Augustus. Yet Claudius’ measures went beyond those of his predecessors, for instance in the rewards of honours and property to his freedmen, or Agrippina’s appearance on imperial coinage together with Claudius.

1234 Agrippina does not figure in the work, nor do Britannicus and Octavia. On the political setting and implications of the Apocolocyntosis: Horstkotte 1985; Nauta 1987; Leach 1989; Braund/James 1998; Osgood 2007, several of them drawing attention to the similarities in message with Seneca’s treatise De Clementia.
1235 Cf. Nauta 1987 on the function of the humour in the Apocolocyntosis.
1238 Osgood 2011, 193-205; Eck 1994 on the role of freedmen in the Claudian administration.
1239 Osgood 2011, 206-224.
er words, of those considered unworthy to wield political power: women and (ex) slaves – during Claudius’ reign, combined with decreasing senatorial power, will have provoked senatorial resentment and have contributed to the negative characterization of Claudius as a puppet in the hands of his corrupt wives and freedmen, a well-known theme in invective.  

This will have been further enhanced by the later bitterness over Nero’s government, for which Claudius could be considered indirectly responsible because of his adoption of Nero.  

Hindsight, in particular the knowledge of Nero’s later outrages, overshadows the appreciation of Claudius’ reign in the literary tradition, just as Tacitus makes the last Book of the Claudian narrative revolve entirely around Nero’s future succession. As argued above (section 3.1.2), however, Claudius did in fact make a deliberate choice in marrying Agrippina and advancing Nero, and arranged the imperial succession quite well.

In her study on the Claudian Annals, Keitel distinguishes three main themes which recur throughout the narrative, and which convey direct and indirect criticism of the emperor. These motifs provide a useful framework for Claudius’ characterization and his behaviour with regard to the question of the succession. The first and most obvious one is the ‘Saturnalia theme or the master/slave inversion within the royal household’: Claudius is consistently portrayed as obedient to his freedmen and his wives, classes of people that normally have an inferior position. 

Another aspect may be added, however: the reversal of gender roles at the court. While the emperor is the submissive – hence feminine – party, his wives assume the roles traditionally reserved to men and meddle in political and military business (see more in detail below, section 3.3.3). 

This inversion is thrown into greater relief by emphasizing Claudius’ conservatism, which would logically preclude such a distortion of traditional roles; in this respect, Tacitus’ representation is more

1242 Wiedemann 1989, 48; Osgood 2011, 191-193, 204, 223; cf. Griffin 1984, 87-89; Demougin 1994 on Claudius’ relations with the Empire’s upper classes.
1243 Cf. Momigliano 1961, 78-79: ‘The traditional conception ... was really a consequence of the hatred felt for Nero. Whatever else might be thought of Claudius, he could not be pardoned for allowing Agrippina and Pallas to have their way with him over the succession; and this attitude was reinforced by the loathing of every aristocrat and every middle-class Italian for freedman government.’; cf. Aubrion 1985, 267 on the absence of a positive literary tradition on Claudius.
1244 Keitel 1977, iii.
1245 On ‘active dominance’ as the ‘defining characteristic of masculinity’ in the Annals, see Späth 2012, 435-438.
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pointed than that of Suetonius and Dio.\textsuperscript{1246} The second theme proposed by Keitel is ‘the contrast between Claudius’ scholarly knowledge and his ignorance of political realities, most notably the dangerous machinations of his wives’.\textsuperscript{1247} Tacitus frequently (mockingly) comments upon the emperor’s antiquarian interests, while at the same time emphasizing his complete lack of insight in what is going on in the world around him, in particular at his own court.\textsuperscript{1248} The third theme is ‘the moral equivalence Tacitus constructs between Claudius and his wives’, and presumably his freedmen as well, resulting in the emperor being ‘judged to be no better morally than those whom he allows to rule in his name’.\textsuperscript{1249} As a result, even Claudius’ respectable public acts are disparaged because they are presented as the result of an unworthy private situation.\textsuperscript{1250} All in all, Claudius is portrayed throughout the \textit{Annals} as inactive, weak, submissive to inferior individuals and parties, ignorant, and morally depraved as a result of this. The censure inherent in this portrayal is clear: the leading man of the state, the father of the country and an example for all to imitate, is unaware of the political realities, incapable of independent action, and wholly overruled by those that should be obedient to him – not \textit{capax imperii} at all.

To summarize, compared to the other ancient sources, and to what we can reconstruct of the actual historical course of events, the Tacitean Claudius is portrayed as a much more ignorant, naïve and passive party in the matter which concerns him most – the transmission of his own power. Tacitus appears to deliberately minimize Claudius’ agency in the question by various means, from leaving out information that makes Claudius’ choices understandable and offering disreputable alternatives to the emperor’s motives, to the representation of arguments that convince

\textsuperscript{1246} Cf. Keitel 1977, 25: ‘In Tacitus, as in Suetonius and Dio, Claudius is shown under the influence of his household but is also held solely responsible for most of the acts of his reign. Tacitus uses the Saturnalia theme more effectively than Suetonius or Dio to undermine Claudius’ stance as a traditionalist. By the ironic collocation of Claudius’ conservative measures and antiquarian interests with the machinations of his wives and freedmen, Tacitus makes the emperor’s traditionalism seem foolish if not hypocritical. For how could a sincere conservative counsel such a sinister reversal of roles in his own household or in the government of the Empire?’

\textsuperscript{1247} Keitel 1977, iii.

\textsuperscript{1248} Keitel 1977, 23-24; cf. Seif 1973, 297; Levick 1978 for a more positive interpretation of Claudius’ antiquarian interersts. Claudius is openly mocked at various points; see e.g. Keitel 1977, 151, 161-162, 177-178 and 186.

\textsuperscript{1249} Keitel 1977, iii, 133.

\textsuperscript{1250} Keitel 1977, 25-26.
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him as clearly deceitful, the use of grammatically passive constructions, or even the complete omission of Claudian involvement. This impression of imperial passivity is reinforced by Tacitus’ general characterization of the emperor in the rest of his narrative: ‘Claudius Caesar lacks shape and colour, decision and movement’.1251 His portrayal of the emperor as passive in the crucial matter of the transmission of his power conveys an indirect, but very harsh judgment on Claudius’ capacity to rule.1252 Moreover, Tacitus implies that Nero’s calamitous reign was a direct consequence of Claudius’ inability or unwillingness to actively involve himself in the matter and to prevent Agrippina’s promotion of her son. As such, Claudius’ ignorance, inactivity and submission to his wives and freedmen come to have much more far-reaching implications: it is no longer a purely private matter, but has severe consequences for the state as well, and prefigures the climax of disaster that would be the reign of Nero.

1251  Syme 1958, 314.
1252  Vessey 1971, 408 rightly notes the ‘mordant sarcasm and cruel irony that pervade the narrative’.
3.3 Agrippina’s scheming

The previous section argued that Tacitus deliberately minimizes Claudius’ agency in the question of the succession. Instead, many of the actions in this struggle are ascribed to Agrippina and her helpers, whose agency, as this section will suggest, is emphasized up to the point of dominating most of the narrative of Book 12. This section investigates, first, Agrippina’s general characterization, then her methods in directing the course of the succession, and finally the issue of gender roles and literary (stereo)types in this.

3.3.1 AGRIPPINA’S CHARACTERIZATION IN THE ANNALS

In the Annals, Agrippina the Younger, in contrast to her predecessor Messalina, is portrayed as politically ambitious, openly greedy for power and wealth, proud, cunning and ruthless.\(^\text{1253}\) This starts immediately after her selection by Claudius, when she is said to ‘enjoy wifely power’ (12.3.1: *potentia uxoria iam uteretur*) – a rare and paradoxical combination, which highlights everything that is wrong with the Tacitean Agrippina. Not only is this power illegitimate – the term *potentia* denoting effective power in contrast with the official magisterial *potestas* – it is also wielded by a woman, a class of people which is not supposed to have any political influence. Agrippina’s power-hungry disposition is brought to the fore most clearly and explicitly after the official announcement of her engagement to Claudius, the moment when her position seems firmly entrenched: ‘it was as a result of this

\(^{1253}\) See Ginsburg 2006, 9-54 for a good discussion of Agrippina’s portrayal in the literary tradition.
that the community was overturned, and there was universal obedience to a female who did not, like Messalina, sport with Roman affairs through recklessness: it was a tightly controlled and (so to speak) manlike servitude. Openly there was severity, and more often haughtiness; there was no domestic immorality unless it availed domination. An inordinate desire for gold had as its screen that a bulwark was being prepared for the kingdom.\footnote{1254} Agrippina exhibits a desire for total domination \textit{(cuncta feminae oboediebant, adductum servitium, dominationi, regnum)}, severity \textit{(severitas)}, pride \textit{(superbia)} and greed \textit{(cupido auri)}; she accomplishes these goals through planning and strategy \textit{(non per lasciviam)}, dissimulation \textit{(obtentum, quasi)}, and sex \textit{(nihil domi impudicum, nisi dominationi expediret)}. This first character sketch of the new empress hardly bodes well for Claudius; but his marriage also has devastating consequences for the state \textit{(versa ex eo civitas)}, given the earlier statement that the emperor was \textit{coniugum imperii obnoxio} – the Empire will effectively be ruled under the \textit{imperium} of Agrippina.\footnote{1255}

The elements highlighted in this initial portrayal, in particular Agrippina’s desire for power both for her son and for herself, recur throughout the narrative. Her \textit{ambitus} is mentioned in 12.1.1 and 12.59.2, and her power hunger is referred to again in connection with her recruitment of Seneca to aid her in her \textit{spes dominationis} \footnote{1256} (12.8.2). She removes two women she perceives as rivals for Claudius’ affection – and as such, as competitors for her influence \footnote{1257} (12.22.1-3). After Claudius’ adoption of Nero, she is publicly honoured with the title of Augusta (12.26.1), and then wants to show her influence \footnote{1258} (the strong \textit{vis sua}) to Rome’s allies as well, and secures the institution of a veteran colony in her birthplace Cologne (12.27.1). Agrippina presents herself as \textit{socia imperii} during the public surrender and parading of the captured British commander Caratacus, claiming a share in the power her ancestors had won by, like Claudius, being seated on a platform and receiving the Britons’ praise and gratitude.\footnote{1259} After Nero’s assumption of the \textit{toga virilis}, Tacitus describes

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{1254} 12.7.3: \textit{versa ex eo civitas, et cuncta feminae oboediebant, non per lasciviam, ut Messalina, rebus Romanis inludenti. adductum et quasi virile servitium: palam severitas ac saepius superbia; nihil domi impudicum, nisi dominationi expediret. cupido auri immensa obtentum habebat, quasi subsidium regno pararetur.}
\item \footnote{1255} 12.1.1; cf. Seif 1973, 181. As Vessey (1971, 403) observes, ‘the words are remorselessly hammered home: \textit{superbia, servitium, dominatio, regnum}’.
\item \footnote{1256} As Ginsburg 2006, 26 notes, ‘\textit{quaque} here implies that Agrippina had already accomplished her aim of making a public display of her power at Rome’.
\item \footnote{1257} 12.37.4: \textit{ipsa semet parti a maioribus suis imperii sociam ferebat; semet indicates that this is about her own position. The term \textit{socia imperii} evokes other Tacitean characters designated similarly, such as Mucianus}}
how Agrippina further enhances her own high position (fastigium) by mounting the Capitol in a carpentum, a privilege previously restricted to priests and sacred objects.\footnote{347} Agrippina accompanies Claudius to the spectacle at the Fucine Lake wearing a chlamys, the Greek counterpart of Claudius’ own military cape, thereby visibly becoming his equal.\footnote{348} In a wrangle during that occasion, Narcissus accuses her of impotentiam muliebrem nimiasque spes (12.57.2). She competes with Nero’s aunt Domitia Lepida over control over Nero and is said to be unable to tolerate his command.\footnote{349} And finally, Narcissus again charges her with a desire for power (regnum) and for sacrificing everything (her decus, pudor and corpus) to obtain it.\footnote{350} In trying to maintain her position of influence during Nero’s reign, Agrippina displays ferocia (13.2.2, 13.21.2), a trait which Traub explains as ‘outspokenness and defiant behavior towards the emperor’ or ‘a rebellious and defiant nature aspiring to be more than a citizen’.\footnote{351} This desire for political and military power conflicts with the traditional behaviour expected of Roman women, and Agrippina’s portrayal as a dux femina is part of a broader pattern of gender reversal in the Claudian Annals (see below, section 3.3.3).

Agrippina’s superbia, in particular with regard to her ancestry, is also referred to several other times. During the presentation of Caratacus, Tacitus states that she ipsa semet parti a maioribus suis imperii sociam ferebat (12.37.4); this is surely Agrippina’s train of thought, deeming that she had a claim to a share in the power which had been won by her ancestors. Her imperial ancestry is picked up in an authorial comment some chapters later, where Tacitus already looks forward to Nero’s future reign, and with authorial hindsight, he describes Agrippina as a woman (Hist. 2.83.1), Drusus the Younger (3.56.4: laboris particeps) and Sejanus (4.2.3: socius laborum), thus aligning Agrippina with these powerful men. As Levick 1990, 46-47 notes, ‘Phrases of that non-committal type were invaluable at the court of a monarch where immense power was wielded by persons disqualified for office.’

1258 12.42.2: suum quoque fastigium Agrippina extollere altius, etc.; Seif 1973, 207 notes the emphatic placement of suum: like semet before, this indicates that these measures concern her own, rather than Nero’s status. Dio 60.33.2.1 also records Agrippina’s grant of using the carpentum, like Messalina’s before her (60.22.2; also in Suet. Cl. 17.3); note that Tacitus, by contrast, does not mention that the honour was granted to her by the Senate, and that both Livia and Messalina had enjoyed the same privilege, but suggests that it was her own initiative and unique; cf. Hausmann 2009, 368.


1260 12.64.3, with the pithy statement Agrippina, quae filio dare imperium, tolerare imperitantem nequibat.

1261 12.65.2. Also in the Neronian Books, Agrippina is said to have used sex to gain power: 14.2.1 (on the authority of Cluvius Rufus) and 14.2.2 (Tacitus himself).

1262 Traub 1953, 250, 259.
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quam imperatore (Germanicus) genitam, sororem eius (Caligula) qui rerum potitus sit et coniugem (Claudius) et matrem (Nero) fuisse, unicum ad hunc diem exemplum (12.42.2). Although this remark is made by Tacitus, it implies that Agrippina took particular pride in her lofty ancestry, or at least that she was renowned for her illustrious relatives. Some chapters later, she is represented as rivalling with Lepida not just for command over Nero, but also over their respective claritudo (12.64.2) – both could claim a link to Augustus – suggesting both Agrippina’s concern for her ancestry and, presumably, the authority and status this was seen to confer.

In 12.7.3, Tacitus states that Agrippina covered up her greed by pretending she was collecting money for the good of the reign. A similar impression is conveyed in Book 13, where he writes that Agrippina, after Nero’s murder of Britannicus, was ‘snatching, over and above her inborn greed, money from everywhere as if for support’ (13.18.2). Notably, Dio also recounts her amassing of wealth, but explicitly states that she did this for her son.\(^\text{1263}\) Indeed, after Nero’s succession, Tacitus reports a dispute between Agrippina and Nero about the ownership of certain imperial possessions: Nero sends his mother some valuable garments as a present, but Agrippina is enraged because she regards these properties as her own – or if Nero’s at least derived from herself (13.13.4). Tacitus, then, appears to focus on Agrippina’s own greed, not her acquisition of property for her son’s sake. This impression is heightened by his report of Agrippina’s desire for the gardens of Statilius Taurus (12.59.1). Other words and features occurring with regard to Agrippina are minax, atrox, infensa, ferox, ira and her being a noverca.\(^\text{1264}\)

In 12.7.3, Agrippina’s position of power – cuncta feminae oboediebant – is indirectly compared to that of the freedman Narcissus during his quest against Messalina, through the verbal echo omni liberto oboediebant.\(^\text{1265}\) Narcissus’ influence, however, was connected to that single episode, and will quickly wither at the beginning of the next Book; for Agrippina, on the other hand, this position of power is merely the point of departure for her further plans.\(^\text{1266}\) The Tacitean Agrippina is also repeatedly compared and contrasted with her predecessor as empress, Tacitus’ Messalina. Ostensibly, they are very different, as the explicit contrast between the two

\(^{1263}\) Dio 60.32.3.

\(^{1264}\) Minax: 12.42.3, 12.64.3 (also 13.14.2 and 13.15.3); atrox: 12.22.1 (also 13.13.3), infensa: 12.22.1 (also in 13.19.4); ferox: only in Book 13 (13.2.2, 13.21.2); ira: 12.2.3; noverca: 12.26.2, 12.41.3, 12.65.2.

\(^{1265}\) 11.35.1; Malloch 2013 \textit{ad loc}.

\(^{1266}\) Mehl 1974, 82 n.475.
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women’s influence on the state in 12.7.3 suggests: while Messalina only meddled in public affairs from time to time, Agrippina wants control over everything (cuncta); Messalina plays around (lascivia, inludere) with the state, but Agrippina schemes carefully and controls tightly (adductum servitium, severitas); Messalina is only after sexual pleasure, while Agrippina uses her body to acquire power.\textsuperscript{1267} In describing Messalina’s affair with Silius, Tacitus uses the vocabulary of lust and (crazed) passion – even though the adultery clearly had political implications.\textsuperscript{1268} Nevertheless, as much as Tacitus enhances the contrast between those women by consistently associating Messalina with female sexuality rather than male dominance, and Agrippina with the vocabulary of power, the two women do exhibit some similarities, perhaps partly arising from the fact that Claudius’ character attracts similar wives.\textsuperscript{1269} Several verbal echoes connect the two Tacitean empresses, and their methods are comparable as well.\textsuperscript{1270}

The Tacitean Agrippina the Younger is furthermore reminiscent of her mother Agrippina the Elder, as depicted in the Tiberian hexad.\textsuperscript{1271} Both women are characterized as ambitious and desirous for power and domination, and participate in political and military matters. The Elder’s description as aequi impatiens, dominandi avida, virilibus curis feminarum vitia exuerat (6.25.2) very much recalls her daughter’s quasi virile servitium (12.7.3), her spes dominationis (12.8.2) and her intolerance of rivals in power, be they other women, her husband, or her own son.\textsuperscript{1272} The Younger Agrippina, however, takes this desire for power much further than her mother, even murdering her own husband for its sake. Both women are, further-

\textsuperscript{1267} Cf. Koestermann 1967 ad 12.7.3.
\textsuperscript{1268} E.g. 11.12.1: novo et furori proximo amore et exaserat; 11.26.1 libidines; 11.26.3: voluptas; 11.27.1: licentia coniugali; 11.34.2: libidinum; 11.36.3: cupidinem; 11.37.3: animo per libidines corrupto. On the motives of Messalina and Silius and the political implications of the affair, as well as its representation in the literary sources, see Joshel 1997; Fagan 2002; Nappa 2010; Malloch 2013, 392-398.
\textsuperscript{1269} Keitel 1977, 25; cf. 203: ‘Both contrive to murder for gain, and both draw up false charges to bring it about. Both are clever at manipulating Claudius.’ See Fagan 2002 on the political implications of Messalina’s affair with Silius.
\textsuperscript{1270} Mehl 1974, 51 n.263; Keitel 1977, 137-140, 160-161 and 214 on verbal reminiscences indicating similarities and contrasts; Foubert 2010b, 355-361. Cf. Keitel 1977, 47: ‘each reference to Agrippina in Book 11 shows how she will take Messalina’s place later, both as wife and sensualist (11.25.8) and as plotter after power. Thus, the opposition of the two women paired as predator and prey [in 11.12.1] is superficial and ironic.’
\textsuperscript{1271} Cf. Foubert 2010b, 355-357, 361-362.
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more, described as *ferox*, *atrox* and displaying *ira*. Yet the Younger Agrippina turns these hostile qualities to the destruction of others. Both take great pride in their (Augustan) ancestry and seek to obtain popularity with the people. Mother and daughter are praised for their fecundity, but while the former’s fertility ‘merely’ produces Caligula, the latter’s generates Nero, an even greater disaster for the state. Both are associated with some kind of unique quality: the Elder Agrippina is described as *solum Augusti sanguinem*, *unicum antiquitatis specimen* (3.4.2), while the Younger is the *unicum exemplum* of someone who was mother, sister, daughter and wife of an *imperator* (12.42.2). The mother was depicted as *paulo commotior*, but this flaw was balanced by her *castitas* and *mariti amor* (1.33.3), but this is exactly where her daughter fails to live up to her example. The marital *concordia* between the Elder Agrippina and Germanicus is perverted into incest, manipulation and murder by her daughter. And whereas her mother’s *pudicitia* was *praecella* (1.41.2) and *impenetrabilis* (4.12.2), the Younger Agrippina exploits her body to gain power (12.7.3, 12.65.3). In his depiction of the Younger Agrippina, then, Tacitus employs verbal and thematic similarities to evoke the image of her mother and to invite comparisons between the two. The daughter, however, far from inheriting or learning good qualities by maternal example, exaggerates and perverts many of the features still reasonably tolerable in her mother.

