CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-86044-4 — Death and Dynasty in Early Imperial Rome
Key Sources, with Text, Translation, and Commentary
J. Bert Lott
Excerpt
More Information

1 Introduction

This commentary treats a set of texts dating from the first decades of the first century of the Common Era (CE) that commemorated the deaths of four young men: Lucius Caesar, Gaius Caesar, Germanicus Caesar, and Drusus Caesar. The first two, Gaius and Lucius, were the (adopted) sons of the first Roman emperor, Augustus. The second two, Germanicus and Drusus, were the adopted and natural sons respectively of the second emperor, Tiberius. Before their deaths, all four had been the designated successors to the nascent position of *princeps* or emperor, held by their fathers. None lived to take up the *status*: Lucius died in 2 CE on route to Spain; Gaius died two years later in Syria. When Augustus died in 14 CE he was, therefore, succeeded by his stepson, Tiberius, whom he had also adopted in 4 CE after the death of Gaius. Tiberius came to the throne with two sons of his own who shared Gaius' and Lucius' unlucky fate: Germanicus died in Syria in 19 CE; Drusus at Rome in 23 CE. The deaths of all four were widely and publicly commemorated through ritual, monument, and public business. In particular the Roman senate took the unprecedented step of producing official guidelines explaining just how the princes (an anachronistic but useful word) had been, and were to be, memorialized. Our texts comprise, in the case of Germanicus and Drusus, these senatorial guidelines and, in the case of Gaius and Lucius, the reactions of one provincial community, Pisa, to the guidelines. In addition, one document, the SCPP, reflects the complicated circumstances surrounding Germanicus' death and the reaction to it at Rome: In it a blue-blooded aristocrat, Cn. Calpurnius Piso, is convicted of treason and conspiracy against Germanicus.

This commentary is designed primarily for use by advanced undergraduate and graduate students. It has three primary goals: First, it aims to expand students' knowledge of an important period of Roman history through the close examination of surviving primary documents. In particular, our texts reveal much about the process by which the Roman empire came to be and about the social and political consequences of the successful imposition of totalitarian, dynastic rule over the Roman world by Caesar Augustus. They inform us about important events, clarify many aspects of early imperial governance, reveal the growing public influence of imperial women,

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-86044-4 — Death and Dynasty in Early Imperial Rome
Key Sources, with Text, Translation, and Commentary
J. Bert Lott
Excerpt
More Information

and allow us to gain a more complete historiographical understanding of the received literary histories, especially Tacitus. More importantly, reading them together allows students to see "history in action," to question the process by which a new form and language of governance developed over time rather than viewing it only in hindsight, from the vantage point of later writers, such as Tacitus, who knew the outcome.

Reading our texts together also serves as a vital complement to reading the other central statement of Augustus' ideas about the principate, Augustus' own autobiographical *Res Gestae*. A bronze inscription of the *Res Gestae*, which recounted the accomplishments of Augustus, was erected upon his death at his massive mausoleum on the Campus Martius and the text was distributed and displayed across the empire. Several of our texts stood alongside the copy of the *Res Gestae* at the mausoleum and they were distributed and displayed elsewhere as well. The examination of our texts together with the *Res Gestae* enables a broader, and more developmental, vision of Augustus' and Tiberius' ideas about the principate, and allows us a better understanding of the use of explicitly funerary and memorial texts as a mode of communicating imperial ideals. (A. Cooley (2009) has made the *Res Gestae* newly available with an excellent commentary.)

The second goal is to provide a friendly point of entry to the study of Latin inscriptions, especially lengthy inscriptions. Our texts are part of a trend towards the increased and more complex use of epigraphic texts as partners to literary works for the study of Roman history. This trend has been driven in part by more sophisticated methodology and understanding of inscriptions as media objects (rather than as texts to be mined for facts) and in part by the simple fact that the discovery of new inscriptions continues to add to our knowledge of Roman antiquity at a rate unmatched by new discoveries of literary manuscripts (papyri from Egypt are a more complicated story). The texts in this commentary mostly came to light only in the twentieth century, with two of the longest, the TS and the SCPP, found in its last three decades.

