

Chapter 10: Rome: From City-State to Empire: 10-3d The Succession Problem

Book Title: World Civilizations

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10-3d The Succession Problem

One important problem that Augustus was unable to solve was that of succession to his office and powers. Having only a daughter (the scandalous Julia), he adopted her husband, Tiberius (tie-BEER-ee-us), as his son and coruler. He thus set an example that would be followed by most of his successors: a combination of *heredity*, meaning succession by blood, and co-option, meaning succession by designation of the ruler. But this method often resulted in chaos and was at times disregarded in favor of heredity alone.

Tiberius was an effective ruler, although by no means the equal of Augustus in popularity or his ability to manipulate the Senate. Whereas a grateful Senate had deified (declared to be a god) Augustus almost immediately after his death, Tiberius was much resented. Other members of the family of Augustus (the Julio-Claudians) followed Tiberius until 68 c.E., when the succession system experienced its first crisis. The last of the Julio-Claudians—the unpopular Nero—committed suicide in 69 and, after some bloodstained maneuvering, was replaced by the Flavian (FLAY-vee-an) emperors from 69 to 96. They based their right to rule simply on having imposing military force behind them. Even though these generals were effective and wise rulers, they set an ominous precedent of coerced selection that would come back to haunt Rome in the third century.

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