3.3.2 AGRIPPINA’S ROLE IN THE SUCCESSION

As stated before, the narrative of Book 12 can be seen as a sequence of actions of

1273  *Ferox*: 2.72.1, 13.2.2, 13.21.2; *atrox*: 4.52.2, 12.22.1, 13.13.3; *ira*: 4.53.1, 12.22.3.
1274  Pride: 1.41.3, 4.52.3, 4.12.3, 12.7.3, 12.37.4, 12.42.2; seeking popularity: 1.41.2, 1.69.3-4, 4.12.3, 12.41.2.
1275  1.41.2, 2.43.6, 12.2.3, 12.6.1. It seems remarkable that the Younger Agrippina is associated with fecundity, as this more readily applies to her mother, who had borne nine children, not with the single son of her daughter; the Domitii seem to have had a tradition of single children to preserve their patrimony: Griffin 1984, 21. This suggests that Tacitus only uses this term for the Younger Agrippina to evoke the image of her mother, and indirectly compare her to the latter. Plin. *HN* 7.46 preserves the anecdote, found in the memoirs of the Younger Agrippina, about Nero being born feet first.
1276  Andrew Stiles (in a personal communication) raises the interesting question whether Agrippina the Younger may be considered to embody the kind of woman Tacitus imagined Agrippina the Elder might have become, had her husband Germanicus actually acquired imperial power – a thought-provoking idea, considering Tacitus’ tendency to play with counterfactuals.
Agrippina leading to Nero’s accession. Likewise, Dio’s entire account of Claudius’ reign after his marriage to Agrippina is dominated by (episodes illustrating) her influence. Suetonius’ life of Claudius does not accord a particularly large role to the empress, and his biography of Nero does not pay much attention to her efforts with regard to her son’s succession; and she does not figure at all in the Apocolocyntosis (nor do Octavia and Britannicus); this must be due to her continuing prominence under Nero. In Tacitus’ work, however, Agrippina’s character, aims and methods receive abundant attention. In the struggle for the succession, she is depicted as acting swiftly, cool-headedly, decisively, purposefully and with foresight and self-awareness. Moreover, in addition to securing imperial power for Nero, Agrippina is also represented as trying to advance her own position by enhancing her status and influence, both domestic and public.

**Agrippina’s artes**

With regard to Nero, Agrippina is represented as striving for two interrelated goals. Her main aim, of course, is securing Nero’s succession to Claudius, which she does by isolating Britannicus on the one hand, and getting Nero more and more closely connected to Claudius – first as his stepson, then as his son-in-law, finally as his adopted son – on the other, and, finally, by murdering Claudius to speed up the succession for Nero. Her secondary objective is to prepare Nero for his future succession, by providing him with a proper education under the guidance of Seneca (12.8.2), accelerating his entry into manhood (12.41.1), having him honoured with offices and the title of *princeps iuventutis* (12.41.1), enhancing his popularity with the military and the people (12.41.2), and with the Senate and several provincial communities (12.58.1-2). Agrippina accomplishes these goals in various ways: through manipulation of the important parties (Claudius, the army, the people and the Senate), legal prosecution, outright crime, dissimulation, careful planning, and the help of supporters at crucial posts in society: influential freedmen, senators and military officials. Her *artes* are described at several points in the narrative, never in a positive light; they are associated with such words as *moliri* (12.42.1), *struere* (12.3.2), *insidiae* (12.4.3), *potentia uxoria* (12.3.1) and *scelus* (12.3.2).

One of her main weapons is sex, as becomes clear immediately at the beginning of Book 12. To persuade Claudius to marry her, she uses ’her allurements: by going
to him very frequently under the guise of their relationship, she lured her uncle with the result that she was preferred to the others'.

The words *inlecebrae* and *pellicio* evoke connotations with seduction, but also with false flattery and entrapment, while the incestuous nature of their relationship is emphasized by Claudius’ designation as her *patruus*. Even before their engagement is publicly announced, their relationship is already being consummated: *matrimonium ... iam amore inlicitum firmabatur* (12.5.1). Indeed, in the chapter preceding their actual wedding, Tacitus aptly summarizes her use of her body: *nihil domi impudicum, nisi dominationi expediret* (12.7.3). In contrast to Messalina, who pursued sex for the sake of her lust, Agrippina uses it as a weapon in her political battles. She commits adultery with Pallas to secure his loyalty towards her (12.25.1: *mox stupro eius inligatus*), and is said to have tried to win over Nero by proposing incest after he has become annoyed with her (13.13.2 and 14.2.1-2). The absence of any marital love on her part is clearly pointed out in the episode of Seneca’s recall from exile at the instigation of Agrippina, which shows her conspiring against her husband: she hopes to profit from Seneca’s enmity towards Claudius for his banishment – and consequently, from his gratitude towards herself for his remission – to further Nero’s chances on imperial power (12.8.2). Finally, the true nature of her conjugal devotion shows itself in the carefully planned – *sceletis olim certa et oblatae occasionis propera* (12.66.1) – murder of her husband in 12.66-67.

Deception or dissimulation is another of the tools with which Agrippina achieves her aims: she repeatedly cloaks her private aims by pretending concern for the state (12.25.1, 12.41.3, 12.42.1, 12.68.1), exhibits inopportune (*intempestivus*) and pretended (*falsi*) dutifulness towards her stepson Britannicus (12.26.2), has Vitellius trump up an accusation of incest against Silanus (12.4.2), lures her uncle into marrying her under the guise of their kinship relation (12.3.1: *per speciem necessitudinis ... pellicit*), fabrics charges and distorts the truth to persuade Claudius to remove Britannicus’ tutors and supporters (12.41.2-3: *remoti fictis causis, per speciem honoris, quasi criminibus*), issues false bulletins about Claudius’ health when she

1278 12.3.1: *adiuta Agrippinae inlecebris: ad eum per speciem necessitudinis crebro ventitando pellicit patruum ut praetela ceteris.*

1279 Suet. Cl. 26.3 uses a very similar formulation (*inlecebris Agrippinae, Germanici fratris sui filiae, per ius osculi et blanditiarum occasiones pellectus in amorem*), which may imply that these terms were used in a common source.

1280 In 14.2.2, Tacitus further adds that she had committed illicit sex with Lepidus *spe dominationis.*
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has already killed him (12.68.3), and feigns grief to keep Claudius’ children from leaving the bedroom and discover the true state of their father (12.58.2). She also bribes people to gain their support, as in the case of Mammius Pollio, who is induced by *ingentia promissa* to propose a motion asking Claudius to betroth Octavia to Nero (12.9.1).

Agrippina is shown manipulating all the important parties in society: the emperor, the Senate, the army and the people. She knows Claudius’ weaknesses and takes advantage of them to establish increasing control over her husband. Playing on his lust, she employs charms to get him to marry her (12.3.1); knowing his affection for his children, she has Vitellius come up with a charge against the fiancé of his daughter, to which Claudius lends his ears *promptior caritate filiae* (12.4.2); she has Pallas appeal to his concern for the state to convince him of the adoption (12.25.1-2); she capitalizes on Claudius’ fearful disposition in presaging public ruin unless Britannicus’ tutors are eliminated (12.41.3); and she uses strategic reasoning to make him transfer the command of the Praetorian Guard to one of her own supporters (12.42.1). Within the stretch of the narrative, she goes from using *inlecebrae* (12.3.1), emotional appeals (12.4.2), and *questus* in complaining about Britannicus’ greeting (12.41.3), to reasoning (12.42.1: *adseverante*), until finally she is powerful enough to abandon the pretense of affection, and turns to *minae* rather than pleas (*preces*) in freeing Vitellius from charges (12.42.3): her domination over Claudius is complete.

As has been touched upon in the previous sections, Agrippina is repeatedly credited with actions that might in reality have been performed by others – or are at least indicated as such by other ancient sources. It is Agrippina, rather than other persons, who seduces Claudius, eliminates Silanus, complains to Claudius about Britannicus disregarding Nero’s adoption, and is opposed by Narcissus; and she decides to murder Claudius out of concern for her own position rather than that of Nero. In comparison with the other sources, then, her agency is magnified by Tacitus. This is particularly clear in the episode of Claudius’ death and Nero’s succession, where Tacitus pays much more attention than Suetonius and Dio to Agrippina’s machinations and elaborates the episode more. He describes her deliberations with regard to the choice of poison, her delaying tactics once the emperor

1281 On the roles of these groups, see the next section 3.4.
1282 Cf. Osgood 2011, 227-228 on the historical accuracy of the Tacitean picture.
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is dead, and her careful orchestration of Nero’s emergence from the palace; Suetonius and Dio provide far fewer details about this, but focus on Claudius’ reaction to the poison, and on his death.\footnote{Suet. Cl. 44–45; Dio 60.35.2.} Moreover, as is well-known, Tacitus endows this episode with some striking thematic and verbal resemblances to his narration of the death of Augustus, the succession of Tiberius and the role played in this by Livia \footnote{1.5.3–4, with 13.1.1 and 1.6.1 on the first murders of the new reign. These similarities have been discussed by many scholars, see e.g. Charlesworth 1927; Martin 1955; Goodyear 1972 ad loc. (with many references). As Mehl 1974, 174 remarks, Dio, too, likens the deaths of the two emperors and the actions of their wives in his description of these episodes.} These are mostly significant for what it suggests about Tiberius’ accession and Livia’s possible involvement in the death of her husband, rather than the other way around.\footnote{As Martin suggests, the Tiberius-episode has been modelled on the present one with regard to content/facts, while the Claudius-episode borrows the language from the Tiberius one (Martin 1955, 124).} Nevertheless, these similarities evoke an indirect comparison between Agrippina and Livia, which is strengthened by their explicit association at 12.69.3, where Tacitus relates that Claudius’ funeral was celebrated in the manner of Augustus, ‘with Agrippina rivaling the magnificence of her great-grandmother Livia’. Also at other points in the narrative, Agrippina is indirectly likened to Livia, for instance by being depicted as a scheming noverca, through her overbearing influence on her son, or by reminding him of the gift of Empire she had given him.\footnote{Agrippina as noverca: 12.26.2, 12.41.3, 12.65.2; Livia as noverca: 1.3.3, 1.6.3, 1.10.5, 1.33.3. Agrippina reminding Nero of her role in securing his succession: 1.13.4, 1.14.2; Livia: 4.57.3.} As a result, Tacitus’ account of the murder of Claudius and the succession of Nero accords Agrippina a more active and loaded role than Suetonius and Dio give her.

\textit{Use of supporters}

Often, Agrippina’s influence on the course of events is not mentioned explicitly, but is revealed only at the end of a chapter, or has to be inferred.\footnote{E.g. in 12.9, 12.41 and 12.58, where her name is only mentioned at the very end, or in the next chapter.}Tacitus repeatedly employs an undefined third person plural, or an impersonal or passive form, to describe actions that are, in the end, attributable to the empress.\footnote{E.g. 12.3.2: videbatur; 12.8.2: credebatur; 12.9.1: placitum and inducunt; 12.41.1: toga maturata; 12.42.2: edebatur.} Perhaps this reflects the extent to which her work takes place ‘behind the scenes’ of public busi-
ness and within the secrecy of the imperial household. Indeed, when her sex prevents her from independent action – for instance in senatorial business, imperial consilia or legal accusations – Agrippina uses several male supporters to promote her interests. These supporters occupy important positions and as such are able to influence various groups: Pallas is one of the most influential freedmen at the imperial court, the senator Vitellius had held the consulship three times and had been censor with Claudius, Burrus is installed as sole Praetorian Prefect, and Seneca is both a well-known literary figure and the teacher of Nero. Agrippina binds these men to herself in various ways: Pallas through sex, Burrus through his promotion to Praetorian Prefect, Seneca by effecting his recall from exile and the resumption of his political career with a praetorship, Vitellius through the influence he gains as her principal supporter.

She even actually controls some of them: Pallas is ‘bound’ and ‘entangled’ to her (12.25.1), while Vitellius is said to offer his ‘slavish deceptions’ to her service (12.4.1). Their loyalty to Agrippina is so emphatically stated that it is unambiguous that they are acting on her behalf, even if they are, strictly speaking, the actors in the episode. Only at the very end of the Claudian narrative does her practice change: when murdering Claudius and preparing Nero’s succession, Agrippina is the main actor, assisted by a different group of helpers, showing the extent of her power at the court: Claudius’ private physician and taster, and a poisoner described as ‘long considered one of the instruments of the king-

1289 See Keitel 1977, 163-165.
1290 Pallas urges her claims in the emperor’s council (12.1-2), Vitellius prosecutes L. Silanus to ingratiate himself with Agrippina (12.4.1) and secures senatorial and popular goodwill towards her marriage to the emperor (12.5-7), consul designate Mammius Pollio introduces a motion about Nero’s engagement to Octavia in the Senate (12.9.1-2), ‘those who, for having accused Messalina, feared vengeance from her son’ help achieve the engagement (12.9.2), she has an unnamed accuser charge Lollia Paulina (12.22.1), Pallas persuades Claudius to adopt Nero (12.25.1-2), someone has the Senate propose honours on the occasion of Nero’s assumption of the toga virilis (12.41.1), Tarquitius Priscus accuses Statilius Taurus because Agrippina has her eye on his gardens (12.59.1-2), an accuser must have charged Domitia Lepida (12.64.2-65.1), Agrippina employs the help of several servants and of Claudius’ doctor Xenophon to murder Claudius (12.66.1-67.2) and Burrus escorts Nero to the Praetorian camp to secure his acclamation as emperor (12.69.1-2).
1291 12.8.2 (Seneca), 12.25.1 (Pallas), 12.42.1 (Burrus; cf. Dio 60.32.6a, who also mentions the removal of the old prefects on Agrippina’s orders, but does not report that they were replaced with Burrus; Tacitus, by contrast, makes Burrus the focus); 12.4.1 and 12.42.3 (Vitellius).
1292 Note that Tacitus employs the words artes and obtego for both Agrippina (12.7.3, 12.59.1, 12.68.2) and Vitellius (12.4.1, 12.5.2), indicating the extent to which Vitellius functions as a continuation of Agrippina; cf. Mehl 1974, 114.
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dom’ (12.66.2). Burrus only comes in at the end, directing his troops. The Claudian Annals end fittingly, with the focus on the character which had controlled most of the last Book: Agrippina.

These men’s support of Agrippina (and Nero) is, in some cases, based purely on self-interest. Whereas Seneca and Burrus were elevated by Agrippina at her own instigation to obtain their loyalty, Vitellius actively seeks to ingratiate himself, and in particular the freedmen are portrayed as striving to enhance their own position. For instance, at 11.28.1, after the wedding of Messalina and Silius, Tacitus states that the domus principis inhorruerat, and that ‘in particular those with whom power lay – and upon whom, if things should change, alarm would descend’ start to openly express their worries about the consequences. The ‘shuddering’ of the domus principis seems to be due not so much to the audacity of Messalina’s action, or to the fatal consequences it will have for Claudius, but to the potential threats it might pose to the freedmen’s status. Fear for their own position is, indeed, their motivation to put a halt to Messalina’s plans – not concern about Claudius’ fate. Dio, on the other hand, states that the freedmen turned against Messalina after she had contrived the death of Polybius, a fellow freedman – a less self-interested motive. But Tacitus associates the freedmen firmly with power – potentia (11.28.1 and 11.29.2) and flagrantissima gratia (11.29.1) – and with selfishness. Through the phrase domus principis inhorruerat, this passage is linked to the first chapters of Book 12, where the same three liberti compete with each other in selecting a new spouse for Claudius and thus in enhancing their own influence. The chapter starts with caede Messalinae convulsa principis domus, orto apud libertos certamine, quis deligeret uxorem Claudio (12.1.1). Again, the personified imperial household is shaken, and again, this is mainly caused by the freedmen’s concern for their own status and the rivalry arising from that, and not so much by the impact or horror of the execution of the empress itself.

This passage also indicates an important difference between Tacitus’ representation of the freedmen and that of the other sources. Suetonius mentions several freedmen of Claudius’ and does not concentrate on these three liberti. Dio does name Pallas, Callistus and Narcissus as the main actors, but in his account, the three

1293  Dio 60.31.2.
1296  Suet. Cl. 28; he does not mention Callistus.
freedmen act in concord, for instance in bringing about the engagements of Agrippina and Nero. Tacitus, by contrast, depicts them as acting individually and even competing with each other, and as enduring different fates. It is Narcissus who finally initiates and brings about the elimination of Messalina; Pallas withdraws from participating out of cowardice, Callistus out of self-centred prudence (11.29.2). They vie with each other in selecting a new wife for Claudius, each supporting their own candidate (12.1-2). Callistus is never heard of again, but while Pallas ‘wins’ the bridal competition and continues to function as one of Agrippina’s main helpers (e.g. in 12.25), Narcissus turns against the empress (12.57.2 and 12.65). Pallas’ individual influence is signalled twice, in 12.29.1 (flagrantissimaque eo in tempore gratia Pallas) and in the honours bestowed on him at 12.53. Narcissus is driven to suicide by Agrippina against Nero’s will in 13.1.3, and Nero fires Pallas from his function as a rationibus to deprive his mother of support in 13.14.1. The imperial freedmen, then, appear as opportunistic, shrewd and quarrelsome courtiers who dominate their master Claudius. Tacitus’ emphasis on their self-centredness, internal rivalry and control over the emperor conveys overt critique, not just on the freedmen themselves, but also on Claudius for allowing his former slaves such supreme influence.

Agrippina’s desire for power is easily fulfilled under Claudius; during the reign of her son Nero, however, her influence increasingly becomes a problem, and the complex and progressively strained relationship between mother and son is indeed one of the main themes of Books 12 to 14. Throughout the narrative, Agrippina is first and foremost depicted as Nero’s mother, even if her primary role in Book 12 – indeed, the position she owes her influence to – may be expected to be that of wife of the emperor. Nero would not have been a candidate for the throne had she not married Claudius, and her efforts with regard to Nero’s succession are explicitly mentioned several times. In addition to procuring imperial power for her son,

1297 Dio 60.30.6b mentions the three men, stating ‘there were three of the latter in particular who divided the power among themselves’; in 60.31.2, 60.31.8 and 60.32.2 they are represented as acting together; in 60.33.3a he mentions Agrippina’s collaboration with Pallas and Narcissus (after Callistus’ death).
1298 This is very reminiscent of Galba’s subordination to his three main advisers in the Histories; see Chapter 1 passim.
1299 E.g. 12.9.2: studii matris; 12.64.3: filio dare imperium; 13.13.4: quae cuncta ex ipsa haberet; 13.14.2: per
however, she also seeks to establish sole dominance over him. In this respect, it is significant that Tacitus inserts the episode of the elimination of Domitia Lepida immediately before that of Claudius’ murder. In fact, he states that Agrippina decides to carry out her long-held plans against her husband, but that she first (prius) removed Lepida. Several commentators interpret Tacitus’ deliberate insertion of this passage right before Claudius’ death as a last occasion for the historian to show Agrippina’s ruthlessness. While this is certainly true, I would argue that there is more to it: it is an attempt on the part of Agrippina to establish exclusive control over her son before murdering Claudius and realizing Nero’s succession.

Initially, Tacitus states that she attacks Lepida because of ‘womanly reasons, because Lepida ... believed her brilliancy equal to Agrippina’s own’. This impression is supported by his depiction of her as matching Agrippina in beauty, age, wealth, immorality, infamy and violence; ‘rivals no less in vices than in the advantages which they had received from fortune’. The real reason for their competition (enimvero), however, is pointed out several sentences later: the women vied with each other for influence with Nero. Lepida, daughter of the Elder Antonia and as such sister to Agrippina’s late husband Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus as well as aunt to Nero, was the mother of Claudius’ previous wife Messalina, and had taken care of her nephew Nero when Agrippina was in exile. Now both mother and aunt compete about who will hold sway over the boy. Lepida approaches Nero with blandishments and generosity, while Agrippina is frightening and threatening, ‘able to give command to her son but not to endure his commanding’.

\[\text{iniurias matris.}\]


\[1301\] We may suppose that with claritudo, Tacitus refers to her ancestry, which he describes in detail: 12.64.2: perdita prius Domitia Lepida muliebribus causis, qua\(<><\)a Lepida, minore Antonia genita, avunculo Augusto, Agrippinae sobrina pr\(<><\)or ac Gnaei mariti eius soror, parem sibi claritudinem credebat.

\[1302\] 12.64.3. Cf. Mehl 1974, 163.

\[1303\] 12.64.2-3: enimvero certamen acerrimum, amita potius an mater apud Neronem praevaleret.

\[1304\] For Domitia Lepida – not to be confused with her sister Domitia, also a rival of Agrippina’s (cf. 13.19.4) and allegedly murdered by Nero for her wealth (Suet. Ner. 34.5) – see PIR² D 180; Barrett 1996, 233; Suet. Ner. 6.3; Tacitus incorrectly calls her the daughter of the Younger Antonia; she was also the mother of Nero’s later ‘rival’ Faustus Cornelius Sulla Felix.

\[1305\] 12.64.3. Hausmann 2009, 423 observes that Lepida is a match for Agrippina not just on the basis of their shared characteristics, mentioned in the previous sentence, but also in their corresponding tactics: whereas Agrippina had seduced her uncle Claudius with inlecebrae (12.3.1), so Lepida tries to gain favour with her nephe-
tion presages the friction that will arise between mother and son in the subsequent Books, when Nero will be portrayed as becoming increasingly annoyed with Agrippina’s overbearing interference with his public and private matters.\textsuperscript{1306} Agrippina has Lepida accused of trying to attack her with magic and of not having control over her slaves in Calabria – pretexts, as Tacitus may suggest with \textit{ceterum} – and Lepida is sentenced to death.\textsuperscript{1307}

Agrippina’s attack on Lepida, then, is not a mere female squabble about status, but has to do with preserving her own power. Agrippina’s present influence is determined by her position as wife of the emperor and mother of the heir apparent. If she is to maintain her power after Nero’s accession, she needs to make sure that she, and not Lepida, has the decisive influence on Nero.\textsuperscript{1308} The future emperor was still in his teens and would, for his governance of the Empire, necessarily rely heavily on advice from confidant(e)s with experience at the court, with the result that his advisers would hold unprecedented power. Since Agrippina surpasses her son in power as long as Claudius is alive, the balance of power has to be defined before getting rid of the old emperor, and this is done by just eliminating Lepida altogether. Considering the strong political overtones of the episode, it is remarkable that Tacitus at first characterizes Agrippina’s rivalry with Lepida as springing from \textit{causae muliebres} – presumably, reputation or pride – and reinforces this impression by including Lepida’s ancestry and qualities, thus diverting the reader’s attention from the strongly political – and hence masculine – nature of the women’s competition. Suetonius, by contrast, also briefly refers to Agrippina’s efforts to destroy Lepida, but does not link it to issues of power at all; instead, he uses the episode as an illustration of Nero’s cruelty, because he publicly testified against his aunt through \textit{blandimenta}, a strategy which Agrippina will again mirror to appease Nero in 13.13.2.