The third goal is to expose students to documents as a type of Latin distinct from the works of literary prose and poetry that make up most of what is normally read in Latin classes. The processes of writing and publishing documents differed greatly from that of literary authors. It should be said in the interests of honesty that for those used to reading only literary Latin, the transition to reading documents is unsettling and the transition to reading epigraphy is hard. The reward, however, is a broader understanding and experience of both the Latin language and Roman culture.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-86044-4 — Death and Dynasty in Early Imperial Rome
Key Sources, with Text, Translation, and Commentary
J. Bert Lott
Excerpt
More Information

The distinction between "document" and "inscription" is an important one. The term "text" from the first paragraph is intentionally vague because our "texts" can be understood and organized in two complementary but different ways. The first way to describe our texts is to call them documents. "Documents" is a term that ancient historians normally reserve for non-literary texts that deal with public or private business. The term is especially used for written copies of various sorts of official acts of government such as decrees, laws, edicts, court decisions, petitions to and responses from the emperor. The texts here comprise seven such documents: two decrees of the town council of Pisa (DPL, DPG), three decrees of the Roman senate (SCGC, SCPP, 6.31200), and two laws of the Roman people (LVA, TI). The second way to describe the texts here is to call them inscriptions. The term "inscription" refers fundamentally not to the origin or subject matter of a text but to the physical medium on which the text, as we have it, was encoded. Inscriptions are texts that were incised, carved, or painted onto some lasting physical medium, most commonly stone or bronze. Our texts include eight main inscriptions on stone and bronze (DPL, DPG, TS, TH, 6.31199, SCPP, 6.31200, TI) as well as a few smaller fragments from other inscriptions.

The two possible conceptions of our texts, the documentary and the epigraphic, do not neatly overlap. The divergence is partially a physical one. For in none of our texts does a complete document appear wholly on a single inscription. Sometimes the difference is small, due mostly to damage to the inscription. In these cases (DPG, DPL, SCPP) the same abbreviation has been used for both document and inscription. In some cases the difference is more substantial. The TS (an inscription) contains portions of two documents (SCGC, LVA). Conversely, sometimes portions of the same document appear on two different inscriptions: The TS and TH (inscriptions) both contain portions of the LVA (a document) that partially overlap. The case of the SCPP, of which two nearly complete epigraphic copies and several very fragmentary copies as well exist, is particularly complex. The divergence between document and inscription is also conceptual. "Documents" are the tools of state, used, copied, and distributed. They imply production through a political process and distribution, when it happened, through bureaucracy. Inscriptions are individual media objects received from antiquity that raise questions of provenance, decoration, and monumentality. Whether we read our texts as documents or inscriptions, therefore, has a potentially serious impact on our understanding of them.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-86044-4 — Death and Dynasty in Early Imperial Rome
Key Sources, with Text, Translation, and Commentary
J. Bert Lott
Excerpt
More Information

1.1 Historical background

Over a decade after his murder, the heir of Julius Caesar, the soon to be Augustus, cemented his dominance over the Roman world by defeating the forces of his one-time partner and fellow triumvir Marc Antony (M. Antonius) in a decisive naval battle at Actium. After a detour to Egypt to finish off Antony and his ally queen Cleopatra, he returned to Rome in 28 BCE and began to lay the groundwork for a new political settlement of the Roman *res publica* and *imperium*, which had at that point been wrecked by civil war for more than a generation. In January of 27, in a carefully orchestrated moment, he, in his own words, passed control of the republic back to the senate and people of Rome:

> In my sixth and seventh consulship after I had extinguished civil wars and gained control of everything, I transferred the republic from my own power to the direction of the senate and Roman people. (*Res Gestae* 34.1)

In response, the senate voted him the honorary cognomen Augustus by which we know him. Augustus declared that from this point forward he excelled everyone in influence (*auctoritas*) but had no more formal power (*potestas*) than was appropriate for the offices he held with colleagues. Modern and ancient scholars recognize that this renewal of constitutional rule concealed the beginnings of a new kind of Roman monarchy behind a veil of republican restoration. There is nothing to suggest that Augustus ever intended to lay down power, and the truth was indisputably revealed upon Augustus' death in 14 CE when his position passed directly and without challenge to his chosen successor Tiberius. The monarchical and dynastic Roman empire persisted for at least the next four hundred years.

