

6.5 The Succession

The problem of how one emperor was to succeed another plagued the Principate from the start. Augustus, having no son, hoped to see the imperial office pass to his sister Octavia's son, Marcellus, and after he died, to his grandsons. But with their premature deaths, in which Tacitus suspected the hand of Livia "who had the aged Augustus firmly under control," the title went to her own son by a previous marriage, Tiberius. He in turn was succeeded by his unstable great nephew Gaius (Caligula) and Gaius, haphazardly, as is described in this reading, by Claudius. It is with the accession of Claudius that we first see the direct hand of the military who, with the help of the people, were determined not to have the Senate regain control.

The story begins with the assassination of Gaius. When word reached Claudius of the emperor's death, he tried to hide fearing that the conspirators were out to eliminate the entire imperial family.³

Soon after hearing that Gaius had been killed Claudius crept onto a balcony and hid himself behind the hangings of the door. But a soldier passing by saw his feet and wanting to find out who it was, dragged Claudius from behind the curtain. Recognizing him, he threw himself in fear at his feet, saluting him as emperor. He then led Claudius to his fellow guardsmen who were all in a rage and uncertain what to do. They put Claudius in a litter and because the slaves of the palace had all fled, took their turns in carrying him to the camp. Looking melancholy and in great consternation, Claudius was pitied by the people who met him on the way, thinking of him as an innocent man being led to execution.

Claudius was brought within the ramparts of the camp [*the camp of the Praetorian Guards*] and spent the night with the watch. He gradually recovered from his fright, but did not have much hope of the succession. The reason for this was that the consuls, the Senate and the Urban Cohorts had taken possession of the Forum and the Capitol with the intention of proclaiming liberty [*i.e., restoring the Republic and the power of the Senate*]. A tribune of the plebs was sent to bring Claudius to the Senate to provide it with advice on what should be done under the present circumstances. He replied that he could not come because he was under duress.

The following day, the Senate, being divided, was slow to follow up on its proposed restoration of liberty. The people at large also slowed down deliberations because they insisted on being governed by one man, naming specifically Claudius. As a result Claudius allowed the Praetorians to assemble under arms and swear allegiance to him after promising them 15,000 sesterces per man. He was the first of the Caesars to purchase the fidelity of the soldiers with money.

³Suetonius, *Claudius* 10.