\textsuperscript{1306} Most explicitly in 13.12-14, which show thematic verbal similarities with this passage, e.g. Agrippina’s initial use of violent protests and severity (\textit{obnittente}, \textit{quantoque foediora exprobrabat}, \textit{intempestivam severitatem}, \textit{coercendo filio}, \textit{mulieris semper atrocis}) and her turn towards blandishments (\textit{versis artibus per blandimenta iu-venem adgredi}); the formulations \textit{in modum muliebriter} and \textit{superbia muliebris}; her assertions that Nero owed all he had to her; and her sudden support of Britannicus, whom she had damaged before (just like Narcissus).

\textsuperscript{1307} 12.65.1. Seif 1973, 270 argues that Tacitus does not judge the truth or justification of the accusations, and takes \textit{ceterum} as indicating that political charges were used to settle private scores. I would modify this interpretation and propose that it illustrates how the struggle for political power was veiled with charges pertaining to public offenses, threatening the greater good (the safety of Italy: \textit{pax Italiae}, and the empress: the phrase \textit{coniunx principis} is used instead of Agrippina’s own name) rather than threatening the power of one individual.

\textsuperscript{1308} For Agrippina’s power being dependent on that of Nero, see 13.19.1 and 13.21.5.
AGrippina’s scheming at his mother’s wish – a detail omitted by Tacitus, who makes Agrippina solely responsible.\textsuperscript{1309} Earlier in Book 12, two other episodes in which Agrippina vies with other women – the selection of a new wife for Claudius in 12.1-2, and Agrippina’s destruction of Calpurnia and Lollia Paulina in 12.22 – were signalled right from the start as rivalries over the affection of Claudius and the resulting position of power as the spouse of the emperor.\textsuperscript{1310} While the language and themes of the anecdote of Agrippina’s competition with Domitia Lepida are strongly reminiscent of these two previous episodes, its political importance is much more veiled.\textsuperscript{1311} Also in other instances of Agrippina’s desire for, or display of, power, the political aspect is veiled (see below, section 3.3.3).

With Lepida’s execution, Agrippina, through pure domination (12.64.3: \textit{trux} and \textit{minax}) assures herself of sole control over Nero – at least for now. In the Neronian Books, her son will gradually liberate himself from her, Burrus and Seneca will assume ever greater importance, and Agrippina will have to resort to different tactics to maintain her position.\textsuperscript{1312} Agrippina’s relationship with her son starts to deteriorate almost immediately after his accession, as was prefigured through \textit{quae filio dare imperium, tolerare imperitantem nequibat} (12.64.3). The first two murders in his reign are committed on her orders, without knowledge or consent of Nero (13.1.1: \textit{ignaro Nerone}; 13.1.3: \textit{invito principe}). But the next chapter announces Burrus’ and Seneca’s joint struggle against her influence, and Nero’s irritation at Pallas (13.2.2), as well as the new emperor’s open (\textit{propalam}) honouring of his mother (13.2.3) – which, considering the adversative \textit{tamen}, probably veils the first hidden signs of alienation. Chapter 13.5 sees the first overt signs of her diminishing influence, when a senatorial motion is successfully carried despite her protests, and she

\textsuperscript{1309} Suet. \textit{Ner.} 7.1; cf. Seif 1973, 270.
\textsuperscript{1310} See Ginsburg 2006, 22 for the language of political canvassing in 12.1-2; Ginsburg 2006, 24 on the political component of these rivalries; Foubert 2010a, 86-89 on female strife.
\textsuperscript{1311} Mehl 1974, 164 notes that the aspects of female \textit{claritudo}, \textit{forma} and \textit{opes} have political implications in 12.1.1 and 12.2.3, and that this passage is evoked through the term \textit{certamen}; 12.22.1 has the term \textit{certavisset}, the charge of practising magic, the listing of the ancestry of Lollia, and a tossed-out remark from Claudius’ (\textit{fortuito sermone}) as the reason for Agrippina’s actions. As Keitel 1977, 208-209 points out, while 12.64-65 recalls these earlier episodes, ‘the arena has already shifted from control over Claudius – who may as well be dead – to control of his heir.’ Remarkably, Tacitus does not mention that Domitia Lepida was Britannicus’ grandmother (through Messalina) as well as Nero’s aunt, and as such might have had an interest in the succession of either of the two boys; see Koestermann 1967 \textit{ad loc}.; Levick 1990, 76.
\textsuperscript{1312} See Barrett 1996, 143-195 on the historical dimension.
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is prevented from presiding next to Nero at a reception of Armenian legates, by Nero’s display of species pietatis. In 13.6.2, Nero is still called is, qui a femina regeretur, but from 13.12.1 onwards, Nero starts taking control and freeing herself from his mother’s influence – ceterum infracta paulatim potetia matris – by embarking on an affair with the freedwoman Acte. First ignorant of Nero’s new object of devotion (13.12.2: ignara matre), she resorts to vain protests after her discovery (13.12.2: dein frustra obnitente), and mutters ‘in womanly fashion’ about her ‘freedwoman rival’ and ‘daughter-in-law the maid’ (13.13.1). Her behaviour, however, only fires his love for Acte, until he finally ‘casts off all compliance towards his mother’ (13.13.1). Agrippina then changes her tactics, behaving regretfully and submissively towards her son, approaching him with blandishments, and offering him parts of her own property, as well as her own bedroom and lap (13.13.2-3).

Nero, however, is not deceived; and when he sends Agrippina some garments and jewels from the imperial collection, she interprets this as an assertion of control, on his part, over the imperial possessions, complaining that ‘she was being kept from everything else, and her son was dividing up possessions which he derived entirely from herself’ (13.13.4). This is Agrippina’s first overt reference of Nero’s debt towards her for her efforts in arranging his succession, and it is quickly followed by another, after Nero removes Pallas from his office of a rationibus (13.14.1). Agrippina replies with threats, open support of Britannicus, and declarations of her sacrifices in securing imperial power for Nero (13.14.2-3). Upon this, and with Britannicus’ adulthood approaching, Nero decides to murder his adoptive brother and starts secret preparations to this end (13.15.1-3). Poison is administered to Britannicus through a trick during a dinner party, and when the boy suddenly collapses, Nero remains calm and attributes his seizures to epilepsy (13.16.14). Agrippina, however, understanding ‘that her last source of aid had been seized away and that there was now a precedent for parricide’, fails to hide her horror, despite her attempts to suppress the expression of her feelings (13.16.4). Nero attempts to placate her, but to no avail: Agrippina starts building up financial and military support, associating herself with Octavia and building relationships with friends and

1313 See Martin 1990, 1554-1555 for a good discussion.
1314 See Lendon 1997, 127-128 on the dangers of giving a gift – such as the Empire – which cannot be repaid by its recipient; Rutland 1978 on women as makers of kings in the Annals.
1315 Cf. Suet. Ner. 33.3; Dio 61.8.1 (without the epilepsy anecdote); cf. Schmitzer 2005; Murgatroyd 2005 on the resemblances of Tacitus depiction to his description of Agrippina’s murder of Claudius.
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nobles (13.18.1-2). In response, Nero takes away her bodyguard, removes her from the palace, and distances himself from her (13.18.3). Agrippina is then accused by another female rival, Junia Silana, of planning to seize power by marrying Rubellius Plautus – a descendant from Augustus in the same degree as Nero – and encouraging him to revolution (13.19). Although Agrippina succeeds in clearing herself of the charges, with another reference to her exertions on Nero’s behalf (13.20-22), Nero’s suspicion is aroused, and he decides to kill his mother (13.20.1). After subsequently disappearing from the narrative for several consecutive years (AD 56-58) and the rest of Book 13, Agrippina returns at the beginning of Book 14, only to be murdered by her son and accused by him of a desire for a consortium imperii and for the loyalty of the Praetorians, Senate and people, as well as charged with cuncta eius [sc. Claudii] dominationis flagitia (14.11.1-2). In her final moments, she urges the centurion whom Nero has sent to kill her to stab her womb (14.8.5), and the magnitude of her maternal sacrifices is epitomized in the last speech Tacitus attributes to her in the narrative, an earlier reaction to the prediction that Nero would become emperor and kill her: ‘occidat’, inquit, ‘dum imperet’ (14.9.3).\textsuperscript{1316}

The theme of the relationship between Agrippina and Nero draws attention to various narrative parallels and contrasts. The increasingly strained connection between mother and son, the tensions between his formal power and her informal influence, her claims to an equal share in his power, and Nero’s indebtedness to Agrippina for his position all evoke the interaction between Tiberius and Livia in the first hexad of the \textit{Annals}.\textsuperscript{1317} Both women help their son gain power by having them adopted by their husbands, yet both become estranged from their sons after their accession.\textsuperscript{1318} Agrippina is stated to emulate Livia’s magnificence at the funeral of her husband (12.69.3). Agrippina is honoured with titles – among which that of Augusta, first borne by Livia – and privileges in their position as mother of the emperor, as was Livia (1.14.1-2 and 12.26.1). The impotentia muliebris and

\textsuperscript{1316} The phrase is reminiscent of Accius’ well-known \textit{oderint dum metuant}, indirectly comparing Nero and his power to Atreus and his position. Cf. Keitel 1977, 48: ‘Agrippina’s introduction foreshadows her end: as a mother she triumphs and as a mother she dies’. On Tacitus’ representation of Agrippina’s death, see Walker 1960, 24-25; Ginsburg 2006, 46-53; Baltussen 2002.
\textsuperscript{1317} See in particular 4.57.3, where Livia is called \textit{dominationis socia} and is depicted as having given Tiberius the gift of imperial power: \textit{dominationem ipsam donum eius accepisset}.
\textsuperscript{1318} Cf. Keitel 1977, 200-201.
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their dominance over their sons are said to burden, even to enslave the state.\textsuperscript{1319} In addition, both women are characterized as scheming stepmothers through the words \textit{noverca}, \textit{dolus}, and \textit{insidiae}.\textsuperscript{1320} Yet the differences are also significant: while both Tiberius and Nero are depicted as giving the Praetorian Guard their password after their accession (1.7.5 and 13.2.3), it is Nero who issues that of \textit{optima mater}; whereas Tiberius prevents his mother from being decreed a lictor (1.14.2), Agrippina is accorded two (13.2.3); although Livia’s complicity in the murder of Agrippa Postumus is only implied, Agrippina’s responsibility for that of M. Silanus is manifest.\textsuperscript{1321} By reporting parallel incidents and thereby inviting comparisons, Tacitus represents Agrippina’s dominance over her son as much stronger than Livia’s. As a result, while Tiberius had allegedly reacted to his mother’s growing demands of recognition by withdrawing to Campania (4.57.3), Nero resorts to a more radical solution and kills his mother. The narration of the deteriorating relationship between Nero and Agrippina, furthermore, is characterized by a gradual reversal of roles. Agrippina starts off in power, using concealment and pretense to achieve her aims. During the course of the narrative, it is Nero who assumes more and more control, and starts using secrecy and dissimulation to proceed against his mother. The portrayal of mother and son, however, reveals an essential difference between them. As Keitel notes, Agrippina’s \textit{sententia} in 14.9.3, ‘placed after the death scene as it is, … underlines Agrippina’s understanding of power and the price it exacts. Juxtaposed with this is the terrified reaction of Nero, who realizes the full horror of his crime only when news of its execution is brought to him.’\textsuperscript{1322} Indeed, Agrippina’s insight stands in sharp contrast to Claudius’ ignorance, passivity and sluggishness,
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but also to Nero’s dramatic and emotional reactions, improvidence and lack of insight, as attributed to him in the Neronian Books.1323

3.3.3 CONTEXTUALIZING TACITUS’ AGrippina

Stereotypes and gender roles
In his portrayal of Agrippina the Younger, Tacitus plays with narrative echoes, literary (stereo)types, and Roman notions of gender roles and their inversion. While she is depicted as exhibiting characteristically masculine traits, to the extent that she embodies the stereotypical dux femina, many of Agrippina’s actions are denoted with the term muliebris; she is associated with the literary types of the evil noverca, the sexual transgressor and the overbearing mother, and evokes Tacitus’ Livia, Agrippina the Elder and Messalina. On the one hand, Agrippina is associated with typically masculine notions and spheres like dominatio, potencia and regnum, and the submission she commands is even called quasi virile servitium (12.7.3). She desires power, controls her partner, wears military dress, has the loyalty of the Praetorian Guard and receives foreign enemies: she effectively fulfills her husband’s functions as emperor. Agrippina is indirectly presented as dominating Claudius with her imperia (12.1.1), and she is described as atrox, ‘an attribute normally associated with soldiers in battle and emphasizing their forceful display of virtus’.1324 Moreover, she gladly sacrifices her decus, pudor ad pudicitia – typically female features – to obtain power. In this respect, she is a typical example of the literary type of the dux femina as delineated by Santoro l’Hoir: women transgressing the boundaries of the traditionally female spheres of action and usurping power and ‘expropriating authority to which they have no claim whatsoever’.1325 Agrippina’s transgressions are

1325 Santoro l’Hoir 1994; citation from page 6; Santoro l’Hoir 2006, 112-139; on Agrippina as dux femina, see Ginsburg 2006, 112-116; Foubert 2010b, 358; Fishler 1994 and Wood 1999, 257-270 on the prejudice inherent in the ancient accounts. Especially when read in the context of the senatorial debate on women accompanying their husbands to the provinces in 3.33-34 (which echoes the debate on the Lex Oppia in Livy), ‘Agrippina the Younger – who built her regnum on a foundation of gold (12.7.3), who flaunted her golden chlamys (12.56.3) and private carpentum (12.42.2), and who, as a dux femina, usurped power from her husband and son – personifies the beast unchained.’ (Santoro l’Hoir 1994, 17).
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highlighted by her actions and character being implicitly compared with the traditional idealized image of the Roman *matrona*, an image which Tacitus conjures up through certain terms.\(^{1326}\) This is in accord with the ‘Saturnalia theme’, as observed by Keitel in the Claudian Books, in which not just power roles are inverted, but gender roles as well.

On the other hand, her actions are also repeatedly denoted with the word *muliebris*, thus casting them in terms of specifically female quarrels, emotions or preoccupations, especially in the Neronian Books. Narcissus accuses her of *impotentia muliebris* (12.57.2), her rivalry with Lepida is stated to arise from *muliebres causae* (12.64.2), she complains *muliebriter* about Acte, a rival for Nero’s affection (13.13.1), Nero accuses Agrippina of *superbia muliebris* (13.14.1), and she tries to seduce her son with *muliebres inlecebrae* (14.2.1). This term *muliebris*, although sometimes used by Tacitus to denote general female weakness, passivity, hysteria or moral corruption,\(^{1327}\) is used in the *Annals* mostly with reference to the principal (imperial) women in the narrative: Livia, the Elder and the Younger Agrippina, Livilla, and Plancina – women that exhibit pre-eminently unwomanlike behaviour.\(^{1328}\) Livia is represented as controlling her son Tiberius and through him the government of the state, both Plancina and the Elder Agrippina undertake military activities when on campaign with their husbands, and Livilla conspires against her husband, the crown prince Drusus, with Sejanus to seize imperial power for the latter.\(^{1329}\) Most of the actions and qualities designated by Tacitus as ‘womanly’ are, in fact, strongly imbued with political purposes or significance.\(^{1330}\) In line with this,

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1326  Foubert 2010b.
1327  E.g. 13.30.2: *ob libidines muliebrer infamis*; 14.30.2: *muliebre et fanaticum agmen*; 15.54.4: *consilium ... muliebre ac deterius*; 15.57.1: *ratus muliebre corpus impar dolori tormentis*; 16.10.4: *mulie<b>ri</b> eiulatu*.
1328  Cf. Santoro l’Hoir 1994, 123.
1329  1.4.5: rumours fear Livia’s *muliebris impotentia* and predict that *serviendum feminae [est]* if Tiberius assumes power; 1.14.2: Tiberius is offended by the honours proposed by the Senate to Livia and considers her *muliebres fastigium* as depreciation of himself; 1.33.3: Livia is said to exhibit *muliebres offensiones* towards her daughter-in-law Agrippina the Elder, whose husband Germanicus is perceived as challenging the power of Livia’s son Tiberius; 1.40.4: the *muliebre agmen* seems to be a show put up by Agrippina to arouse Germanicus’ soldiers to remorse; 2.43.4: Livia is believed to have incited Plancina, wife of Germanicus’ rival Cn. Piso, to *aemulatio muliebris* with Agrippina the Elder; 2.71.2: Germanicus attributes his death, which will be interpreted in the context of *maiestas* later, to *muliebris fraus*; 4.39.1: Livilla shows a *muliebris cupido* to marry Sejanus, while Tacitus had earlier attributed her adultery with him to her desire for a *consortium regni* (4.3.3); 5.2.2: Tiberius criticizes Livia’s *amicitia muliebris*, which had brought political favours to her friends.
1330  Cf. Ginsburg 2006, 24; see Späth 1994, 35-120 on female behaviour in the *Annals*, in particular 68-92 on
Messelina – whom Tacitus depicts as striving for (female) sexual domination rather than (masculine) political influence – is only associated with things *muliebria* once, by Valerius Asiaticus, whom she destroyed out of sexual jealousy and desire for his gardens.\(^{1331}\)

By contrast, Tacitus hardly ever uses the term *virilis* to denote particular traits or actions as specifically masculine: the word mostly indicates the physical sex of persons or animals, not their character or behaviour. The exceptions to this practice are always cases of women appropriating masculine things. For example, Tacitus states of Agrippa the Elder that she, ‘impatient of equality and greedy for mastery, had cast off female flaws in a preference for men’s concerns’,\(^{1332}\) while her daughter’s dominance is described as a *quasi virile servitium* (12.7.3). So whereas Tacitus uses expressions of masculinity mostly with regard to sex (i.e. physical properties), his use of femininity is specifically connected to gender, i.e. to the expected behaviour of women, and in particular to the cases when imperial women transgress the boundaries of these gender roles.\(^{1333}\)

This has several implications. By explicitly characterizing them as *muliebris* – rather than not denoting them with an adjective at all – Tacitus in some cases veils the political implications of these women’s actions, perhaps to obscure the disconcerting fact that women are (indirectly) taking part in male activities and exhibiting male courage, while the leading men of the state are passive and obedient.\(^{1334}\) More importantly, the designation *muliebris* emphasizes the participation of women in the spheres traditionally reserved to men – politics and warfare – and as such represents both the situation and the men who allow this transgression as dishonourable. Both Tiberius and Nero are cast in a negative light by being presented as under the influence of their mothers, while the weak Claudius is wholly subservient to his wives – being ruled by a woman implies slavery.\(^{1335}\)

\(^{1331}\) In 11.3.2, where Asiaticus attributes his fall to *fraus muliebris*.

\(^{1332}\) 6.25.2: *sed Agrippina aequi impatiens, dominandi avida, virilibus curis feminarum vitia exuerat*.

\(^{1333}\) On female ideals, see Fischler 1994; Cenerini 2002; D’Ambra 2007.

\(^{1334}\) Cf. Keitel 1977, 134; Foubert 2010b on Tacitus comparing the behaviour of these women with an (outdated) idealized image of traditional Roman female behaviour. Santoro l’Hoir 2006, 136-139 explores the role of clothes in Tacitus’ depiction of the reversal of gender roles; Ginsburg 2006, 20 on Agrippina’s gender reversal.

\(^{1335}\) Santoro l’Hoir 1994; Fishler 1994, 127-130 on ‘the activities of the imperial women [as] a standard category which authors used to evaluate the quality of emperors’. On gender roles and reversals in the *Annals*, see Späth 1994, 27-269; Späth 2012.
In this way, the emphasis on Agrippina’s actions being ‘womanly’ stresses Tacitus’ censure of Claudius’ weakness. This is reinforced by several implicit similarities between Agrippina’s actions and those of Sejanus in the Tiberian Books, stressing that it is not a man who exerts the dominance (as in the case of Tiberius) but a woman, even less excusable.

But it is not just the contrast between male and female behaviour or spheres of action which is highlighted by the use of *muliebris*; there is also a moral aspect to it, since Tacitus specifically uses *mulier*, *muliebris* and *muliebriter* to describe Agrippina’s actions, instead of their counterparts *femina*, *femineus* or *femininus*. As Santoro l’Hoir argues, the term *femina* denotes a noble and morally upright woman, while *mulier* has a more pejorative association. Applied to Roman women – the uses are different for non-Romans – the word *femina*, with its positive connotations, is used by Tacitus to, for instance, emphasize the outrage when he describes the degrading or destruction of such virtuous women.