The question of just how Augustus managed to move successfully the Roman state from republican oligarchy to monarchical empire is a central question of Augustan historical studies. It involved a set of constitutional arrangements that stretched but did not break the fiction of republican government: Augustus was consul in 27 and he continued to be elected to the chief magistracy annually until 23 BCE; in that year he replaced holding the consulship with the powers and personal immunity of a plebeian tribune (*tribunicia potestas*) and a special *imperium* that extended over all provinces, both voted him by the senate. Augustus' position was also grounded in military reality. The late republic had made clear the relationship between military and civil power in Roman politics. The troops left in service after the civil wars were personally loyal to him as the heir of Caesar, and his provincial governorships formalized his continued command of most Roman legions.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-86044-4 — Death and Dynasty in Early Imperial Rome
Key Sources, with Text, Translation, and Commentary
J. Bert Lott
Excerpt
More Information

Moreover, his inheritance and victories gave Augustus personal financial resources (*fiscus*) that far exceeded those of the state treasury (*aerarium*). Augustus' own accounting of his achievements, the *Res Gestae*, is replete with instances where Augustus spent enormous sums of his own money in public service, including directly donating money to every segment of society. These expenditures tied the beneficiaries, both individuals and communities, personally to Augustus through the traditional relationships of patronage. More than money, however, Augustus' resources included his *familia*, his slaves and freedmen, who were increasingly deployed in public service (e.g. sewer and water repair) even though they were the personal dependents of Augustus. Finally, Augustus' position was buttressed by a persuasive ideology of "Augustan exceptionalism" manifest in public ceremony, religion, art, and literature. It presented Augustus as Rome's new founder and savior; it claimed that the gods favored him personally, that their benefits flowed to the Roman people only through him; and it asserted that his rule had brought prosperity at home and victory abroad. There has been much discussion about the precise mix of the different aspects of Augustus' domination of the state, as well as about the roles played in the new system by other institutions such as the senate. There is value in the debate, but it must be remembered that the political, social, and cultural position of the emperor, lacking the grounding of written constitution or long-held tradition, was always somewhat fluid, reactive to external events as much as proactive. At a basic level, Augustus' success derived from his remarkable (though far from perfect) ability to make progress on the seemingly intractable problems of urban decay, popular unrest, and aristocratic ambition that had blighted the previous generations. Augustus' attention to the built environment of Rome has also been the subject of much recent scholarly discussion, although the role of epigraphy in the visual culture of the city is still understudied (see the further reading section, p. 23).

The establishment of Augustus' personal dominance, however, is only part of the story of the beginning of the empire. Equally important was the establishment of the first Roman dynasty and the successful transfer of his position to an heir. From the beginning Augustus surely had it in mind to pass down his new position to his heirs. A member of the Roman aristocracy, among whom family status was paramount, would naturally desire to pass down the power accumulated through his achievements to his descendants. Augustus considered himself rightfully entitled to Caesar's honors and positions by virtue of being his heir. When Augustus wrote about becoming *pontifex maximus* in 12 BCE, upon the death of the former triumvir Lepidus, he praised himself for not having seized the office earlier

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-86044-4 — Death and Dynasty in Early Imperial Rome
Key Sources, with Text, Translation, and Commentary
J. Bert Lott
Excerpt
More Information

even though his father, Caesar, had held it. Lepidus, he claims, had taken advantage of the civil unrest after Caesar's death to seize the office (*Res Gestae* 10.2). However, as the case of Lepidus shows, there was no mechanism by which someone as a private heir might automatically gain his father's political offices. Moreover, the very nature of the imperial system made it difficult to pass down: Augustus' position was not a single unified office but an assembly of different modes of authority. The situation was further complicated by the fact that Augustus had no son or other close male blood relatives, only a daughter Julia and a sister Octavia.

Augustus' succession plans, like his own position, developed and changed over time, often in reaction to uncontrollable events, like the deaths of our princes, or political needs. There are signs that Augustus was thinking in dynastic terms from the very beginning of his regime. He built a massive mausoleum on the *campus Martius* that was both a family tomb and a public monument surrounded by parks and other new public amenities. While there is still some disagreement over the details, the mausoleum was evidently begun as a propaganda tool against Marc Antony, who was said to have wished to be buried in Alexandria, but after Actium it served to proclaim the dominance not just of Augustus but of his family—it came to hold all his close relations who died in good standing—over Rome. However, in the earliest years of his rule, dynastic planning probably took a back seat to the consolidation and definition of Augustus' own position.

In the decades following Actium, as the next generation came of age, Augustus used the important political tool of marriage to consolidate his extended family. Most notably, he married his daughter Julia in turn to his nephew Claudius Marcellus, then, when Marcellus died in 23 BCE, to his chief lieutenant M. Vipsanius Agrippa, and, when he also died in 12 BCE, to his son-in-law Tiberius, the future emperor. This was more endogamy (marriage within the family) than was usual in Roman aristocratic circles, and while it is not clear evidence of explicit dynastic planning (carefully considered political marriages were the norm for aristocratic families), it did serve to begin separating the family of Augustus from the rest of the Roman aristocracy just as Augustus' own position was elevated above that of his nominal peers. The most notable familial arrangement of these years was Augustus' adoption of the sons of M. Agrippa and Julia, Gaius and Lucius, in 17 BCE. Lucius was born in 17 BCE; the elder Gaius was born three years earlier in 20 BCE. This would have made the boys heirs to Augustus' estate, but given their tender age at the time this should not be taken as marking them out as Augustus' political heirs. Indeed the boys largely disappear from the historical record between 17 and 5 BCE. Confusion over the heritability

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-86044-4 — Death and Dynasty in Early Imperial Rome
Key Sources, with Text, Translation, and Commentary
J. Bert Lott
Excerpt
More Information

of Augustus' position in these years is evident from a story from the year 23 BCE: When Augustus thought himself to be dying he handed over his signet ring, which implied authority over his private affairs, to his son-in-law Agrippa but his state papers to his colleague in the consulship.

It was the years 5–2 BCE that finally saw the development of a clear dynastic strategy for identifying and promoting the successors to Augustus and defining the relationship of the imperial family and the state. On January 1, 5 BCE Augustus took up his twelfth and penultimate consulship. His previous term in the chief magistracy had been seventeen years earlier. The occasion was the coming of age of his eldest adopted grandson, Gaius Caesar. When they reached the age of maturity, Roman aristocratic youths changed into the white toga (*toga virilis*) worn by Roman citizens and were led by their fathers into the Forum to offer sacrifices and be enrolled as citizens ready for public life and military duty. Suetonius (*Aug.* 26.2) tells us that Augustus asked to take up the consulship in 5 BCE precisely so that he might perform this ceremony for Gaius while in office. Augustus also gave a gift of money (*congiarium*) to all the citizens on the occasion. The entire pageant was repeated three years later in 2 BCE when Augustus took up his thirteenth and final consulship in order to repeat the rite for Lucius. Through his consulship and *congiarium*, Augustus signaled to the senate and people that Gaius' and Lucius' coming of age should be understood as more than a private, family affair.

The senate and knights (*equites*) responded by granting the two youths extraordinary honors that signaled their acceptance of the boys as the heirs to Augustus' political position. Augustus proudly recalls the honors in the *Res Gestae* (14):

> In order to do me honor, when my sons Gaius and Lucius Caesar, whom fortune stole from me in their youth, were each fifteen, the senate and Roman people made them consuls-designate, ordering that they should enter that office five years later, and the senate decreed that on that day when they were led into the forum they would be included in public councils. Moreover the Roman knights together named each of them *princeps iuventutis* and gave them shields and spears.