The word *mulier* and its derivatives *muliebris* and *muliebriter* carry less favourable overtones, often of ‘unreason, emotion, and deception’. In qualifying a certain act or feature as *muliebris*, Tacitus indirectly criticizes its moral standing, even apart from the moral dubiousness of women transgressing the boundaries of their gender. Indeed, Agrippina the Younger is referred to as *femina* before her marriage to Claudius (i.e. before she commits most of her outrages) and in the arguments of her supporters (who have been as(179,322),(811,457)(170,630),(824,776)

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1336 Späth 2000. In addition, the interaction and power dynamics between Claudius and Agrippina may be seen as reminiscent of that between the (passive) male lover and his distant *domina* in Roman love elegy.
1339 Santoro l’Hoir 1994, 120-121, e.g. in the cases of Junia Silana and Calpurnia; see 120-143 on Tacitus’ use of gender terms.
1340 Rutland 1978, 15-16.
1341 The difference may be discerned in two statements focalized by Tiberius. The first is a passage describing the emperor’s hostile thoughts on Agrippina the Elder’s political and military ambitions (1.69.4), where she is called *mulier*, clearly with negative associations. The second is a letter of Tiberius to Sejanus, where he writes about the *aemulatio feminarum* between Agrippina the Elder and Livilla (4.40.3), where the emulation clearly has a political background – the women vie for influence at the court and the succession of their sons – and may be presumed to be disagreeable to Tiberius, but the social setting demands a more correct or polite description of the women involved. Further moral criticism is implied in Tacitus’ attribution of *servitium* and *dominatio* to Agrippina: ‘[s]uch terms denote illegitimate political power and would be pejorative enough if used in reference to a man. They carry yet more opprobrium when applied to a woman, an outsider in the political process.’ (Ginsburg 2006, 116).
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an interest in portraying her as honourable); but she is denoted as mulier by her son and his friends after their estrangement (who try to cast her in a negative light), and her actions are described as muliebria once she starts exerting her power (and thus crossing the gender boundaries). 1342

Agrippina’s transgression is described by Tacitus’ Narcissus as muliebris im-potentia, which, according to Santoro l’Hoir, ‘[embraces] a remarkably expansive and flexible range of nuances, connot[ing] female appropriation of legitimate male prerogatives, including political power and the art of eloquence; the expression, as Tacitus employs it, also embraces the rhetorically related transgressions of adultery, poisoning, seduction, and magic.’ 1343 Indeed, the Tacitean Agrippina uses sex to gain power, seduces Claudius only to poison him later, uses the services of the Chaldaeans, usurps power from Claudius and (less successfully) from Nero, and, notably, is one of the few women in Tacitus’ historical works who is allotted quite a lot of speeches. 1344 As touched upon before, she also exhibits many of the traits of the literary or rhetorical type of the wicked noverca: intrigue and scheming, crime and deception. 1345 As said, this likens Agrippina to her great-grandmother and predecessor as empress Livia (see above, sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2). But Agrippina is suggested to be worse than Livia: her dominance over her son and her political power are far greater, and are emphasized much more by Tacitus. In contrast to Livia, Agrippina’s influence is noted explicitly with terms such as potentia and dominatio, her complicity in crimes is stated rather than implied, she is given more speeches, while her moral depravity and transgression of the roles of her gender are highlighted with the term muliebris. Agrippina’s repetition of traits of her narrative predecessors in an aggravated and deteriorated manner was also noted above, with regard to her mother Agrippina the Elder (whose ambition was mitigated by the

1342 Cf. Santoro l’Hoir 1994, 137-138. Agrippina is called mulier in 13.3.3, 14.3.2 and 14.11.2.
1343 Santoro l’Hoir 2006, 10; on the term and the stereotypes behind it, see 124-139; on the role of speech and eloquence in the description of the reversal of gender roles, 139-144; on seduction, deception and magic: 144-157; on poisoning as a typically female crime, and one connected to adultery and magic: 158-195.
1344 She speaks in, for instance, 13.14.2-3 (in oratio obliqua), 13.21.2-5 (in recta) and 14.8-9 (in obliqua and in recta); her last words are also reported, in contrast to those of her husband Claudius (see above, section 3.2.3). Her defence against the charges laid against her in 13.21 is so successful that she even procures the punishment of the accusers; cf. Santoro l’Hoir 2006, 142. Her mother, Agrippina the Elder, is also represented as speaking (e.g. in 1.40.3 and 4.52-53), but these are brief utterances and in oratio obliqua.

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love for her husband) and the previous empress Messalina (whose meddling in politics was veiled by Tacitus through the language of lust). Agrippina, too, recalls the *topos* of the sexual transgressor who commits adultery and resorts to incest.\(^{1346}\) In addition, her characterization is reminiscent of that of Clytaemnestra in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, who is said to have a ‘man-planning, hopeful heart’ and to command (Ag. 10-11: ὧδε γὰρ κρατεῖ γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον ἐλπίζον κέαρ), just like Agrippina was credited with masculine attributes and *impotentia muliebris nimiasque spes* (12.57.2); both women, of course, murder their husbands.\(^{1347}\)

*The historical Agrippina and her representation in other sources*

Tacitus endows his portrayal of Agrippina the Younger with many layers and implicit (negative) values through the use of literary or rhetorical stereotypes, echoes of other characters in the narrative, and indications of gender role reversals. In this, he diverges notably from the other ancient sources, where Agrippina’s depiction, although without exception negative and with an emphasis on her crimes and desire for power, is not so complex and charged.\(^{1348}\) Moreover, the historical Agrippina’s actions may perhaps also be interpreted in a different, somewhat more positive light than Tacitus does. The historical Agrippina the Younger does indeed appear to have occupied a position of great visibility and influence. As empress, she was granted more, and greater, honours than had ever been decreed to the living female members of the imperial family. She was awarded the title Augusta and the right to use a *carpentum*, her birthplace Cologne was given colonial status and the name Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium, she was portrayed on imperial and provincial coinage together with Claudius and Nero as well as on her own, and figured on cameos, in statuary and other monuments, for instance on the reliefs of the Sebasteion in Aphrodisias.\(^{1349}\) Although some of these honours had their precedent in the privileges accorded to Livia – for instance, the title of Augusta and the right of using

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1347  Santoro l’Hoir 2006, 126-127, 143.
AGrippina’s scheming

the *carpentum* – the latter only received those after Augustus’ death, in Tiberius’ reign, when she was the mother, rather than the wife, of the emperor. Claudius’ previous wife Messalina had also been honoured with statues, coins and privileges, but not as lavishly as Agrippina – and she had never been designated as Augusta or portrayed on coins. The historical Agrippina’s influence, furthermore, can be deduced not only from Nero’s advancement, but also from such measures as the removal of L. Silanus, the replacement of various officers (allegedly supporters of Britannicus) of the Praetorian Guard, the condemnations and punishments of Calpurnia, Lollia Paulina and Domitia Lepida, the recall of Seneca from exile and his (and perhaps his relatives’) advancement, provincial munificence and interventions in senatorial and provincial affairs. An indication of her exceptional influence is found in the *Acta* of the Arval Brethren, recording vows offered by them for Nero’s health at some point between AD 50 and 54, in which the prince is designated as suboles Agrippinae Augustae before his descent from Claudius is named.

Agrippina’s efforts for securing the succession for her son Nero, represented in entirely negative terms by Tacitus, may, however, also be seen as an attempt on her part to safeguard her own position at the imperial court, which was plagued with power struggles. If Claudius were to die and Britannicus were to succeed him, Agrippina’s position as stepmother to the new emperor would naturally be far from secure. Promoting her own son may have been the only way to protect her own status, rather than solely a method to enhance her power. A similar need to fortify her own insecure position may have been behind Agrippina’s public visibility; as Flower observes, ‘[t]he very need to eclipse the recently deceased Messalina must

1350 Levick 1990, 71 on Agrippina being ‘the first living female member of the dynasty to accept it since Livia herself – and she had had it only as a widow, when it could not enhance her majesty to a level too close to her husband’s’.
1353 Scheid 1998 no. 22; cf. Levick 1990, 71; Osgood 2011, 227-228.
1354 Cf. a similar statement in Wood 1999, 258: ‘Agripinna II, by the time of her marriage to Claudius, was the veteran of bitter political struggles within her immediate family that had cost the lives of her mother and two older brothers, caused her exile and that of her sister, and endangered her own life more than once. It would be surprising if such a past had not made her paranoid, and encouraged her to pursue her own interests by any means possible, regardless of ethics.’
have been a decisive factor in Agrippina’s presentation of herself in public. Agrippina’s higher profile, especially on state occasions, can be seen as a logical consequence of her sudden elevation but also of Messalina’s previous position.\textsuperscript{1355} Also in another way, Tacitus appears to deny Agrippina strategic considerations. It is known that the Younger Agrippina wrote memoirs: both the Elder Pliny and Tacitus himself, in the Tiberian Books, refer to these as a source of information.\textsuperscript{1356}

From the anecdotes reported by Pliny we may infer that Agrippina included stories about signs prefiguring her and Nero’s later power; for instance, there is a tale about Agrippina having a double set of canine teeth, which was supposed to be a favourable omen (Plin. \textit{NH} 7.71). This may point towards wider efforts on Agrippina’s part to bolster her and Nero’s position by manipulating public opinion. Although Tacitus will certainly have used her memoirs when composing the Claudian and Neronian \textit{Annals}, he does not mention them in those Books, thereby indirectly refusing to credit her with a deliberate strategy for advancing Nero, and reinforcing his portrayal of her as a kind of power-hungry loose force capable only of influencing her weak husband.

Tacitus depicts Agrippina as a proud and fierce woman eager for power, who resorts to ruthless manipulation and crime to further her own and her son’s position. He deliberately plays up her agency in the matter of the succession in comparison with other sources and endows her character with various negative connotations through the use of stereotypes and a reversal of gender roles. In doing so, and by explicitly designating Agrippina’s highly political actions as \textit{muliebris}, Tacitus censures her for her moral transgressions, but is even more critical of Claudius, for letting his wife do this. As such, the overbearing Tacitean Agrippina is the complement to Tacitus’ weak Claudius. Notably, like Claudius, Agrippina echoes some of her narrative predecessors – Livia, Messalina, the Elder Agrippina – by being depicted as replaying particular traits of these women; but, like Claudius, she is seen to exhibit these features in a magnified and deteriorated fashion, with far greater repercussions for those around her and for the state at large.

\textsuperscript{1355} Flower 2006, 183; see 182-189 on the very thorough memory sanctions against Messalina, and Agrippina’s need to position herself in reference to the previous empress.

\textsuperscript{1356} 4.53.2; Plin. \textit{HN} 7.46, 7.71; on the memoirs, see Clack 1975.
So far, the roles of the emperor and empress have been investigated, but nothing has as yet been said about the parts played in the succession by the main constituents of Roman society: the Senate (and, to a lesser extent, the equestrians), the people, and the military. Does Tacitus allow them an opinion on, and involvement in, the question of the succession? Although the attitudes, loyalties and procedures of these groups are clearly different, they are jointly treated here, since, as will be argued, they are all represented as more or less obedient to Agrippina’s manipulations.

3.4 The Senate, army and people

3.4.1 THE SENATE

The Senate is accorded a very marginal, subservient role as regards the succession. Whereas the Tacitean Tiberius still proceeded through the Senate in all the steps he took to advance Germanicus, Drusus, and Nero and Drusus Caesar, and made sure to present it with motivations for his proposals, here the body is forestalled, lied to and manipulated, and the only active role it is allowed to play is in showing its excessive adulation. The senators are – either innocently or knowingly – deluded by Vitellius’ deceitful presentation of Agrippina as a dutiful wife and stepmother (12.5-6), and misinformed by Agrippina when she convenes them and issues optimistic bulletins with regards to Claudius’ health (12.68). At several occasions, Tacitus describes how the important decisions are made within the imperial household, after which Agrippina and her party stage a show of senatorial independence by having the Senate produce a motion urging Claudius to do something which
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has long been decided upon by others. This is what happens with the marriage of Claudius and Agrippina, where Vitellius manages to make the Senate and people compel Claudius to enter into a relationship which has in fact already been consummated (12.5.1 and 12.7.1). A similar procedure is followed in the matter of the engagement of Octavia and Nero, which has been prepared by Agrippina and her helpers from 12.3.2 onwards, but which is only officially set in motion after the Senate, on the initiative of the bribed consul designate, urges Claudius to betroth his daughter to Nero in 12.9.1.

Often, the assent of the Senate is not even mentioned anymore, but simply assumed as self-evident: in the passage just named, Tacitus only notes that Mammius Pollio advances the motion, and that Octavia was engaged, but not that the motion was actually passed. Likewise, he omits the senatorial decree that allowed Agrippina the use of a *carpentum* in 12.42.2, and their decisions surrounding the adoption of Nero are rendered in passive phrases, downplaying their independent agency.1357 The senators do not protest against legal accusations that Tacitus shows to be untrue, such as Vitellius’ allegations of incest against L. Silanus (which Tacitus explicitly denies with *non incestum, sed incustoditum amorem*: 12.4.2), or the execution of Domitia Lepida in 12.64-65 (on feigned charges: *ceterum objecta sunt* implies that the formal accusations had nothing to do with the actual reasons for her prosecution); they are not represented as backing Junius Lupus’ indictment of Vitellius for *maiestas* and *cupido imperii* in 12.42.3 (which the preceding narrative clearly justifies), or as objecting against Lupus’ subsequent banishment on the urgings of Agrippina. They do win a victory against Agrippina when they expel Tarquitian Priscus, who had accused Statilius Taurus because Agrippina was coveting the latter’s gardens, but it is a modest one in comparison with the suicide of Taurus (12.59.2).

Instead, the senators are depicted as consenting to everything proposed to them, for instance Nero’s pleading on behalf of various communities in 12.58, or the military’s approval of Nero as the new emperor in 12.69.2: *sententiam militum secuta patrum consulta*. They display extreme enthusiasm in legalizing incestuous marriages between uncles and their nieces in 12.7.1, even threatening to use force (*vi acturos*) if the emperor were to hesitate. Apparently uninterested in the welfare

1357 12.26.1-2: *augetur* and *quibus patratis*; Hausmann 2009, 354. Dio 60.33.2.1, by contrast, does mention the senatorial decree with regard to Agrippina’s use of the *carpentum*. 
of the state, they are not represented as proposing an alternative candidate to Nero, someone who would be better suited to governing the Empire. The senators are, however, active in expressing extravagant *adulatio*: they are depicted as bursting out of the curia and competing to testify to their approval of Agrippina (12.7.1), they present their thanks to Claudius as if he were a god and show *quaesitior adulatio* towards Nero in 12.26, and they decree numerous adulatory honours to Nero in 12.41.1.\(^{1358}\) As Keitel summarizes: ‘the Senate, like a comic opera chorus, appears after the completion of the action to rubber stamp where it once would have led.’\(^{1359}\) This passivity, subordination and lack of protest against clearly immoral proposals is not just the result of the manipulations of Agrippina and her party, however; it is also symptomatic of the state of the Senate under the Principate: they allow themselves to be directed by others. This decline of their influence continues over time: Tacitus is hardly positive about their role in opposing Nero in the Neronian *Annals*, and in the *Histories*, as has been noted (Chapter 1 *passim*), the Senate plays no role whatsoever in Galba’s adoption of Piso or Otho’s following coup.\(^{1360}\)

### 3.4.2 THE MILITARY

In the Tiberian Books, the succession was closely bound up with military matters, since both Drusus the Younger and Germanicus were commanders and were frequently portrayed as engaging with their soldiers. As such, Tacitus reported several military speeches by the two candidates, as well as the opinions of the soldiers about the two men. In describing the succession issue under Galba’s reign, Tacitus likewise, and logically, pays much attention to the views of the military on the question. In the Claudian narrative, however, the military is relatively absent from the matter of the succession, despite the important role of the Praetorians in confirming Nero’s succession in 12.69, which Tacitus states gave the lead to the Senate and the provinces – probably both the people and the legions in the provinces (12.69.2).

\(^{1358}\) See Shannon 2012, 176-177 on *grates agere* in 12.26.1 as a phrase for describing thanksgiving to gods.


\(^{1360}\) Cf. Walker 1960, 26 on Tacitus’ judgment on the Pisonian conspiracy and Thrasea Paetus: ‘As a solution to the political problem of the day, Thrasea’s policy is as useless as Piso’s. Tacitus presents both as assisting in the Senate’s collapse, which culminated in 69 when it became clear that the Senate had nothing to do with the government of Rome at all’.
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Nothing is heard about the Guard’s attitudes towards Nero and Britannicus, despite the explicit mention of a donative distributed in Nero’s name in 12.41.1. They are not depicted as reacting to the replacement of their prefects with Burrus in 12.42.1 either. Their only response is narrated in the last chapter of the Claudian Books, where they receive Nero favourably (12.69.1: faustis vocibus), carry him to the camp and hail him as imperator after his promise of a donative. Their reaction, however, is directed by Burrus (monente praefecto), after Agrippina has tried to propitiate them by issuing hopeful bulletins about the emperor’s health (12.68.3: quo miles bona in spe ageret). Tacitus reports hesitation about the absence of Britannicus of the part of some soldiers, which may perhaps be connected to his earlier statement that Agrippina believed the old prefects too attached to the memory of Messalina and her children (12.42.1). However, only some (quosdam) soldiers look around and enquire after Britannicus, and only for a brief period: when no alternative is offered, they simply follow. Burrus appears successful in his manipulation of the Praetorian opinion.

3.4.3 THE PEOPLE

The people are accorded a slightly more substantial role in the matter, although it cannot be compared to the part they played in the Tiberian narrative. There, Tacitus frequently reports public opinion on Tiberius, Germanicus, Drusus and the whole issue of the succession. In the Claudian Books, comments are rarely focalized through the people, and Tacitus hardly reports upon the (un)popularity of the emperor or the heirs apparent. Agrippina, nevertheless, is depicted as showing concern for public opinion and as increasingly trying to manipulate it to her own benefit. In 12.5.1, she worries that people will disapprove of the incestuous marriage; in 12.8.2 she has Seneca recalled ne malis tantum facinoribus notesceret; in 12.41.1 she speeds up Nero’s entry into manhood quo capessendae rei publicae habilis videretur, the appearance of Nero and Britannicus in 12.41.2 is carefully staged so as to direct public opinion: spectaret populus hunc decore imperatorio, illum puerili habitu, ac perinde fortuna utriusque praesumeret; and she suppresses Claudius’ will lest the people’s disposition be disturbed by the inuria and invidia of Nero’s preference (12.69.3). Her efforts to manipulate public opinion, however, are not always equally successful. At the first introduction of Nero, the people are still described as demonstrating
a spontaneous preference for Nero, as interpreting this as an omen, and as disseminating fabulous stories about Nero’s protection by snakes (11.11.2-12.1). At 12.7.1, they are represented by an overly eager *promisca multitudo* shouting and begging the emperor to marry his niece (12.7.1), after what the reader well understands is a grossly misleading speech of Vitellius’ in the Senate.

But after these excessive, perhaps scripted, reactions, their enthusiasm for the empress and future successor seems to fade. In the next chapter, on the wedding day itself, they are depicted as ridiculing (12.8.1: *inridentibus cunctis*) Claudius’ sacrifices to propitiate incest, although no serious protest against the accusation of Silanus or the incestuous imperial marriage is heard. At the engagement of Nero and Octavia (12.9), no reaction from the people is reported, while after the adoption, the only emotion they show is pity for Britannicus (12.26.2). At the games for Nero’s manhood, which are explicitly stated to have been produced *adquirendis vulgi studiis*, Tacitus does not tell us whether the efforts were successful: no reaction from the people is related. They do not figure in the episodes of Nero’s marriage to Octavia and his speeches in the Senate, of Lepida’s destruction, or of Claudius’ murder. The last things mentioned are that Agrippina again tries to manipulate their thoughts by publicizing (12.68.3: *vulgabat*) optimistic messages about the emperor’s health, and by suppressing Claudius’ will (12.69.3). Again, however, Tacitus does not mention whether this worked: he records no popular reaction to the succession, even though the sentiments of the military, the Senate and the provinces are recounted. In fact, the first chapters of the Neronian narrative makes it clear that public opinion was not all that positive about the succession (see above, section 3.1.4).

The people, then, emerge as the group that is most difficult for Agrippina and her party to control. Whereas Tacitus regularly reports senatorial enthusiasm, he often suggestively refrains from recording popular agreement. But the people are not represented as independent: despite their lack of enthusiasm and their commiseration with Britannicus, they do not protest or take action against measures they might disapprove of. The people seem more concerned with miraculous stories (they believe and circulate stories about Nero and his snakes in 11.11.3) and food (they receive a *congiarium* in 12.41) or the lack of it (they actively react to a shortage of crops by beleaguerling Claudius in 12.43) than with the future of their state, and they are depicted as easily swayed by deceitful rhetoric. In this sense, they may be seen to resemble the emperor himself, who busies himself with antiquarian matters and large-scale building projects such as the draining of the Fucine lake,
but who is portrayed as blind to the things that really matter: Agrippina usurping his power and harming his son. Rumours about Nero’s unsuitability are apparently rife just after his accession (13.1.1: crebra vulgi fama), but no alternatives are actively proposed or demanded by the people. The first time they are seen in true action appears to be their protests against Nero’s divorce of Octavia and marriage to Poppaea in 14.60.6-61.1 – but then it is much to late to influence Nero’s course of action.

The Senate, people and military, then, play no noteworthy roles in the succession issue in the Claudian Books. When compared to the Tiberian and Galban narratives, Tacitus uses these groups significantly less often as focalizers to comment upon the succession and the candidates: they are only rarely represented as having an independent opinion about it. They either resort to automatic, adulatory consent, or do not get a voice at all. Moreover, they do not play active roles in the narrative: they might disagree with, or ridicule certain measures, but they do not act upon their sentiments. This relative passivity and obedience reflects the success of Agrippina and her supporters in manipulating their attitudes and reactions. There is a difference, however, between the way in which these groups respond to her efforts: the people prove to be more problematic to manage.

Contemporary sources indeed show little protest against Nero’s advancement and succession, even if it may not have seemed entirely legitimate. Claudius’ marriage to Agrippina appears to have been received comparatively favourably, considering the reduction, in the following years, in the number of plots aimed at overthrowing the emperor.\textsuperscript{1361} Agrippina and Nero appear on provincial coins, and communities outside Italy are shown to have sent delegations to congratulate the new emperor.\textsuperscript{1362} Tacitus, however, turns this – albeit perhaps somewhat reluctant – consent into condemnation. The lack of opinions and actions on the part of these constituents, as depicted in his narrative, may be interpreted as an indication of, and authorial criticism on, Rome’s increasing moral degeneration. The \textit{iussa populi} and \textit{auctoritas senatus}, so solemnly invoked by Vitelius in 12.5.2, turn out to be mere hollow phrases. This impression is heightened by the contrast provided in the eastern narrative: ‘The eastern \textit{plebs} and \textit{nobles}, while fickle, still play a considerable

\textsuperscript{1361} Wiedemann 1996a, 240-241; Osgood 2011, 233.
\textsuperscript{1362} Osgood 2011, 232-233, 245-247.
role in the overthrow of tyranny. At Rome this role has passed almost exclusively to members of the royal household.\textsuperscript{1363}

\textsuperscript{1363} Keitel 1977, 44.
3.5 The role of kinship

Since imperial succession is presented as dynastic by Tacitus, kinship naturally plays a determining role in selecting a successor in the narrative. Yet the theme of kinship is much less prominent in the Claudian Annals than one might expect on the basis of the historical role it played during Claudius’ reign. Kinship, after all, was very important for Claudius. He was the first emperor with no links to Augustus or the Julian family, and he had barely held any public offices before his accession, having deliberately been kept in a low and obscure position by his relatives. Playing up his ancestors and advertising his wife and children were means by which Claudius sought to enhance his status as emperor and the legitimacy of his power. He particularly emphasized the Claudian side of the imperial family, which his (Claudian) predecessors in office had downplayed in favour of their more prestigious adoptive Julian ancestry, but which was the only line Claudius could connect himself to. His grandmother Livia, father Drusus, mother Antonia and brother Germanicus appear on imperial coinage and in statue groups, and were also displayed on provincial coins and monuments. In some of these, Germanicus was emphatically connected to his biological father Drusus, rather than to his adoptive

1364 On Claudius’ life before his accession, see Levick 1990, 11-28; Osgood 2011, 9-11.
1365 Rose 1997, 40 even speaks of ‘a redefinition of the Imperial family based on biological descent rather than adoption’, with reference to the renewed emphasis on the Claudian side, which ‘had been continually ignored or recast in a Julian mold during the prior three reigns’ (39-40). But see Levick 1975 against such a division between the gentes; Koster 1994 on Julians and Claudians in the literary texts.
1366 Levick 1990, 43-47; Rose 1997, 39-41; Osgood 2011, 55-66; 93-101; Hekster forthcoming, ch. 2 and 3; Trillmich 1978, 15-24, 49-79; see also Suet. Cl. 7, 11 on Claudius’ use of, and honours for, his ancestors. Imperial coins featuring Claudius’ ancestors: RIC I Claudius 101 (Livia), 69-74, 89, 93, 98, 109, 114 (Drusus), 65-68, 92, 104 (Antonia), 105-106 (Germanicus); references listed in Claes 2013, 269-270.
THE ROLE OF KINSHIP

ancestors Tiberius and Augustus. Claudius did, however, also try to associate himself with Augustus and the gens Iulia, by emphasizing his relatives’ links to the Julian family. Especially after the historical Claudius’ marriage to Agrippina and his adoption of Nero, dynastic messages became widespread on both imperial and provincial coinage as well as in monuments, with the Julian element much more prominent than before. The change in kinship messages after Claudius’ marriage to Agrippina is notable. Previously, Claudius had mainly advertised his retrospective kinship connections; Messalina, Britannicus and Octavia – the next generation and as such the promise of dynastic continuity – had not figured on imperial coinage, and Britannicus had not received much special treatment. To Agrippina and Nero, on the other hand, were accorded special privileges, offices and titles, and they appeared on several imperial coins (on their own as well as together with Claudius), on monuments, in statuary groups, and on provincial coinage. Moreover, the Julian ancestry of the new empress and heir apparent was emphasized, for instance in imperial coins minted for Agrippina’s parents Germanicus and Agrippina the Elder, in the advertisement of Agrippina’s filiation from Germanicus on imperial coinage, and in links between Agrippina and Livia in a large monument erected around AD 51 in Rome. Kinship, as mentioned before, must have been the main reason for

1367 Rose 1997, 39-40; Hekster forthcoming, ch. 2 and 3. Antonia was linked to Augustus and associated with Livia; Livia was presented as a connecting figure between the two sides of the family; and some of Claudius’ coins refer to typically Augustan values. Claudius’ attempt to link himself to Augustus is alluded to (and ridiculed) in Sen. Apocol. 10.4.
1368 E.g. in imperial coins with divus Augustus and diva Livia (RIC I Claudius 101).
1369 They do appear on provincial coins and in statuary (although not much is left of Messalina’s presence due to her damnatio memoriae); Rose 1997, 41-42; Wood 1999, 252-255. See also above, section 3.1.3 and note 1099.
1370 See above, note 1098 and section 3.3.3. RIC I Claudius 75 (Agrippina and Nero), 103 (Agrippina alone), 80-81 (Agrippina with Claudius), 76-77, 79, 107-108 (Nero alone), 82-83 (Nero and Claudius); Claes 2013, 270.
1371 Rose 1997, 42; Wood 1988 on Agrippina the Elder; Agrippina the Younger was designated as Julia Augusta in the inscription, likening her to Livia. RIC I Claudius 102, 105-106; moreover, on 103, Agrippina is designated as filia Germanici in the legend (Claes 2013, 195). The so-called Gemma Claudia, dating from 49, displays Claudius and Agrippina the Younger paired with Germanicus and Agrippina the Elder or alternatively Augustus and Livia (see most recently Guillaume-Coirier 2004, summarizing previous scholarship). The popularity which Claudius’ connection to Germanicus brought him is noted in Suet. Cl. 7. However, cf. Levick 1990, 44-45 for a qualification of the importance of ancestry for Nero’s and Germanicus’ popularity.
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Claudius to marry Agrippina and adopt Nero: their links to Augustus, Germanicus and the Julian line in general provided the emperor with much-needed dynastic reinforcement.1372

3.5.1 AUTHORITATIVE ANCESTORS?

Despite their important role in the legitimation of the historical Claudius’ reign and family, ancestors are mostly absent as positive role models or authorities in Tacitus’ extant Claudian narrative. Of course, this may partly be due to the loss of the early Claudian Books, where Claudius’ efforts to link himself to his Claudian relatives may have been described. Yet even after the introduction of Agrippina and Nero into the domus Caesars, their main assets in terms of kinship – Augustus and Germanicus, and the latter’s wives Livia and Agrippina – are hardly mentioned by name, and when their memory is invoked more indirectly, it is often in rather unfavourable contexts.

Germanicus and Agrippina

Unfortunately, Tacitus’ narration of the reign of Caligula, who certainly played up his descent from Germanicus, is no longer extant.1373 Nevertheless, Nero’s introduction in the Claudian Annals suggests that the memory of the celebrated general Germanicus was still a potent factor in his descendants’ popularity: this is what makes the people more inclined towards Nero than Britannicus at the Lusus Troiae (11.11.2). It is significant that Germanicus is evoked twice at the moment of Nero’s first introduction: once directly and explicitly – *inclinatio populi supererat ex memoria Germanici* – and once more implicit, through the snake story, where Germanicus is conjured up by being associated with Alexander the Great.1374 At the beginning of Book 12, the popularity of Germanicus benefits his offspring again, when Claudius chooses Agrippina as his new spouse on the basis of her Julian lineage, and because she would bring Germanicus’ grandson with her (12.2.3). After Agrippina’s marriage to Claudius, however, Germanicus is never named again.

1372 See above, notes 1101 and 1175.
Claudius is portrayed as resembling his brother in his lack of efficiency and relevant knowledge, but with more far-reaching and disastrous consequences; but this is an implicit comparison (see section 3.2.1). In Pallas’ argumentation in favour of Nero’s adoption, the boy is compared with Germanicus, but only indirectly. Later in Book 12, Tacitus connects Agrippina to (her pride in) her illustrious ancestors, including Germanicus – but he is not mentioned by name. As Nero is advanced and gains more and more priority over Britannicus in the matter of the succession, his ancestry is never stated as a reason for giving him precedence – his promotion at the expense of Britannicus seems solely due to his age and the efforts of his mother. As argued (section 3.2), this is part of a strategy of Tacitus to deny Claudius strategic motives for his marriage to Agrippina and advancement of Nero.

When Germanicus is conjured up in the Neronian Books, moreover, the context is mostly ominous. When Agrippina and Nero fall out, Agrippina threatens to take Britannicus to the Praetorian camp (and have him proclaimed emperor, presumably), invoking her descent from Germanicus as a stronger claim than the authorities of Burrus and Seneca. Indeed, in the next Book, when Nero considers having his mother executed by soldiers, Burrus asserts that the loyalty of the Praetorian Guard towards the domus Caesarum in general, and towards Germanicus in particular, is so strong they will not harm the latter’s descendant Agrippina. When Nero forces his wife Octavia to suicide on the false charges of adultery and revolution, she appeals to his mercy by invoking their shared ancestors the Germanici – Drusus the Elder and Germanicus. The hated prosecutor Suillius uses his quaestorship under Germanicus as a favourable contrast with Seneca’s alleged adultery with the latter’s daughter, while the Senate decrees to rename the month of June as Germanicus to detach it from connotations with the recent murders of...
Decimus and Lucius Silanus. Germanicus’ wife Agrippina the Elder is repeatedly conjured up both in the Claudian and Neronian narrative. Yet she is never named; instead she looms over the narrative through her daughter’s characterization, which is reminiscent of many aspects of the portrayal of her mother (see above, section 3.3.1).

Germanicus and Agrippina, then, are hardly mentioned by name in the Claudian, and even much of the Neronian, Annals, but echoes of them are present throughout the narrative. None of these resonances of Germanicus and Agrippina in the Claudian and Neronian Books, however, is unequivocally positive: his memory is invoked in the context of court intrigue, murder, deceit, and, most importantly perhaps, the disasters of Nero’s principate, while her qualities are turned into criminal distortions. Similarly, Nero shares his grandfather’s impetuosity, theatricality and even comitas, but with much more ruinous consequences. This may be seen as illustrating the extent to which the formerly glorious house of Germanicus has descended into perversion and bloodshed: ‘the people looked to the house of Germanicus for deliverance, and they found Nero’ – and Agrippina the Younger, we may add. The ominous characteristics of Germanicus and his wife Agrippina the Elder, already present in the Tiberian Books, are magnified to monstrous proportions in their last two descendants.

Augustus and Livia
Augustus, and the Julian line descendent from him, play an even less explicit role in the Claudian narrative. Agrippina’s and Nero’s Augustan/Julian ancestry is presented as Pallas’ main argument in favour of Claudius marrying Agrippina: not only would they enhance the status of Claudius’ house, it would also be a risk to allow

1381 13.42.3, 16.12.2: D. Silanus had been forced to suicide in 15.35.1-3, his nephew L. Silanus is executed in 16.7.1-9.2. Furneaux 1907 ad loc. notes that the name Germanicus does not necessarily refer to Nero’s grandfather (Germanicus was also part of Nero’s titulature), but Tacitus’ readers will nevertheless have been reminded of him.
1382 Pelling 2012, 284.
1383 Walker 1960, 128. Cf. Keitel 1977, 184: ‘Tacitus manipulates the Germanicus-motif to serve the purpose of a specific passage. Romance and pathos surround Germanicus and his family in Annals 1-6, where Tacitus plays them off against the jealous, suspicious Tiberius. But in Books 11-16, the heirs of Germanicus, Agrippina and Nero, finally come to power with disastrous consequences. For good reason they are the last of the Julio-Claudians.’
1384 Pelling 2012, 310.
Agrippina to decorate another *domus* with the *claritudo Caesarum*.\(^{1385}\) The name Augustus, however, is not mentioned; and after Claudius’ choice of Agrippina, he does not recur as ancestor of either mother or son, and is also omitted with reference to L. Silanus, whose most important asset – and point of rivalry with Nero – is precisely his Augustan descent (12.3.2). In fact, the status and legitimacy conferred by a link to Augustus is not brought up again until the very end of the Book, when it explains why Domitia Lepida, Nero’s aunt and as such Agrippina’s rival, believed her *claritudo* to be equal to that of Agrippina (12.64.2). Again, as in the case of Germanicus and Agrippina, this may be seen to downplay the Tacitean Claudius’ rational acting in using Agrippina and Nero to bolster his position and secure the succession. The more important role for Augustus in the Claudian narrative is that of an example for Claudius – an example to which the emperor fails to live up time after time (see above, section 3.2.1). Augustus’ wife Livia is evoked several times as well, when Claudius’ spouse Agrippina is likened to her great-grandmother (see above, 3.2.3); in contrast to Claudius, Agrippina does succeed in emulating her predecessor, but the result is far from positive.

In the Neronian Books, by contrast, a kinship connection with Augustus is represented as a major source of popularity, and hence a substantial threat to Nero. Of Marcus Silanus, brother of Lucius, Tacitus states that popular rumour considered him more suitable as emperor than Nero, partly because *quod tunc spectaretur, e Caesarum posteris: quippe et Silanus divi Augusti abnepos erat* (13.1.1), and he is killed because of that. His brother Decimus likewise meets his end on account of his Augustan descent: *mori adigitur, quia super Iuniae familiae claritudinem divum Augustum abavum ferebat* (15.35.1). Marcus’ son Lucius is depicted as a rival both to Nero and to the imperial contender C. Piso on the basis of his *eximia nobilitas* (15.52.2), *claritudo generis* (16.7.1) and *genus nobile* (16.7.2). Rubellius Plautus, son of Drusus the Younger’s daughter Julia and as such *per maternam originem pari ac Nero gradu a divo Augusto* (13.19.3), is likewise presented to Nero as a threat, and is described as enjoying popular favour: *omnium ore Rubellius Plautus celebra<ba>-tur, cui nobilitas per matrem ex Iulia familia* (14.22.1).\(^{1386}\) It is also in the Neronian Books that Augustus is described as Nero’s ancestor for the first time: in his at-

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\(^{1385}\) 12.2.3, where Agrippina and Nero are called *familiae <Iuliae> ... posteros*, while Agrippina’s *claritudo Caesarum* must at least partly refer to the founder of the dynasty.

\(^{1386}\) See also 14.57.1-59.4 and 16.23.1.
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tempt to persuade Nero to follow Augustan precedent Seneca calls him *abavus tuus* (14.53.3), and Nero responds to this with *abavus meus* (14.55.2). In the Neronian Books, then, Tacitus represents Augustan ancestry as being perceived – both by Nero and by society at large – as somehow providing his descendants with a right to rule.

Like Germanicus and Agrippina the Elder, Augustus and Livia do not function as positive ancestral examples or points of reference in the later *Annals*. While Augustus is repeatedly referred to in the Claudian narrative, he is not an ancestor, but an imperial example which Claudius fails to emulate. By contrast, Agrippina does succeed in rivalling and far surpassing Livia, aggravating the latter’s intrigues and crimes. The echoes are particularly dense at the end of Claudius’ reign and the beginning of Nero’s; and it is from the beginning of the Neronian *Annals* onwards that descent from Augustus comes to be perceived as a threat to the emperor and hence as a the cause of a certain death for its holders. With Nero’s accession, the Julio-Claudian dynasty has come full circle: from its founder Augustus, whose elaborate arrangements for the fortification of the dynasty are narrated at the beginning of the *Annals*, to his last lineal descendant, who will ruin all these dynastic plans by murdering the remaining relatives of the first emperor, including – eventually – himself. The fact that Augustus is evoked so forcefully precisely during the reign of the last member of his own family who is striving very hard to destroy what Augustus had built up is particularly ironic. Moreover, one may perhaps connect the sudden and strong attention to (the threat inherent in) Augustan ancestry in the Neronian Books to the Augustan parallels with which Nero’s rule was inaugurated. At his accession, Suetonius tells us, the young emperor expressed his intention to rule according to the principles of Augustus, and both Seneca and Calpurnius Siculus portray Nero’s reign as a new golden age.

By evoking Augustus so strongly, Tacitus may be emphasizing Nero’s failure to live up to these expectations.

3.5.2 BIOLOGICAL AND ADOPTIVE DESCENT

1387 Cf. also Suet. G. 1 on the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty being presaged by the death of Livia’s chickens and the withering of the laurel trees planted by her.
1388 Suet. Ner. 10.1 (note that Tacitus confines himself to the vague *consilia sibi et exempla capessendi egregii imperii memoravit* in 13.4.1); Sen. *Apocol.* 4; Calp.Sic. *Ecl.* 1.42-45, 4.5-8 on Nero’s accession starting a new Golden Age.
THE ROLE OF KINSHIP

The most important kinship relation in the Claudian Annals seems to be a link to the reigning emperor. Tacitus’ narrative – which only features Nero from Book 12 onwards, apart from his short appearance at the lusus Troiae (11.11-12) – implies that Nero only really becomes a potential successor to Claudius, or rival to the throne to Britannicus, once his link to Claudius has been established: after Claudius’ engagement to Agrippina. The importance of a kinship tie to Claudius can also be deduced from the ‘greeting anecdote’ reported by both Tacitus (12.41.3) and Suetonius. In both authors, the complaint to Claudius about Britannicus greeting Nero with his pre-adoptive name is concerned with the legitimacy of the boys’ kinship connections to the emperor – and thus indirectly with their right to succeed. In Tacitus’ version, Agrippina protests that Nero’s adoption is being spurned; in Suetonius, Nero tries to convince Claudius that Britannicus was subditivus, which can be translated as either ‘substituted’ (as in changeling) or ‘spurious’ (as in bastard). Descent from Germanicus, it seems, cannot compensate for legitimate membership of the imperial family, however important it may be as a reason for being included in the domus Caesarum. The question arises whether the narrative differentiates between Britannicus’ biological filiation and Nero’s adoptive descent from Claudius, with respect to the question of legitimacy of claims to power.

The tension between these two kinds of kinship appears remarkably implicit in the Claudian narrative, considering both the historical importance of Nero’s adoption, without which Nero would not have been a candidate for the throne, and the unusual preference for the adopted over the biological son. The issue of the different nature and value of kinship by blood and through adoption is addressed in the Tiberian Books, where the candidacy for the succession is similarly depicted as being between the biological son of the emperor and his adoptive child, who has the additional advantage of an Augustan connection (see above, section 1.4). Moreover, both Suetonius and Dio touch upon the validity of Nero’s claims to power with reference to his adoptive relationship to Claudius. Suetonius, in writing how Claudius comes to regret his adoption of Nero and starts to prepare Britannicus for the succession, makes the emperor remark ut tandem populus R. verum Caesarem habeat, in which verum probably contrasts Britannicus’ genuine and valid claim to power with that of Nero, who only obtained his position through the machinations. 

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1389 See more elaborately above, section 3.1.1.
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of his mother (Suet. Cl. 43.1). Earlier in his biography, Suetonius explicitly criticizes Claudius’ adoption of Nero, ‘as if it were not bad enough to adopt a stepson when he had a grown-up son of his own’ (Cl. 39.2). Indeed, Tacitus also notes, on the occasion of Tiberius’ adoption of Germanicus, how unusual it as for a man to adopt a son when he had a mature son of his own blood (1.3.5). In a similar vein, Claudius’ adoption of Nero elicits from Tacitus the comment triennio maiorem natu Domitium filio anteponit (12.25.2). Yet Dio is more explicit: the first chapter of his narrative of Nero’s reign states that ‘at the death of Claudius the rule in strict justice (κατὰ μὲν τὸ δικαίωτατον) belonged to Britannicus, who was a legitimate son of Claudius (γνήσιος γὰρ τοῦ Κλαυδίου παῖς ἐπεφύκει) and in physical development was in advance of his years; yet by law (ἐκ δὲ δὴ τοῦ νόμου) the power fell also to Nero because of his adoption.’

In his Claudian narrative, Tacitus provides hints that there might be a problem with the legitimacy of Nero’s claims to power, but he never makes these very explicit. The descriptions of Nero and Britannicus at the lusus Troiae are constructed analogously, with an ablative (imperator, adoptione) combined with a perfect participle (genitus, adscitus) denoting the source of their relation to Claudius, and a reference to the emperor (imperatore, imperium). The parallelism is, however, disrupted by the contrast between Britannicus’ consanguineous descent from the emperor, and Nero’s adoption by Claudius, which will furnish him not only with the traditional Claudian cognomen of Nero, but also with the imperium – both of which might be considered to be the prerogatives of the emperor’s biological offspring. Tacitus’ characterization of the stories about Nero and the snake(s) as fabulosa et externis miraculis adsimilata might be interpreted as representing Britannicus as the true heir to Claudius and Nero as ‘the false usurper, whose birth is recalled in theatrical terms’. As noted above, Nero’s advancement, and therefore the deterioration in Britannicus’ situation, is consistently associated with crime by Tacitus. Also with regard to the use of kin terms, Nero’s relationships to his adoptive relatives Claudius and Britannicus is played down. Tacitus never uses a kin term to denote the paternal bond between Claudius and Nero, while he does repeatedly use the words pater, filius, filia and liberi to refer to Claudius’ relationships with Britannicus, Octa-

1390  Dio 61.1.1-2.
1391  11.11.2; Santoro l’Hoir 2006, 96.
THE ROLE OF KINSHIP

via and Antonia. The only exception is Nero’s imitation of Claudius’ example at his accession – 12.69.2: *promissum donativo ad exemplum paternae largitionis* – where it is expedient for Nero to depict Claudius as his father, as the Praetorian cohorts were loyal to Claudius due to his large donative at his own accession in AD 41. Instead, when Nero is associated with a parent, it is always with Agrippina. Similarly, Britannicus and Nero are never called brothers, while Britannicus and L. Silanus are linked to their siblings by kin terms. By avoiding the use of kin terms to denote Nero’s relationships with Claudius and Britannicus, while explicitly placing those between Claudius and his adoptive children in the context of kinship through such terms, Tacitus may be seen to deny Nero’s adoptive connection to Claudius validity. Agrippina’s description of Britannicus as *veram paterni oris effigiem* (12.68.1) draws attention to the latter’s genuine kinship connection with his father, in contrast to that of Nero. Yet the utterance is clearly qualified as insincere, since Tacitus emphasizes the pretense (*velut dolore victa et solacia conquirens*) and continues to state that Agrippina is employing *variae artes* to keep the boy from leaving the bedroom. On two other potentially suitable occasions, Tacitus does not make a statement about the value of Nero’s adoption vis-à-vis Britannicus’ biological descent. The Tacitean Narcissus makes no reference to Britannicus’ biological descent from Claudius, and Tacitus concludes the Claudian Annals with Agrippina’s fear of popular resentment due to the preference of a stepson (*privignus*), not of an adoptive son, to the emperor’s *filius* – thus focusing on the contrast between blood relations and in-laws, not on the distinction between consanguineous and adoptive kinship. And finally, there is the last paragraph of the Claudian Annals, in which the repeated conjuring up of Britannicus raises questions with regards to the legitimacy of Nero’s succession; but no mention of blood or adoption appear there.