The *Res Gestae* represents an official version of events in which the senate modeled the youths' future political careers precisely after Augustus' own: Each was designated to hold an early consulship at age twenty, the same age that Augustus had been when he first held the office; each was enrolled in the senate with speaking privileges, even though they had not held any of the requisite offices, as Augustus had been in 43 BCE. The knights (*equites*) named each of them *princeps iuventutis*. This was particularly significant

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-86044-4 — Death and Dynasty in Early Imperial Rome
Key Sources, with Text, Translation, and Commentary
J. Bert Lott
Excerpt
More Information

because the *iuventus* of the knights contained all the senators' sons who had not yet held public office. Their granting of the title signaled that the contemporaries of Gaius and Lucius accepted them as the leaders of the next generation. Like the senate, the *equites* patterned their honors to Augustus' own: *princeps iuventutis* recalled Augustus' title of *princeps (senatus)* and the ceremonial silver lance and shield recalled Augustus' own golden shield set up in the senate house by vote of the senators in 27 BCE. Though Augustus doesn't mention it in the *Res Gestae*, the youths were also each elected into one of the major priestly colleges: Gaius became a pontiff and Lucius an augur.

The presentation and acceptance of the boys was carefully crafted to present a generational succession plan with Augustus as the leader of the current generation of Roman leaders and Gaius and Lucius as the leaders of the next. The occasion was advertised widely: It inspired a large issue of gold and silver coins from the imperial mint (RIC I^2 205–212): On the reverse the boys stand in their new togas, holding the shields and spears given to them by the knights; a jug and wand (*lituus*), symbols of pontifical and augural authority, appear between them. The legend reads, "The sons of Augustus, consuls designate, *principes* of the youth" (AUGUSTI F(ILII) CO(N)S(ULES) DESIG(NATI) PRINC(IPES) IUVENT(IS)). The obverse shows a bust of Augustus with the legend "Caesar Augustus, son of a divinity, father of the fatherland" (CAESAR AUGUSTUS DIVI F(ILIUS) PATER PATRIAE). The senatorial decrees congratulating and honoring the youths were distributed throughout the empire. The significance of all this was not lost at Rome or abroad. Ovid (*Ars Am.* 1.194) called Gaius "now *princeps* of young men, in the future of old" (*nunc iuvenum princeps, deinde future senum*). In their commemorative decree for Gaius (DPG), the Pisans went so far as to style him *princeps designatus*. Sardis and Samos passed their own honorary decrees congratulating Augustus on the occasion of Gaius' coming of age and declaring the day a civic holiday. Statue groups of Augustus, Gaius, and Lucius together were erected in cities across the empire. Cities sought out the youths as benefactors and civic patrons: Lucius was the patron of the colony at Pisa that erected the DPL after his death. The princes were integrated into the structure of patronage and loyalty that linked the empire directly to the *princeps*.

The amalgamation of imperial family and state was further emphasized and refined by two other important events of 2 BCE. Augustus was proclaimed "father of the fatherland" (*pater patriae*) on 5 February, 2 BCE. Suetonius records the actual words used by the senate in offering the title.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-86044-4 — Death and Dynasty in Early Imperial Rome
Key Sources, with Text, Translation, and Commentary
J. Bert Lott
Excerpt
More Information

May you and your house (*domus*) find good fortune and divine favor, Caesar Augustus; for we understand that we are thus praying for the eternal good fortune of our state and happiness of our city. The senate and people of Rome hail you as father of the fatherland. (*Aug.* 58)

The language of fatherhood was a staple metaphor for Roman political and divine leadership (the senators and Jupiter were both regularly styled *patres*) but when the whole state publicly offered the role of *pater* to Augustus, it suggested that the whole state was now part of the household (*familia*) of Augustus, subject to his paternal as well as political authority. Gaius and Lucius could inherit this relationship: an heir normally took control of his father's property and household. Importantly the senate took this moment to redefine the important relationship between the prosperity of the state and the stewardship of the savior Augustus. Now eternal prosperity depended on the continued good fortune of Augustus and his *domus*. This was a clear dynastic statement: the *domus* of Augustus would inherit his special responsibility for the prosperity of the state, which could thus continue forever.