1392 Claudius/Britannicus: 6 times (11.32.2 *pater*; 11.38.3 *filius*; 12.25.2 *filius*; 12.41.3 *filius*; 12.65.3 *pater*; 12.66.1 *filius*; furthermore *paternis* in 12.68.2); Claudius/Octavia: 5 times (11.32.2 *pater*; 11.38.3 *filia*; 12.3.2 *filia*; 12.4.2 *filia*; 12.58.1 *filia*); Claudius/Antonia: 1 time (12.2.1 *filia*); furthermore they are denoted as *liberi* in 11.34.1, 11.34.3, 12.5.2 and 12.42.1.

1393 The parental relationship between Agrippina and Nero is denoted with a kin term 5 times in the Claudian Books (11.12.1 *mater*; 12.9.2 *mater*; 12.42.2 *mater*; 12.64.3 *filius*; 12.64.3 *mater*).

1394 Antonia and Octavia are called Britannicus’ *sorores* in 12.68.3; the sibling relation between L. Silanus and Junia Calvina in noted three times, due to the charge of incest cast on them (12.4.1: *soror* and *frater*; 12.8.1). The fraternal relationship between Nero and Britannicus is only referred to in 13.17.1: *antiquas fratrum discordias*.

1395 The term *sanguis*, occurring much more often in the Tiberian narrative (see section 2.4.1), is only used
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Whereas this tension between blood and adoption is remarkably absent and implicit in the Claudian Books, Tacitus explicitly addresses the issue in his Neronian narrative. To begin with, when Agrippina has fallen out with Nero and starts to support Britannicus, claiming that ‘Britannicus was now mature, the true and worthy stock for undertaking his father’s command, which an adopted scion was exercising through the injustices of his mother’.\textsuperscript{1396} This one sentence, which articulates the main objections to Nero’s succession and strongly resembles Dio’s statement, neatly summarizes the course of events in the previous Book: Britannicus – who, Tacitus implies, is perceived as the rightful heir to his father’s power – is replaced by an adoptive son on the basis of his older age and his mother’s machinations. Nero’s claims to power are negated: Britannicus’ biological descent from his father is associated with genuineness and worthiness (\textit{veram dignamque stirpem suscipiendo patris imperio}), while Nero’s adoptive status is characterized as something that has been implanted from outside (\textit{insitus et adoptivus}); in addition, the argument of Britannicus’ immaturity is dismissed by stating that he was already grown-up.\textsuperscript{1397} It is surely no coincidence that Tacitus focalizes these arguments – which are clearly valid within the logic of the narrative, as they accord with Tacitus’ representation of events, even if Tacitus himself might not agree with the values implied in them – through Agrippina: she has been presented as the character that is both most perceptive of the realities of power and court intrigues, and the most shrewd in turning that understanding to her own (and Nero’s) advantage. The following chapters contain several more references to Britannicus’ biological descent from Claudius and his ensuing right to the throne. For instance, at Nero’s order, Britannicus strikes up a poem, ‘in which it was indicated that he had been turned out of his paternal abode (\textit{sede patria}) and the supremacy (\textit{rebusque summis}). Hence there arose a pity all the more evident because night and its recklessness had removed dissembling’ (13.15.2). Also in the Claudian narrative, Britannicus’ fate had elicited pity, but only here is the \textit{miseratio} explicitly connected to his being deprived of what was justly his position. Later, when he narrates Nero’s murder of his brother, Tacitus the narrator calls Britannicus \textit{illum supremum Claudiorum sanguinem} (13.17.2);

\footnotesize{once in the Claudian Books (12.47.2), and not in relation to (a member of) the imperial family.}

\textsuperscript{1396} \ 13.14.2: \textit{adultum iam esse Britannicum, veram dignamque stirpem suscipiendo patris imperio, quod insitus et adoptivus per iniurias matris exerceret.}

\textsuperscript{1397} This is almost true: Britannicus would soon turn 14 and be eligible for adulthood; this is in fact one of the reasons for Nero’s decision to murder him: 13.15.1.
and this is immediately countered by the Tacitean Nero in an ensuing edict, where he claims to be ‘a princeps who alone survived from a family born to supreme elevation’ (13.17.3: principem, qui unus superesset e familia summum ad fastigium genita) and as such tries to affirm his true descent from Claudius.

There are, then, references to the problem of Nero’s adoptive relation to Claudius and hence his disputed claim to imperial power in the Claudian narrative, but they are not explicit. Instead of providing direct authorial comment, Tacitus prefers to allude and let his representation speak for itself. It is only in the Neronian Books, in the chapters surrounding the murder of Britannicus, that the issue is directly addressed, and Nero’s right to the emperorship is questioned as a result. Does Tacitus want to suggest that, even though Britannicus had been completely marginalized even before Nero’s accession, he was still an actual threat to Nero’s position when the latter had become emperor? Perhaps the answer lies in the same motive which makes Tacitus withhold criticism on Nero’s qualities in the Claudian Books, only to report it forcefully after Nero’s accession (see above, section 3.1.4). In order to focus on Agrippina’s scheming as the driving, unstoppable force behind Nero’s advancement, Tacitus downplays any resistance or criticism, deferring it until after the goal has been achieved.

In the Claudian Books, then, kinship is not a very prominent theme, despite – or perhaps precisely because – the unquestionably dynastic nature of the Principate by the time Claudius had come to power. Imperial ancestors are strikingly absent, and when they are conjured up, their evocation has unfavourable or portentous connotations, or serves to underline how much their descendants and successors have degenerated from their standards and debased their qualities. The issue of the competing claims to power of Nero and Britannicus on the basis of their respective ancestries is remarkably implicit in the Claudian narrative. It is only in the Neronian Books that kinship starts to play a role of note, with Augustan ancestry becoming a fatal asset, and Nero’s right to the throne being explicitly questioned with reference to his adoptive descent from the previous emperor. This downplaying of kinship in the Claudian Annals may be connected to Tacitus’ desire to focus on Agrippina as the leading character of the narrative, whereas the sudden return to prominence of kinship relations in the Neronian Books may be seen in the light of the irony of Nero failing to live up to the example of Augustus, and destroying the dynasty which had been carefully built up by his great-great-grandfather.
Conclusion

The question of imperial succession in the Claudian Books revolves around Agrippina’s efforts to advance her son Nero and secure the emperorship for him. Formally, of course, there are two heirs apparent: Claudius’ biological son Britannicus and his adoptive son Nero. The Principate is depicted as having become so dynastic that there are no contenders for the throne from outside the imperial family: the only other succession candidate is Claudius’ son-in-law L. Silanus, a descendant of Augustus – but Tacitus deliberately avoids mentioning him in the context of the succession, so as to concentrate on Nero and Britannicus. These two boys are continually paralleled throughout the narrative, but from their first mention in the extant text onwards, it is clear that Nero will be the one to succeed to Claudius. Tacitus systematically records the steps in Nero’s advancement and Britannicus’ accompanying marginalization, and uses several techniques to make Nero’s rise to imperial power seem swift and inevitable. Hardly any protest against his advancement are recorded by Tacitus, and Nero’s perhaps doubtful right to rule on the basis of his adoptive relation to Claudius, when compared to Britannicus’ consanguineous descent from the emperor, is not questioned explicitly in the Claudian Books.

Nero’s relentless promotion by his mother Agrippina dominates the entire narrative, to the extent that the last Claudian Book of the *Annals* is effectively a prelude to Nero’s succession. Using a wide array of literary techniques, Claudius is characterized as essentially weak, passive, ignorant and subordinate to his freedmen, Agrippina and her supporters. His agency in the succession question is minimized by Tacitus in comparison with the parallel sources, and he is denied any rational thinking with regard to the transmission of imperial power: his marriage to Agrippina is a result of his lusts, while the rise of Nero is due to Agrippina’s efforts – the
highly likely explanation that Claudius himself planned this out of dynastic considerations is indirectly refuted by Tacitus. The central figure of Book 12 is Agrippina, whose agency is magnified compared to the other ancient accounts, and whose desire for power is emphasized in her portrayal. She is the driving force behind the narrative; the Senate, people and army are depicted as relatively passive and as manipulated by her and her helpers. Even the candidates for succession themselves play no role of note: the agency, visibility and characterization of Nero and Britannicus is downplayed by Tacitus. The result of all this is that Nero’s eventual status as sole successor at the expense of his adoptive brother is not attributed to any personal qualities of Nero’s, nor to deliberate strategy by Claudius, but partly to Nero’s descent from Germanicus, and mostly to the scheming of Agrippina.

But Agrippina’s intrigues are made possible by the passivity of the Senate, people, army, and, most of all, by the weakness of the emperor himself. As such, Tacitus’ depiction of the transmission of imperial power in the Claudian Books, and in particular the locations of agency in this matter, serve as a sharp critique of Claudius for allowing himself to be dominated by women and freedmen, and consequently for indirectly exposing Rome to Nero’s later misdeeds. Tacitus’ censure of the emperor is made all the more damning in several ways. Tacitus’ Claudian narrative is cast in a ‘Saturnalian’ reversal of power and gender roles: Claudius, contrary to what would be expected from a man who holds supreme power, is portrayed as submissive to everyone, while women and former slaves are seen to hold real power, command the emperor and determine state business. Agrippina’s characterization, furthermore, recalls the literary topoi of the dux femina and the wicked noverca, imbuing her with all the negative connotations attached to those types. The struggle for power at the imperial court is emphasized by being mirrored in the narrative of provincial affairs surrounding the episodes at Rome. Moreover, both Claudius and Agrippina recall various other characters in the earlier Annals, but in all cases, they represent a degenerated ‘reincarnation’ of their narrative predecessors. Tacitus’ Tiberius may have been cruel and dissimulating, but at least he possessed insight and skill, and was in control, and when he did submit to someone else’s influence, it was to Sejanus, a man – whereas Claudius is ordered around by his wives and freedmen. Vitellius was sluggish and gluttonous, but he did have the courage to try to abdicate to prevent further damage to the state. The ignorant Galba, despite his flaws, had some good qualities, even if they did not match the times. And Claudius’ replaying of some of his brother’s features has wider repercussions than in the case of Ger-
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manicus. An unfavourable comparison is also made by Valerius Asiaticus before he commits suicide: ‘he would have perished more honorably from the astuteness of Tiberius or from an impulse of C. Caesar than falling to womanly foul play and the immoral mouth of Vitellius’ (11.3.2) – his predecessors were bad, but Claudius is worse. The Tacitean Claudius, then, is depicted as replicating the worst traits of his narrative predecessors, but in an even graver fashion, and with far more serious consequences for the state. The same applies to his wife Agrippina, who incorporates features of Tacitus’ Livia, Messalina and the Elder Agrippina, in all cases magnifying, distorting and worsening the most evil characteristics of these women. The ancestors of Claudius and Agrippina do not serve as positive examples in the Claudian narrative; their role is to highlight how bad everything has become. As a result, Tacitus’ representation of the succession issue in the reign of Claudius contributes to the theme of progressive decline which runs through the whole of the Histories and the Annals.\(^{1398}\)

But Tacitus’ depiction of the transmission of imperial power in the Claudian Annals also has implications for his views on the Principate more in general. As stated, Tacitus does not indicate any alternatives to Nero and Britannicus, even though the boys are clearly as yet incapable of administering the Empire. They are not credited with any real qualities except for their imperial ancestry; instead, their youth is repeatedly emphasized. As such, Tacitus suggests that the system of hereditary succession had been so well established by now that, as a consequence, the state is left to the discretion of practically inexperienced youths. Moreover, even if he does not explicitly address the issue in the Claudian Books, Tacitus indirectly raises questions with regard to the legitimacy of Nero’s succession, which he implies is brought about by criminal means, maternal intrigues and the suppression of the person whose blood entitled him to rule. Ability to govern the state is not a prerequisite for the emperorship anymore; the transmission of imperial power has become a power game for those at court. Osgood’s conclusion will have appealed

\(^{1398}\) Cf. Keitel 1977, 25-26: ‘Through this system of equivalences built out of allusion, foreshadowing and cross-reference, Tacitus persuades the reader that the principate, and Roman morality with it, is in a state of chronic decline, and second that the principate remains essentially the same because a similar pathology can be detected in the leading personalities and events of each reign. Scholars have for the most part viewed Claudius’ rule as a transition to Nero. They have not looked back to the trends in Tiberius’ reign which worsened under Claudius. Through cross-reference within the Annals Tacitus establishes that Claudius’ rule does represent a decline from Tiberius’ as well as a forecast of even worse to come under Nero.’
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to Tacitus as well, we may presume: ‘that a still unproved adolescent could be considered the best choice for a position whose powers were not well-defined showed the limitations of the emerging principate’. ¹³⁹⁹

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Contested Successions
If there is one thing that Tacitus’ representation of imperial succession in his *Histories* and *Annals* highlights, it is the near-continuous struggle for imperial power in the Roman world and, consequently, the fierce contestation of its transmission. In his writings, Tacitus presents the Principate as an essentially accepted political system, and the emperor as the recognized sovereign head of state; very few characters in his narrative still talk about the possibilities of restoring the Republic. The conflicts which spill from the pages of Tacitus’ histories are concerned with who should be the holder of that supreme power: how should imperial power be passed on, which body or individual has the right to choose or designate the future emperor, and on the basis of which criteria. In the absence of any formal method of passing on imperial power, every new case of succession has the potential to further entrench current practice – or to dangerously undermine it.\textsuperscript{1400}

The very first imperial succession – that of Tiberius, described in the opening chapters of the *Annals* – is depicted as revealing the Principate as an hereditary monarchy, and Tiberius’ own arrangements for the succession confirm the essentially dynastic nature of the Principate, as Tacitus perceives of it. Imperial power appears to be a family property, to be passed down within the imperial family, and to be inherited by successive generations of descendants of the first princeps Augustus. As the Tacitean Galba puts it in the *Histories*, the emperorship was ‘the heritage, so to speak, of one family’ (1.16.1). Yet as time passes, ever more (implicit) rules are broken, and the lack of an official system of succession leads to growing confusion over the ways in which power is to be passed on. Caligula is murdered, and the Praetorian Guard acclaims Claudius as his successor, demonstrating just how deeply ingrained the principle of dynastic continuity was, for Claudius had been deliberately kept away from public life by all previous emperors on the grounds of mental and physical incapacities. But if emperors could be replaced that easily and with violence, and if membership of the imperial family was enough to make a man princeps, regardless of any qualities he might or might not possess, what was next? The part of the *Annals* which deals with Claudius’ accession is no longer extant,

\textsuperscript{1400} Cf. also Griffin 1984, 190: ‘there was no recognized mechanism for election, no agreed rules of eligibility, only a procedure for conferring powers. The weakness and danger inherent in the very theory of the Principate could not be better revealed. If any ruler approved by SPQR was legitimate, however his selection had come about, then no Princeps need be tolerated for long. Continual armed usurpations could be justified on constitutional grounds. It is in this sense that Mommsen was right to describe the Principate as ‘not only in practice, but in theory, an autocracy tempered by legally permanent revolution.’

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but Tacitus will certainly have seized the opportunity for sharp comment. As one scholar phrases the problem: ‘A secret of empire was out: a Caesar could be made other than a Julius. And, it could be asked, if Claudius could have this name – or title – why not somebody else?’\footnote{1401} The decline continues, and becomes more publicly visible, when Claudius marries his own niece, Agrippina murders her husband to get her son on the throne, and Nero cold-bloodedly has nearly all of his remaining relatives killed, including his mother, adoptive brother and sister. Imperial power is acquired and maintained through crime, incest, manipulation and deceit, but without any identifiable qualities. The escalation of this lack of direction of the succession is complete when Galba becomes the first emperor to be created as a result of military violence, and without any involvement of the Senate or people of Rome: ‘the secret of empire was now disclosed, that an emperor could be made elsewhere than at Rome’ (1.4.2) – and on the basis of nothing but brute force.

To increase the insecurity over the location and direction of power, Tacitus makes various Junii Silani and Pisones appear throughout the *Histories* and the *Annals* as theoretical contenders for power, embodying ‘virtual dynasties’ which cast doubt upon the natural supremacy of the Julio-Claudian and Flavian families.\footnote{1402} In addition, he portrays the reigns of these two imperial dynasties as the continuation of the civil wars that preceded their rise, but in an internalized form, continuing to make war on their citizens and tearing apart the state, while ostensibly providing peace and stability.\footnote{1403} Imperial power in the *Histories* and the *Annals* is the object of ardent desire and incessant strife, and, as an inevitable consequence, its transmission elicits uninterrupted contestation.

CONTESTED SUCCESSIONS

This contestation has been the perspective from which this thesis has examined Tacitus’ representation of imperial succession in the first century AD. In writing about this issue, Tacitus draws attention to several aspects of the transmission of power. What kind of system is preferable: a dynastic method of near-automatic inheritance by a kinsman, or a system in which a successor is consciously chosen on the basis of particular qualities? And what qualities determine the choice of succes-

\footnote{1401} Osgood 2011, 31.  
\footnote{1402} See O’Gorman 2006 on the virtual dynasty of the Pisones; cf. Kragelund 2002. On Silani appearing alongside and/or challenging the Julii and the Claudii, see above, note 956.  
\footnote{1403} Keitel 1984; O’Gorman 1995; Joseph 2012a.
sor, and to what extent do these guarantee good emperorship? Who decides about the transmission of imperial power: the emperor himself, those around him, the Senate, the people, the military? Tacitus’ writings may be seen as an extended exploration of these issues, in which he brings to the fore various possible answers and solutions, questioning, assessing and commenting on these. This thesis has tried to unravel and interpret Tacitus’ representation, starting from the assumption that his depiction of imperial succession in his historical works can shed more light on his views on imperial succession, on the individual emperors, and on the emperorship and the political system of the Principate in general. I would like to propose that Tacitus’ representation of the transmission of imperial power in the first century of the Principate can be seen to carry meaning on all these different levels.

Most basically, the way he depicts the matter of imperial succession under various emperors expresses his views on the different ways this issue is handled. Just like Griffin argues that ‘each reign [in the *Annals*] has certain distinctive feature emphasized, which teach us different things about the Principate’, so every case of contested succession seems to highlight a different aspect about the process of the transmission of imperial power, and in particular the problems Tacitus perceives in it.¹⁴⁰⁴ The narrative frame with which Tacitus endows his depiction of Galba’s adoption of Piso explains the failure both of the adoption and of Galba as an emperor. It makes clear that the system of succession which Galba proposes, the rhetoric with which he does so, the criteria he uses to select his successor, and the way he presents him are all fundamentally out of touch with his times, in conflict with his professed principles, and very imprudent in the situation as sketched in the surrounding narrative. Tacitus’ representation of the succession to Galba, moreover, has a broader function for the theme of this thesis. Considering Galba’s adoption of Piso and the emperor’s accompanying speech in the *Histories* as programmatic for Tacitus’ thinking and writing about succession, I have interpreted the adoption episode as Tacitus’ way of ‘opening up’ the discussion about the transmission of imperial power. He has his Galba highlight the aspects relevant to the issue: the different systems, criteria for selecting an emperor, questions of agency. In the remainder of the narrative, Tacitus provides different reactions to these questions, and encourages his readers to reflect on these, for instance by using various focalizers to comment on the matter, by qualifying the standing of Galba’s arguments.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Griffin 1995, 43.
through his characterization of the emperor, or by including speeches by Piso, Otho and Mucianus mirroring that of Galba in subject matter, but introducing different viewpoints. In treating the first case of imperial succession as to some degree exemplary, I have argued, Tacitus sets the scene, establishes the questions he will proceed to discuss, prepares the readers for (their interpretation of) his treatment of later transmissions of power, and invites them to think about the implications of this for their own time.

The following two chapters each elaborate an aspect of the succession question as brought up by Tacitus in the Galban narrative of the *Histories*. The chapter on the Tiberian hexad of the *Annals* deals with the criteria employed by different individuals and groups for assessing suitability for the emperorship: it sees Tacitus’ depiction of the succession to Tiberius as raising questions about what makes a man *capax imperii*, according to whom, and whether rightly so or not. In particular, it investigates the role of kinship, and the value of different kinds of kin relations, in determining the actual course of succession and various focalizers’ evaluations of future successors. I have argued that Tacitus deliberately creates a discrepancy between the reported perceptions of the two heirs apparent, Germanicus and Drusus the Younger, and their actual behaviour, and that, by implication, he questions the relevance of the criteria by which both candidates, as well as the current emperor Tiberius, are judged. Portraying the succession as fundamentally dynastic, and descent from Augustus as the marker of high distinction, Tacitus suggests how this preoccupation with kinship may lead to the disregard of actual ability as a significant requirement for Rome’s future emperors.

Tacitus’ depiction of the succession to Claudius, finally, is interpreted as examining questions of agency with regard to the transmission of power. Tacitus deliberately enhances Agrippina’s role in the advancement of her son Nero, plays up Claudius’ passivity, ignorance and stupidity, draws attention to the slavish sycophancy and indifference of the Senate, people and military, and minimizes the roles of the potential successors Nero and Britannicus. In doing so, I argue, he suggests that Nero’s elevation to the status of sole successor has nothing to do with any of Nero’s qualifications – let alone suitability for governing the state – but is entirely the result of Claudius’ weakness, which allows Agrippina and her supporters to effortlessly promote their candidate at the expense of one who may be considered the rightful heir to Claudius’ position. By displaying a passivity unworthy of a Roman emperor, Claudius permits his wife and freedmen – groups of people otherwise not
deemed capable or worthy of any power – to direct the future of Rome: a role reversal with dramatic consequences for the state.

THE EMPERORS AND THEIR ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SUCCESSION

In describing the three selected cases of imperial succession, Tacitus often hints at his own – mostly critical – view on the extent to which the various candidates for the succession may be considered *capax imperii*. However, Tacitus also uses his depiction to convey judgment on the emperors who arrange these successions – on their character, government and suitability for the emperorship, as expressed through the way they organize the future transmission of their power. Moreover, he evaluates the behaviour of the other main constituents of Roman society: the Senate, people and military. He may be seen to assess their conduct through the three aforementioned aspects of the succession: the system, the criteria of selection, and the agency of the parties involved. To start with the last: the role of the various groups in society in deciding on the succession is telling about the general balance of power. Both the Tacitean Galba and Claudius are depicted as being influenced or directed in their choices by figures who are either incapable or unworthy of possessing such power (such as Agrippina and Pallas) or whom the surrounding narrative has shown to be unreliable (such as Laco). The result is that both emperors are portrayed as weak and lacking authority. Tacitus’ Tiberius, on the other hand, occupies the other end of the spectrum: despite (what Tacitus presents as) the widespread predilection for Germanicus compared to the other candidate Drusus, Tiberius is not persuaded to give his adoptive son a preferential treatment – he even berates people for their excessive attachment to Germanicus by edict. As a consequence, he is shown as a much stronger figure: not swayed by the groups which Tacitus depicts as lacking insight or concern for the greater good.

Indeed, the Senate, the people and the military are not given a particularly favourable treatment in the narrative: the degree to which they are represented as displaying independent action and thought diminishes progressively over (historical) time. Although the senators are already adulatory and inactive in the Tiberian hexad, they become more and more servile and passive over the course of the years, acting as ‘a comic opera chorus’ in the Claudian Books, and being nearly invisible and neglected by Galba in the first part of the *Histories*. The people hardly fare better as regards agency: they are completely blinded by Germanicus’ charisma and fail to
see his less-than-ideal behaviour, they show only faint signs of doubt or resistance with regard to Nero’s rise at the expense of Britannicus, and do not play any role of note in the Galban narrative, except for uttering irrelevant criticisms. The soldiers, finally, are somewhat more active, particularly in the Histories, where they are most often the focalizers of views on Galba and the succession, and have a decisive role in the course of events. Also in the Tiberian Books, their reactions to Germanicus’ speech in the mutinies is indicative. However, all three groups are depicted as primarily concerned with their own interests, rather than exhibiting care for the state, and none of them is credited with correct insight or judgment. All groups are censured, and particular contempt is reserved for the two classes of people which are not traditionally meant to hold power – women and (former) slaves – who are seen to exercise ever more influence, but also to display a better understanding of the political realities.

Individuals and groups in the narrative are also indirectly characterized by the criteria which they are represented as employing. In the Histories, Galba’s preference for a successor with a virtuous character and distinguished ancestry marks him as unrealistic, old-fashioned and mismatched to his context, whereas the soldiers’ and people’s fondness for Otho’s luxuria, demagoguery and prodigality indirectly casts them as morally corrupt. The value attached by almost everyone to the blood of Augustus and Germanicus in the whole of the Tiberian and Claudian Annals makes them seem short-sighted, particularly from the privileged viewpoint of Tacitus and his readers, aware of the disasters to spring from their line of descendants. Another constant criterium is outward appearance: all emperors and successors in the Histories and the Annals are at least once judged on the basis of their looks, with youth and beauty being preferred to age and physical deformations. Tacitus’ disapproval of this criterion is brought out clearly in additions such as ut est mos volgi (Hist. 1.7.3). Most evident, however, is the near-universal preference for dynastic succession – a preference which Tacitus suggests is often at odds with the selection of the most suitable candidate.

This is brought out best in the extent to which alternatives to members of the imperial family are considered, and hence the degree to which a dynastic course of succession is represented as inevitable. In the first four Books of the Annals, Germanicus and Drusus are the only heirs apparent, chosen on the basis of their kinship with the emperor: succession is depicted as firmly dynastic. Only later in the Tiberian hexad, after both of his sons have died, Tacitus has Tiberius consider choos-
ing a successor from outside his own family due to the weak ‘internal candidates’ – but care for his and his family’s reputation prevails over care for the state, and he discards the idea. This choice, together with the disregard shown to the *capaces imperii*, brought up as theoretical alternatives, is indicative of the deeply dynastic nature of the Principate as perceived by Tacitus, and of the potentially harmful consequences of this preoccupation with dynastic succession. But at least Tiberius is shown to be aware of the weakness of a dynastic system when he signals the lack of ability and of the base character traits of some of the intra-familial successors. Claudius, by contrast, does not consider any personal qualities or abilities at all, but is depicted as choosing purely on the basis of personal affection and subordination to others. He is portrayed as not questioning the principle of inheritance: there is no question of the emperorship being passed on to anyone else than the emperor’s sons. The only uncertainty concerns which of these two will succeed, but this is quickly dispensed with as well, when Nero’s rise to power is presented in terms of inevitability. Here, then, it is the complete absence of any alternative to dynastic succession which makes a point. In the case of Galba, on the other hand, alternative candidates are plentiful – understandably, considering the newly revealed *arcanum* that anyone with enough financial and military support could make a bid for power. The abundance of contenders here draws attention to the utter lack of procedures and criteria for arranging the transmission of power. Galba tries to take the state’s interests to heart, but fails due to a lack of insight; Tiberius shows insight but wavers between the greater good and his own reputation; and Claudius is just generally astray.

A system of dynastic succession, then, seems to be taken for granted in the *Annals*, after Galba had tried to change this in the *Histories*, but failed miserably. The two narratives clearly show the force of dynastic succession and the continued potency of the blood of Augustus; but whereas Tacitus suggests that a method of inheritance neglects the qualities of the successors, he does not endorse Galba’s attempt to institute a selective system either. The qualities of the candidate, he may be seen to imply, matter more than the way his succession is brought about: dynastic succession may provide the Empire with a Nero, but deliberately choosing a Piso is effectively not much better. And whereas Vespasian seized power by the illegitimate means of armed force and lacked illustrious ancestry, he is the only emperor to be credited with improvement by Tacitus (1.50.4). Tacitus, then, does not provide a clear solution to the vexed question of the best method of succession; being the
political pragmatist that he is, he emphasizes the importance of specific individual qualities over any fixed system.\textsuperscript{1405}

**IMPERIAL SUCCESSION AND THE PRINCIPIATE**

The recurrence of certain features of Tacitus’ representation of imperial succession is suggestive about his view of the political system of the Principate. For Tacitus’ account exhibits a striking degree of repetitiveness: characters in the narrative are represented as replicating certain traits and replaying particular actions of their narrative predecessors, and several situations and kinds of behaviour recur repeatedly. Germanicus’ theatricality foreshadows that of his grandson Nero; the Elder Agrippina’s political ambition and temperament is inherited by her daughter Agrippina the Younger, whose character and actions are also reminiscent of those of Livia and Messalina; the behaviour of Piso and his wife Plancina in the East is very similar to that of Germanicus and his spouse Agrippina in Germany; Claudius (unsuccessfully) imitates Augustus and exhibits the same lack of knowledge about the real world as his brother Germanicus; and the Tacitean Germanicus himself resembles Tacitus’ Galba and Arminius in outdatedness, while at the same time evoking Scipio and Alexander the Great. Partly, this may have something to do with the Roman perception of type-like or ‘integrated’ characters, with interrelated traits.\textsuperscript{1406} Partly, it is a literary device, inviting a comparison and likening of the two persons.\textsuperscript{1407}

However, it is not just characters which recur; a similar repetition of situations and types of behaviour takes place: intra-familial conflicts over power and succession reappear in every generation; the supposed rivalry of Germanicus and Drusus is continued by their sons; domineering wives and mothers promoting their sons at all costs return in various reigns, as do ageing helpless emperors and passive \textit{principes} dominated by their advisers; and the candidates for the succession always come in pairs of highly contrasting personalities. There is so much replaying in Tacitus’ narrative that, at times, the identities of the individual figures and the particularities of the situation seem to matter less than the patterns of which they form a part. It is this repetitiveness itself, I would argue, which constitutes Tacitus’ point: the fact that the Principate elicits – or perhaps generates – the same kind of individu-

\textsuperscript{1405} Cf. Syme 1958, 208: ‘The quality of rulers mattered more than any theory or programme.’

\textsuperscript{1406} Cf. Pelling 1990a.

\textsuperscript{1407} Cf. Foubert 2010b.
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als, character traits, situations and models of behaviour over and over again. This endless repetition suggests a certain inevitability: regardless of the starting point, the political system of imperial rule, and the absolute nature of imperial power, will always have the same effect. It will always bring forth Agrippinas who will transgress boundaries in their hunger for power, Galbas and Germanicus who are doomed to fail because they are no match for the times they live in, Caligulas and Neros whose characters and young age will be corrupted by sole power, and Claudius and Galba whose ignorance and passivity will be exploited by ruthless advisers. So while the individuals in Tacitus’ histories are certainly culpable of their crimes and weaknesses, the fact that history continues to repeat itself suggests that the system of the Principate itself, and in particular its mechanics for the transmission of its supreme power, has some serious flaws. In this sense, Tacitus’ Histories and Annals really do offer a ‘pathology of despotism’, as Vessey calls it: they illustrate the inevitable course of domination, and the inescapably corruptive force of absolute power, both on its holder and on those around him (or her).

The repetition inherent in the imperial succession and the Principate at large has one important constant: its increasing deterioration. ‘The Rome of the Annals is rotten with fear and corruption. In each successive book the despotism becomes more harsh, the rule more servile, the profiteering freedmen and informers more despicable, the few good men more helpless.’ What Tacitus offers his readers in the Annals is what Keitel calls a ‘picture of the progressive decay of the early Principate, attributable in part to the declining quality of its rulers’: a recurrence of individuals and events which gradually escalates, until it climaxes in the reign of Nero – and perhaps Domitian, in the lost parts of the Histories.

The latter part of the Annals sees Claudius, Agrippina and Nero embodying and replaying the combined worst features and deeds of their narrative predecessors, with far graver consequences. Traits which had been excusable or relatively innocent before, now come to be dangerous. Germanicus’ lack of insight impacted only himself, but Claudius’ ignorance leaves the Roman state with Nero; the Elder Agrippina’s ambition was mitigated by the love for her husband, but the Younger’s desire for power leads her to murder her spouse. Relationships worsen, and roles are reversed. Ti-

1408 Vessey 1971, 391.
1409 Walker 1960, 4.
berius was portrayed as a satirist, while Claudius becomes an object of satire. Tiberius was in control of his *domus* and was able to keep the Elder Agrippina in check; Claudius is dominated by her Younger version and his freedmen. Germanicus and Drusus had been on good terms, despite everything; Nero murders Britannicus without qualms. The reactions become more callous, the crimes more explicit. Tiberius grudgingly tolerated his mother’s overbearing influence; Nero murders her out of irritation. Tacitus’ hints about Livia’s complicity in intra-familial crimes had been implicit; Agrippina the Younger’s guilt in several murders is manifest. Even the characters in the narrative themselves signal the deterioration, when L. Arruntius predicts the crimes of Caligula in Book 6 on the basis of Tiberius’ degeneration, and Valerius Asiaticus, looking back at the start of Book 11, noting the progressive decline in the emperors, states that ‘he would have perished more honorably from the astuteness of Tiberius or from an impulse of C. Caesar than falling to womanly foul play and the immoral mouth of Vitellius’ (11.3.2). ‘[T]he pattern of events is similar, the character of the participants has worsened’, the exception being Vespasian, the only emperor to have changed for the best during the course of his reign (*Hist.* 1.50.4).\footnote{Keitel 1981, 214.}

The struggle for, and wielding of, imperial power, has ever more destructive consequences for the emperors themselves, their successors, their rivals, their victims. Tacitus endows his narrative of Rome’s first imperial dynasty with distinctly regal overtones, allusions to the royal house of the Atreids, and tragic storylines, themes and characteristics. The Principate is not just an hereditary monarchy, in Tacitus’ presentation; in the case of the Julio-Claudians, it is one that is plagued by incessant intra-familial strife. Notably, Tacitus consistently represents the question of the succession as a choice between two candidates: Piso and Otho, Drusus and Germanicus, Nero and Britannicus, and probably also Titus and Domitian in the later Books of the *Histories*. He downplays or even entirely omits other individuals whom the parallel sources mention as real contenders, such as Dolabella, Titus, or Silanus. The two candidates are often given contrasting characterizations, and there is a clear difference in popularity between the two. This deliberate duality evokes the trope of fraternal strife: the *solita fratribus odia* (4.60.3) and the well-known exemplars of these *antiquae fratrum discordiae* (13.17.1), Romulus and Remus, Atreus and Thyestes, Eteocles and Polyneices, Jugurtha and his adoptive...
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brothers – giving the imperial succession ominous connotations. The indivisibility of supreme power, and the violent discord inherent in it, is remarked upon several times, and is implicit in the Atreid evocations and the tragic scheme of the *Annals*, played out while the members of the *domus regnatrix* eliminate each other in their conflicts over the succession, until Nero’s suicide puts an end to the ancestral curse. But this is not the end to the fights over imperial power – they only change their focus, and start to be directed outwards, finding their expression in a series of civil wars. Tacitus’ account of these renewed struggle over the succession, the *Histories*, is fittingly characterized by its epic flavour and allusions.\(^{1412}\) And the description of the following Flavian dynasty suggests that, like their Julio-Claudian predecessors, the emperors continue the civil wars under their outwardly peaceful reigns. As such, Tacitus questions the idea of the Principate as necessary to put an end to these destructive conflicts, and encourages the reader to reflect on whether anything has really changed – again, inviting reflections of the ‘what if’-type. In a way, as I hope to have shown, the problems surrounding the imperial succession may be considered to epitomize the faults which Tacitus perceives in the Principate as a system: the corruption of those in power, the lack of senatorial freedom and agency, the nepotism inherent in dynastic succession, the hypocrisy and intrigue.

REPRESENTING IMPERIAL SUCCESIONS

In Tacitus’ history of the first century of the Principate, the issue of imperial succession, and the related questions of the importance of consanguinity and dynastic continuity, play a remarkably large role. This in itself is significant, considering the context in which Tacitus was writing: during the reign of the very first emperor coming to power through the novel route of extra-familial adoption, on the basis of criteria other than kinship. The fact that Tacitus’ narrative repeatedly draws attention to the potency of blood ties, in particular consanguineous descent from Augustus and Germanicus, cannot be disconnected from the general interest in the value of kinship which must have been present in the Trajanic period. Trajan, it may be remembered, despite owing his position to extra-familial adoption, made efforts to raise the public profile of his biological family and to create a visibly dynastic image of his house – not very long after the Roman state had suffered from the tyranny of the worst product which the system of dynastic succession had brought forth,

\(^{1412}\) I would like to thank Marco van der Schuur for this suggestion.
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Domitian. The importance and meaning of different kinds of kin relations will have been a topic of discussion among the upper classes.

This preoccupation is reflected in the literature of the late-Neronian, Flavian and Trajanic ages, with its attention to unusual and problematic family relations, and the inversion of the traditionally positive ancestral examples (Seneca’s Thyestes, Oedipus and Phaedra, the Octavia, the Flavian epics of Statius, Valerius Flaccus and Silius Italicus, and the many extant declamationes), its interest in genealogy (Suetonius’ and Plutarch’s biographies, the Liber Pontificalis, various succession lists) and, of course, its meditations on imperial succession (Pliny the Younger’s Panegyricus). As such, Tacitus’ writings on the transmission of imperial power in the first century AD do not just convey his view on the emperors and their methods of succession in that particular period, they also contribute to an on-going contemporary debate about imperial power and its transmission. As usual, his take on the matter is far from straightforward and uncomplicated. Tacitus does not take a firm stance with regard to Trajan’s accession and reign – indeed, considering his successful political career under that same emperor, the interpretation of his works as (either veiled or direct) criticism of Trajan seems unlikely. Rather, by drawing attention to various possibilities and views, he encourages reflection on the matter in general.

It could seem unsatisfactory that this thesis does not provide unequivocal interpretations of Tacitus’ views; yet this is inherent to the subtlety with which Tacitus expresses himself. As has become clear, the degree of directness with which the historian conveys his own opinion on a topic varies: sometimes, he inserts authorial remarks unambiguously articulating his opinion; at times, he questions without verdict, either directly, or by encouraging the audience to confront different representations of perceptions; most often, he invites his readers to consider and judge the matter for themselves, while providing some hints of his own interpretation. As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, direct and explicit comment is only the crudest, and the rarest, way in which Tacitus communicates his views: more frequently, he employs a variety of literary techniques to suggest and insinuate – from narrative structure, scale of treatment, conspicuous omission, and playing with rhythm, flashbacks and foreshadowing, to strategic use of diction and grammatical constructions, significant juxtaposition, allusion, and contrasting focalizations.

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Writing in a time in which doublespeak was of necessity omnipresent, Tacitus has perfected the art of innuendo, building up his history as a literary masterpiece, and expecting his readers to treat and interpret it as such. And this leads us to one last, and more general, conclusion – one relating to an aspect of Tacitus’ work which has been seen to impact his depiction of imperial succession even more than anticipated, and which is essential to our reading and understanding of Tacitus’ texts more in general.

What I mean is the fundamentally literary and very personal nature of his writing: the great extent to which his historical works are an expression of his own interpretation of the period, persons and institutions he is describing, as well as the high degree of literary ‘constructedness’ and manipulation used to bring out and substantiate that particular interpretation. Tacitus’ is not a historiography in the modern sense of the word: it is more subjective, selective and literary than the accounts written by modern historians – that much is well-known. Tacitus’ principal aim in his historical works is not the recording and explanation of ‘facts’ (events, developments, states of mind), although it clearly is an important objective. Rather, I propose that his historiography can be considered as primarily his personal interpretation of the first century of the Imperial era, and as a reflection on the value, meaning and consequences of the Principate as a political system. As such, his representation of this period – the selection or exclusion of particular facts, their presentation and colouring, his portrayal of historical characters and their motives – is first and foremost intended to bear out this interpretation, and is constructed accordingly.

One of the things which this thesis has revealed most forcefully is the extent of literary construction and the amount of manipulation to which Tacitus subjects his material. His history is constructed as a highly composed, coherent and polished tale, in which events seem to happen according to a well-defined scheme, early incidents prefigure later episodes, certain themes neatly recur over the course of the narrative, and all the developments logically come together in a kind of unified whole. Rather than an analysis and explanation of historical events in all their irregular, contradictory and coincidental shapes, Tacitus has endowed his interpretations of the first century AD with a consistent plot, a setting, and intriguing characters. As has been pointed out repeatedly in this thesis, Tacitus deliberately manipulates hard facts, insinuates without foundation, leaves out details which conflict with the story he wants to tell, inserts foreshadowings which cannot reasonably have been
present, and colours his events and characters with contemporary resonances and intra- and intertextual allusions. Of course, modern historians also present their material in such a way to substantiate their interpretation of the events; but in bending the evidence to his wishes Tacitus goes much further than what we nowadays consider acceptable scholarly practice.

In writing about imperial succession, Tacitus does not just write a history of events; he conveys his interpretation of a particular period and its emperors, he deals with broader questions with regard to the nature of the Principate and the transmission of imperial power, and he engages with contemporary events. Moreover, he conveys his message in a complex and highly elaborated narrative. This, clearly, has serious consequences for our modern use of his texts as scholarly evidence. For whereas his writings form an excellent source to study senatorial perceptions of the period and the imperial system, the use of his works to mine ‘bare historical facts’ is highly problematic. This is well-known, of course, and has been so for a long time, but the necessary degree of caution is not always exercised when using Tacitus’ works as a historical source. This thesis, through an analysis and interpretation of three very specific case studies, has demonstrated once again that every Tacitean word is so loaded with subtlety, significance and implication that his writings cannot be properly understood unless assessed in their own context and with attention to their literary nature.
APPENDIX: STEMMA OF THE JULIO-CLAUDIAN FAMILY

Source: Wikimedia Commons
(https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e9/JulioClaudian2.jpg)
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Abbreviations of journals, encyclopaedias and epigraphic and numismatic corpora

AAntHung Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae
AHB Ancient History Bulletin
AJAH American Journal of Ancient History
AJPh The American Journal of Philology
AncSoc Ancient Society
BICS Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies
CAH Cambridge Ancient History second edition, various eds., Cambridge, 1923-
CIL Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, ed. T. Mommsen et al., Berlin 1862-
CJ The Classical Journal
ClAnt Classical Antiquity
CPh Classical Philology
CQ The Classical Quarterly
CR The Classical Review
CW The Classical World
C&M Classica et Mediaevalia
G&R Greece & Rome
HSPh Harvard Studies in Classical Philology
ILS Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae, ed. H Dessau, Berlin 1892-1916
JRS The Journal of Roman Studies
MAAR Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome
MEFRA Mélanges d’archéologie et d’histoire de l’École française de Rome.
MD Materiali e discussioni per l’analisi dei testi classici
NPO Brill’s New Pauly Online: Antiquity, ed. H. Cancik / H. Schneider 2013
PCPhS Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PIR Prosopographia Imperii Romani saeculi I, II, III second edition, ed. E. Groag / A. Stein, Berlin 1933-
PVS Proceedings of the Virgil Society
REL Revue des études latines
RhM Rheinisches Museum für Philologie
RIC Roman Imperial Coinage second edition, ed. C.H.V. Sutherland / R.A.G. Carson, London 1972-
SCI Scripta Classica Israelica. Yearbook of the Israel Society for the promotion of Classical Studies
SLLRH Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History, ed. C. Deroux, Brussels 1979-
TAPhA Transactions of the American Philological Association
VL Vita Latina
WS Wiener Studien. Zeitschrift für klassische Philologie und Patristik
YCIS Yale Classical Studies
ZPE Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik

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NEderlandse Samenvatting

Contested Successions
Dit proefschrift is het verslag van mijn onderzoek naar de manier waarop de troonopvolging in de eerste eeuw van de Romeinse Keizertijd wordt beschreven in de historische werken van de Romeinse politicus en historicus Cornelius Tacitus (ca. 55 – 120 na Christus). De keizerlijke opvolging was een zaak van groot belang: wanneer een keizer stierf zonder een duidelijke opvolger aangewezen te hebben, resulteerde dit bijna onvermijdelijk in een machtsvacuüm en bloedige gevechten om de macht. Tacitus en zijn tijdgenoten waren zich bijzonder bewust van dit risico, aangezien zij tijdens hun leven al twee keer, in 68-69 en in 96, de gevolgen hadden ondervonden van een dergelijke opvolgingscrisis. Na de zelfmoord van Nero in 68 volgde een jaar van burgeroorlogen waarin vier verschillende troonpretendenten met grote legers strijd leverden om de keizerlijke macht. De daaropvolgende Flavische dynastie bracht een aantal decennia relatieve rust en zekerheid, maar toen Domitianus, het laatste lid van die familie, in 96 werd vermoord en er geen kinderen of andere potentiële opvolgers achterbleven, was er een grote kans dat de geschiedenis zich zou herhalen. Zover kwam het in 96 niet; de senator Nerva werd door de senaat aangesteld als keizer en hij nam direct maatregelen om de opvolging goed te regelen. In 97 adopteerde hij de legeraanvoerder Trajanus, die hem zonder problemen opvolgde toen Nerva het jaar erna overleed. Hoewel de opvolging dit keer, in tegenstelling tot dertig jaar eerder, zonder geweld verliep, zullen zowel Tacitus als zijn lezers eens te meer het belang hebben ingezien van een degelijke opvolgingsregeling.