The second important event of 2 BCE to correspond with Lucius' coming of age was the dedication of the *forum Augustum* with its temple of Mars Ultor. The dedication was evidently rushed so that it could coincide with the other events of the year, and the temple was not yet finished when it was dedicated. The god of the temple himself signaled that the complex was to be a mixture of public and private: It fulfilled an original vow made by Augustus at Philippi asking for Mars' help in avenging his father, Julius Caesar, but had come since to stand for Augustus' revenge visited upon the Parthians for the death of Licinius Crassus and the defeat of Marc Antony at their hands. The forum also contained a set of statues of past Roman leaders and the members of the Julian family. Thus Augustus mixed state and family in history as well. Augustus issued an edict explaining that he had included the statues "so that the citizens might compel him, while he lived, and the *principes* who followed to follow their lives as an example" (Suet. *Aug.* 31.5). Thus the occasion became a moment not just for the *princeps* to locate himself and his family in the sweep of Roman history but also to make a formal statement that he would be followed by future *principes* who would continue to lead Rome.

The senate, knights, and people accepted Gaius and Lucius as the future leaders; the new dynasty was celebrated in ceremony and art. A final important step involved introducing Gaius and Lucius to the legions. The personal loyalty of the legions to Augustus and the family of the Caesars was a key

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-86044-4 — Death and Dynasty in Early Imperial Rome
Key Sources, with Text, Translation, and Commentary
J. Bert Lott
Excerpt
More Information

underpinning of the position of Augustus. Moreover, success at war was a central part of the ideological justification of Augustus' position and his heirs would need to demonstrate that they had the same ability. As the designated years for their consulships approached, Augustus sent each young man on a mission beyond Rome and Italy to be seen by the armies that would support their eventual succession and to learn to rule. In 1 BCE Gaius departed for Asia, where in 1 CE he took up the consulship ordained for him five years earlier. Three years after Gaius, Lucius also left Rome on a mission to Spain. Like Gaius he would have taken up his consulship in 3 CE while abroad.

Lucius never reached Spain: While en route he was overcome by a sudden illness and died at Massilia on 20 August, 2 CE. Since Lucius was a future leader (and father) of the state, his death was a public affair, to be dealt with by the organs of state as well as his family. When news of his death reached Rome, the senate declared a *iustitium* until he could be buried. In the republic, a *iustitium* was a temporary cessation of juridical and public business declared at times of disaster or immediate crisis. Now the senate declared that Lucius' death was a state crisis because he represented the future of the Augustan regime and its benefits: The stability of the state was equated with the stability of the dynasty.

The body was returned to Rome, carried by the military tribunes of the legions he was to command and by the leading men of the cities through which the cortege passed. The passage of Lucius' body through the port city of Ostia was commemorated, in a fragmentary passage, on the city's inscribed calendar. The surviving fragment reads:

Hominu[m --- g-]
inta millia can[delis ardentibus]
obviam processe[runt. Magistratus]
Ostiensium pulla[ti corpus tulerunt.]
Oppidum fuit orn[atum ---]

Thousands of men with lighted candles came out to meet [the funeral procession]. The magistrates of Ostia dressed in mourning carried the corpse. The town was decorated . . . (*Insc. Ital.* 13.1.181–182)

Thus army, people, and civic leaders all had a role in returning Lucius home. Our sources do not record any details of the funeral or *laudatio* for Lucius at Rome, but he was buried in the mausoleum of Augustus.

The clearest sign that Lucius' death was conceived as a public rather than private loss was the use of a senatorial decree as the official public response to his death. Decrees by town councils commemorating important

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org