Maar dit was tegelijkertijd het grootste probleem met de Romeinse keizerlijke opvolging: dat er geen officiële regeling of formeel opvolgingssysteem was. Dit is een direct gevolg van de merkwaardige en paradoxale status die het Romeinse keizerschap had. Hoewel moderne wetenschappers ogenschijnlijk probleemloos de termen 'keizerlijke macht' en 'de Keizertijd' gebruiken, bestonden deze concepten in het Romeinse Keizerrijk niet als zodanig. De keizer vervulde geen vaststaande functie, maar regeerde op basis van een combinatie van republikeinse ambten, bevoegdheden en privileges die op persoonlijke titel aan hem waren toegekend door de senaat en daardoor niet overdraagbaar waren. Formeel was er met de aanvang van de Keizertijd onder Augustus ook niets veranderd aan de Romeinse staatsvorm. Moderne historici zien een duidelijke constitutionele breuk tussen wat wij de Republiek en de Keizertijd noemen, maar Augustus en de latere keizers presenteerden het nieuwe systeem als een herstel en voortzetting van de door de Romeinen zo bewonderde Republiek. De keizer werd princeps genoemd, een republikeinse term
die gebruikt werd om de senator aan te duiden die op basis van zijn leeftijd, ervaring en autoriteit als de voornaamste werd gezien. Er bestonden dus geen Romeinse keizers, maar alleen ‘eersten onder gelijken’ die in samenspraak met senaat en volksvergadering de staat bestuurden. De praktijk leek uiteraard in niets op de theorie zoals die door zowel de keizers als de rest van de samenleving werd hooggehouden. De keizer oefende een welhaast absolute alleenheerschappij uit over alle inwoners van het Rijk, gebaseerd op zijn overweldigende militaire macht, aanzienlijke financiële middelen, een grote schare van persoonlijke slaven en vrijgelatenen, de loyaliteit van een groot deel van de senaat en het volk, en zijn persoonlijke autoriteit.

De gevolgen hiervan voor het opvolgingsvraagstuk waren problematisch. De afwezigheid van een constitutionele of anderszins officiële basis voor het Romeinse keizerschap betekende immers dat er van een formele opvolgingsprocedure geen sprake was. Er was namelijk niets om door te geven, daar de machts positie van de keizer ogenschijnlijk strikt persoonsgebonden was. De problematische gevolgen van deze opmerkelijke situatie mogen duidelijk zijn: de opvolgingkwestie verwerd tot een spel met ongekend hoge inzet, maar zonder enige regels. Hoewel de macht in de eerste eeuw na Christus in de praktijk sterk dynastieke tendens vertoonde, was er geen duidelijke lijn van opvolging binnen de keizerlijke familie, waardoor in theorie alle verwanten van de keizer in aanmerking kwamen. De veelal bloedige conflicten tussen de potentiële opvolgers die hiervan een uitvloeisel waren, zijn met haarscherpe blik en in doordringend Latijn vastgelegd door Tacitus in zijn twee geschiedwerken, de Historiën (geschreven ca. 100-110 n.Chr.) en de Annalen (geschreven ca. 110-120 n.Chr.).

In dit proefschrift heb ik Tacitus’ beschrijving van drie van zulke ‘omstreden opvolgingen’ (‘contested successions’) onderzocht: de opvolging van Tiberius en Claudius in de Annalen, en die van Galba in de Historiën. In al deze gevallen waren er meerdere potentiële opvolgers, die op basis van uiteenlopende eigenschappen recht meenden te hebben op de macht, en daarin door verschillende partijen werden gesteund. De drie behandelde casus geven zodoende een divers beeld van de verscheidene vragen en argumenten die een rol spelen in het doorgaan van keizerlijke macht. Mijn onderzoeksvraag was wat Tacitus’ weergave van die afzonderlijke opvolgingkwesties en – conflicten ons vertelt over zijn visie op zowel die specifieke gevallen, als op de keizerlijke opvolging en het politieke syteem van de Keizertijd in het algemeen. Het ging mij dus om Tacitus’ representatie van bepaalde historische
gebeurtenissen en niet om die gebeurtenissen zelf. In zijn beschrijving van de strijd om de troon laat Tacitus zijn historische karakters herhaaldelijk met elkaar in discussie gaan over de beste methode om keizerlijke macht door te geven, de criteria waaraan een (toekomstig) keizer moet voldoen, en de personen of instanties die bevoegd zijn om over de opvolging te beslissen. Mijn onderzoek is opgezet op basis van die drie deelaspecten van het opvolgingsvraagstuk, die elk in een eigen hoofdstuk worden uitgewerkt.

Het eerste hoofdstuk behandelt de vraag van het beste opvolgingssysteem – overerving van de macht door verwanten, of de vrije keuze van een opvolger van buiten de eigen familie – aan de hand van Galba’s adoptie van zijn beoogd opvolger Piso zoals beschreven in de Historiën. Het tweede hoofdstuk, over Tiberius en zijn twee zonen Drusus en Germanicus in de eerste zes boeken van de Annalen, gaat dieper in op de selectiecriteria die door verschillende partijen worden gehanteerd in hun voorkeur voor een bepaalde opvolgingskandidaat. Hoofdstuk drie houdt zich bezig met de vraag wie de lijn van opvolging bepaalt en hoe deze personen of groepen hun doel bereiken; centraal staan de regelingen die worden getroffen voor de overdracht van Claudius’ macht in boek 12 van de Annalen.

Om mijn onderzoeksvraag te beantwoorden heb ik een gecombineerd letterkundig-historisch perspectief gehanteerd. Ik heb Tacitus’ teksten benaderd als werken van een primair literaire aard, maar met een geschiedkundig onderwerp, en geschreven in een specifieke historische context. Antieke geschiedschrijving verschilden in een aantal fundamentele opzichten van onze moderne variant. Hoewel Tacitus vanzelfsprekend gebonden was aan een bepaalde historische werkelijkheid, had hij als Romeins historicus een aanzienlijk grotere vrijheid om zijn verhaal vorm te geven zoals hij dat wilde. Hij kon spelen met de chronologie van bepaalde gebeurtenissen, dingen weglaten of juist heel uitvoerig behandelen, de personen in zijn verhaal op een bepaalde manier karakteriseren, gesprekken en toespraken verzinnen of zijn materiaal op een veelzeggende manier schikken. Daarbij maakte hij uitvoerig gebruik van de literaire en retorische middelen die hem ter beschikking stonden, zoals dictie, wisselende vertelperspectieven, technieken van persoonsbeschrijving, stijlfiguren, insinuaties en intra- en intertertekstuele allusies. Deze sterke literair-retorische dimensie van geschiedschrijving kwam deels voort uit de belangrijke rol die retorica speelde in de Romeinse samenleving. Jongemannen uit de hogere stand werden uitgebreid geschoold in de welsprekendheid, politiek werd voornamelijk bedreven middels debatten in de senaat, en veel leden van de elite
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(inclusief Tacitus zelf) traden regelmatig op als redenaar en advocaat. Deze ‘vormaspecten’ waren echter niet louter bedoeld als literaire verfraaiing: zij waren net zozeer betekenisdragend als de ‘inhoud’ van de tekst (de historische ‘feiten’).

Om Tacitus’ weergave van de drie opvolgingen te kunnen duiden is het dus van groot belang om rekening te houden met de literaire dimensie van zijn teksten. Ik heb daarom gekozen voor een tweeledige benadering. Ten eerste heb ik Tacitus’ beschrijvingen vergeleken met andere antieke bronnen – literaire teksten, maar ook munten, inscripties, standbeelden en monumenten – en met moderne historische interpretaties van de gebeurtenissen, om vast te stellen waar Tacitus’ weergave significant afwijkt van het beeld zoals dat in andere bronnen wordt geschetst. Vervolgens heb ik die Taciteïsche ‘eigenaardigheden’ met behulp van verschillende filologische en narratologische instrumenten onderworpen aan een letterkundige analyse om te onderzoeken wat Tacitus precies anders doet, hoe hij dat doet, en waarom. Bij de interpretatie van het ‘waarom’ heb ik Tacitus en zijn werken steeds beschouwd in hun eigen context.

Het eerste hoofdstuk is gewijd aan het eerste boek van de Historiën, waarin Tacitus schrijft over keizer Galba en zijn adoptie van een beoogd opvolger. Galba was na de dood van Nero in 68 door zijn legioenen uitgeroepen tot keizer, maar al na een paar maanden was de steun voor zijn heerschappij sterk verminderd en probeerde een deel van het leger één van hun commandanten op de troon te krijgen. In een poging zijn populariteit te vergroten besloot Galba, zelf al in de zeventig en kinderloos, een opvolger aan te wijzen door middel van adoptie. Tacitus suggereert dat hij daarbij de keuze had uit twee kandidaten: Otho, één van zijn trouwe en relatief ervaren aanhangers, en Piso, een onbekende maar rechtschapen jongeman van adellijke afkomst. Galba kiest voor Piso, en Tacitus laat hem bij de voltrekking van de adoptie een lange, bevlogen toespraak houden over de voor- en nadelen van verschillende opvolgingssystemen. De Taciteïsche Galba spreekt daarin met afkeuring over de erfopvolging zoals die gebruikelijk was onder de Julisch-Claudische keizers en stelt daar een eigen, nieuw systeem tegenover: vrije selectie en adoptie van ‘de beste man’, op basis van diens karakter en morele kwaliteiten.

Hoewel de toespraak op het eerste gezicht een overtuigend pleidooi lijkt voor een meer bewuste keuze met betrekking tot de opvolging, omkleedt Tacitus Galba’s voordracht met een narratief kader dat indirect vraagtekens plaatst bij de geloofwaardigheid van de argumenten van de keizer. Met behulp van verscheidene
technieken zet Tacitus Galba neer als zwak, onwetend, ouderwets en niet in staat om naar zijn eigen idealen te handelen. Door de discrepantie tussen Galba’s beweringen en de auctoriële karakterisering van de keizer suggereert Tacitus dat het nieuwe systeem dat Galba voorstelt niet past in de situatie van 68-69 zoals hij die geschetst heeft in zijn vertelling. Deze ‘mismatch’ tussen Galba en zijn omstandigheden vormt voor Tacitus de belangrijkste verklaring voor de mislukking van de adoptie en Galba’s uiteindelijke ondergang – slechts enkele dagen na de adoptie van Piso grijpt de teleurgestelde Otho de macht en laat hij beide mannen vermoorden. Tacitus nodigt zijn lezers bovendien uit om zelf te reflecteren over de waarde en geldigheid van de twee door Galba beschreven opvolgingssystemen. Dit doet hij door in zijn beschrijving van Galba’s adoptie van Piso een groot aantal verwijzingen in te voegen naar de – voor hem en zijn publiek zeer recente – adoptie van Trajanus door Nerva. Op deze manier verbindt hij de vragen die hij behandelt in zijn vertelling van het verleden met kwesties die spelen in het heden, waardoor die vragen niet alleen een bijzondere actualiteit en relevantie krijgen voor zijn lezers, maar Tacitus zijn publiek ook aanmoedigt om zelf na te denken over de manier waarop de opvolging in hun eigen tijd geregeld is.

Galba’s toespraak over de merites van de verschillende opvolgingssystemen kan gezien worden als programmatisch voor de discussie die Tacitus in de rest van zijn werken indirect zal voeren over het doorgeven van de keizerlijke macht. Het tweede hoofdstuk richt zich op een ander aspect van die opvolging: de selectiecriteria die door verschillende groepen gehanteerd worden bij het aanwijzen of steunen van een opvolgskandidaat. De vraag die Tacitus met zijn beschrijving indirect stelt is: wat maakt iemand capax imperii oftewel geschikt voor het keizerschap? Tiberius, de tweede keizer van Rome, heeft twee volwassen zonen: zijn biologische zoon Drusus de Jongere en zijn adoptiefzoon Germanicus, de zoon van Tiberius’ overleden broer. Deze twee jongemannen worden door de keizer als zijn toekomstige opvolgers gezien, en door hem ongeschikt gelijkwaardig behandeld. Tacitus maakt echter op verscheidene manieren duidelijk dat Germanicus door de gehele samenleving als enige rechtmatige opvolger wordt gezien. Germanicus’ breedgedragen populariteit berust – in Tacitus’ weergave – met name op zijn beroemde voorvaders en echtgenote en zijn eigen vriendelijkheid en charisma. Zijn adoptiebroer Drusus, daarentegen, valt minder in de smaak bij het grote publiek vanwege zijn onaangename karakter en zijn afstamming van de weinig geliefde keizer Tiberius.
In zijn vertelling laat Tacitus echter zien dat de bewonderde Germanicus bijzonder inefficiënt is in het uitvoeren van de (militaire en bestuurlijke) functies die door de keizer aan hem zijn toegekend, terwijl de impopulaire Drusus zich juist vrij goed van zijn publieke taken kwijt. Middels deze tegenstelling tussen de publieke opinie over de twee opvolgingskandidaten en hun eigenlijke gedrag bekritiseert Tacitus de criteria waarmee de maatschappij individuen beoordeelt op hun geschiktheid voor het keizerschap. Hij roept in het bijzonder vragen op met betrekking tot de relevantie van afstamming en bloedverwantschap in deze kwesties. De keizerlijke opvolging wordt door Tacitus gepresenteerd als fundamenteel dynastiek: het zijn de zonen van Tiberius die worden geacht hun vader op te volgen, en aan Germanicus wordt door het volk een zeker recht op de macht toegeschreven op basis van zijn bloedbanden. Tacitus plaatst daar zijn eigen opvattingen van geschiktheid tegenover en laat doorschemeren dat er andere mannen zijn die in zijn optiek competent zijn, maar hij kent hun een marginale rol toe in zijn vertelling, die voor een groot deel gericht is op het wel en wee van de leden van de keizerlijke familie. Op deze manier suggereert hij dat de algemene preoccupatie met verwantschap ervoor zorgt dat het vermogen om de keizerlijke functies uit te oefenen geen prioriteit heeft – met desastreuze gevolgen van dien.

Het derde en laatste hoofdstuk gaat dieper in op de kwestie van ‘agency’ – wie beslist er over de opvolging – door de kijken naar hoe de macht van Claudius wordt overgedragen aan diens opvolger(s). Nadat de vrouw van Claudius in 48 n.Chr. geëxecuteerd was op verdenking van samenzwering tegen haar echtgenoot, besloot de keizer te hertrouwen. Zijn keuze viel op Agrippina de Jongere, een directe naaizoon van de eerste keizer Augustus en de dochter van de eerdergenoemde populaire prins Germanicus. Het huwelijk was daardoor een uitermate geschikt middel voor Claudius om zijn positie te verstevigen. Claudius adopteerde niet lang daarna ook officieel haar zoontje, de latere keizer Nero. De keizer had echter al een biologische zoon, Britannicus, waardoor een zelfde soort situatie onstond als onder Tiberius. Maar in tegenstelling tot Tiberius liet Claudius zijn voorkeur duidelijk blijken: hij schoof Nero naar voren als toekomstig opvolger, terwijl zijn biologische zoon Britannicus een minder publieke rol kreeg toebedeeld. Dit was zeer waarschijnlijk een strategische keuze: Nero was net iets ouder en was door zijn afkomst bijzonder geliefd in alle lagen van de bevolking. Hij zou dus op den duur gemakkelijker geaccepteerd worden als nieuwe keizer.
Tacitus doet het echter voorkomen alsof Nero’s opvolging direct en alleen het gevolg is van de inspanningen van zijn moeder Agrippina, die door middel van intriges, overspel en misdaad haar zoon op de troon probeerde te krijgen. In zijn beschrijving van de opvolgingkwestie in het twaalfde boek van de *Annalen* zet Tacitus alle mogelijke literaire middelen in om Agrippina’s handelen uit te vergroten, Claudius als passief, dom en onwetend neer te zetten, de actieve rol van Nero en Britannicus te minimaliseren, en de senaat, het volk en het leger als onverschillig en slaafs af te schilderen. Op deze manier impliceert hij dat Nero’s bevordering tot opvolger niets te maken heeft met zijn kwalificaties – om nog maar te zijgen van enige competentie – maar louter het resultaat is van Claudius’ zwakte, die het Agrippina mogelijk maakt om haar eigen zoon te begunstigen ten nadele van de rechtmatige erfgenaam van de keizer. De opvolgingkwestie ontstaat daardoor in een conflict waarin de potentiële opvolgers en hun geschiktheid er niet meer toe doen, maar slechts de inzet zijn van de machtsstrijd die uitgespeeld wordt aan het keizerlijke hof. Met deze weergave uit Tacitus scherpe kritiek op Claudius als keizer, die niet alleen een passiviteit tentoonspreidt die een man van zijn stand onwaardig is, maar daardoor ook indirect de staat in het verderf stort door toe te laten dat Nero aan de macht komt.

In dit proefschrift heb ik aangetoond dat Tacitus door middel van zijn beschrijving van die drie ‘omstreden opvolgingen’ niet alleen zijn oordeel uitspreekt over die specifieke historische situaties, maar dat hij daarmee ook indirect zijn mening geeft over de betrokken keizers en verschillende aspecten van keizerlijke opvolging. De vragen en de problemen, en de manieren waarop de personages in Tacitus’ werken daarmee omgaan, zijn bovendien veelzeggend voor Tacitus’ visie op het politieke systeem van de Keizertijd. Tacitus laat bepaalde elementen steeds weer terugkeren in zijn beschrijvingen van de opvolgingkwesties: bepaalde karaktertrekken, de passiviteit van de keizer, het hanteren van verkeerde criteria, keizerinnen die meer macht hebben dan gepast is en de dubieuze methodes waarmee de opvolgingkwestie beslecht wordt. Elke keer dat deze aspecten terugkeren, gebeurt dat echter in een verslechterde vorm en met nog desastreuzere consequenties voor de Romeinse staat dan daarvoor. Door middel van deze continue herhaling suggereert Tacitus dat het politieke systeem zelf in bepaalde opzichten serieuze tekortkomingen vertoont, omdat het steeds hetzelfde soort verachtelijke patronen en gedrag uitlokt. Door de herhaling bovendien een neerwaarts karakter te geven impliceert hij een
voortdurende en toenemende achteruitgang van het systeem en de kwaliteit van de keizers. Een laatste aspect waar dit proefschrift de aandacht op heeft gevestigd is het belang van het onderkennen van het literaire karakter van Tacitus’ geschiedschrijving. Hoewel het al lang bekend is dat Tacitus’ werken als literaire teksten gelezen moeten worden voor een goed begrip van hun implicaties, worden ze nog al te vaak door wetenschappers probleemloos gebruikt als bron voor historische feiten, zonder dat hun literaire en narratieve context in acht wordt genomen. Door te laten zien hoezeer Tacitus’ weergave van de geschiedenis gevormd wordt door zijn eigen visie op de besproken zaken en door zijn grootschalige gebruik van retorische en literaire technieken wordt eens te meer duidelijk hoe belangrijk het is om Tacitus niet alleen als historicus, maar vooral ook als literator te lezen.
Curriculum vitae

Ylva Klaassen (Leiden, 1984) graduated from Stedelijk Gymnasium Leiden in 2002, after which she spent six months at the Università per Stranieri di Perugia studying Italian. From 2003 to 2007 she read Classics at Leiden University, majoring in Latin literature and Roman archaeology. During her bachelor’s programme, she spent one semester at the Università degli Studi di Bologna, where she took courses in Italian and ancient history. She completed her BA with distinction (cum laude) with a thesis on the representation of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in Panegyricus Latinus 12 (9) and the Arch of Constantine in Rome. In 2009 she completed a research master’s degree (MPhil, cum laude) at Leiden University, specializing in Roman cultural history, with a master’s thesis on migration and integration in the Roman world. Thereafter she began studying for her PhD in the department of History at Radboud University Nijmegen, with a project on Tacitus’ representation of imperial succession in his historical works. During her time as a PhD student, she stayed at the University of Oxford for one term and spent several shorter periods of time there for the purpose of research. Additionally, she was president of the board of PON, the PhD Organization Nijmegen (2010-2011), and one of the co-ordinators of OIKOS, the National Research School in Classical Studies in the Netherlands (2011-2012). After completing her dissertation at the end of 2013, she moved to Sweden to study Swedish at Lund University.