THE SENATORIAL DEBATE ON 17TH SEPTEMBER A.D. 14
AND DRUSUS’ JOURNEY TO PANNONIA

Tacitus, at Annals 1, 10, 8–15, 1, records a meeting of the senate at which
1) divine honours were given to Augustus, 2) the consuls brought a relatio
concerning Tiberius’ position which led to a lengthy debate, 3) proposals were
made about granting honours to Livia, 4) Tiberius asked for imperium
proconsulare for Germanicus, 5) praetorian elections were held.

We know from the Fasti Amiternini, Antiates and Oppiani⁴ that divine
honours were decreed to Augustus on 17th September A.D. 14 and this gives us a
date for the whole senatorial session, though two or three days must surely be
allowed for such an agenda. An attempt by K. Wellesley² to show that Tacitus³ is
recording two senatorial meetings, one at which divine honours were given to
Augustus and an earlier meeting at which the other matters referred to above
were decided, has been refuted by F.R.D. Goodyear.⁴

However, if one accepts that this meeting of the senate began on 17th
September A.D. 14, a chronological difficulty arises. Tacitus, discussing
Tiberius’ request for imperium proconsulare for Germanicus, adds: ‘quo minus
idem pro Druso postularetur ea causa quod desigl)atus consul Drusus
praesensque erat.’⁵ But on 26th September A.D. 14 Drusus was in Pannonia, in
the vicinity of Emona, dealing with the mutineers:⁶ this date is fixed by the
reference to the eclipse of the moon which occurred on the night of 26th/27th
September.⁷ How did Drusus, accompanied by a considerable body of troops,
manage to travel from Rome to Emona in only nine days? It was this
chronological difficulty that caused Wellesley to postulate a much earlier date
for the meeting of the senate but, as Goodyear⁸ has shown, his argument fails at a
crucial point.⁹

Goodyear¹⁰ suggests that Drusus and his troops could have shortened their
journey by sailing across the Adriatic: he cites Annals 1, 47, 3 ‘ceterum ut iam
iamque iturus (Tiberius—to Germany or Pannonia) legit comites, conquisivit
impedimenta, adornavit navis.’ Although Goodyear does not examine this
suggestion any further, it well repays investigation and can be used to remove the
chronological difficulties inherent in Tacitus’ narrative.

POSSIBLE TIMETABLE INCLUDING RELEVANT DISTANCES¹¹

Death of Augustus: 19th August
News of his death taken to Pannonia: 20th–25th August (Nola to Emona
600mp. Speed of imperial courier 100–125mp daily)¹²
Development of the mutiny: 26th–30th August
News of the mutiny brought to Rome by courier: 29th August–1st September
(Emona to Rome 450mp—speed of courier 100–125mp daily)
Tiberius and Drusus make preparations to dispatch troops: 2nd–3rd September

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Troops (mixed horse and foot) under the command of Sejanus march from Rome to Ravenna: 4th–18th September (Rome to Ravenna 285mp. Speed of infantry 18–20mp daily)

Senatorial meeting: 17th–19th (or 18th) September

The troops sail from Ravenna to Aquileia: 19th September (Ravenna to Aquileia 90 mp.)

The troops march from Aquileia to the winter camp in the vicinity of Emona: 20th–24th September (a distance of approximately 100mp. Speed of infantry moving quickly 20mp daily)

Drusus and the ‘primores’ travel overland Rome to Emona: 20th–24th September (450mp at a daily speed of 90mp)

The whole force moves to the summer camp: 25th–26th September

Obviously it is impossible to arrive at a definitive timetable (events in the above scheme can be shifted around e.g. news of the mutiny may have been brought to Rome earlier, which would ease the time-table of the troops) but at least it is possible, by adopting Goodyear’s suggestion, to show that Drusus and his troops could have reached the mutinous Pannonian legions on 26th September.

The supposition that news of the Pannonian mutiny reached Rome before the meeting of the senate on 17th September poses some problems.

1) Why did Drusus and the ‘primores’ wait for the meeting of the senate instead of leaving at once for Pannonia?

Little purpose could have been served by their leaving Rome with the troops. Even if the meeting extended over three days, Drusus and his entourage by moving quickly could reach a rendezvous near Emona at about the same time as the main force.

In addition, Tiberius very likely did want Drusus to be present in the senate to lend his weight as consul designate if things went wrong. There was no precedent for what was going to happen on 17th September and Tiberius did not know how much opposition he might encounter or what course matters might take—and he was a man who liked to hedge his bets. This meeting of the senate was likely to prove a political and diplomatic watershed for Tiberius, and it is not surprising that he preferred to have his son and the ‘primores’ present to support him instead of slowly accompanying the troops.

2) Why did Tiberius not mention the mutiny to support his arguments during the debate in the senate?

On the face of it this mutiny of three legions was not a very great potential threat—after all, Tiberius’ son, Germanicus, was in command of a force which might easily quell any trouble. But Dio provides the answer to this problem: he states that Tiberius was suspicious of the Pannonian and German armies and of Germanicus. As soon as Tiberius heard of the mutiny of the Pannonian legions, he must have realised that the situation was potentially explosive. The mutiny might spread to the legions on the Rhine—and even if this did not happen, Germanicus might exploit the situation to make himself princeps. But this was not a suspicion that Tiberius could voice in the senate: and it was vital that,
dangerous though the situation was, he should not overreact and in doing so perhaps spark off the very catastrophe he hoped to avoid. So it suited his book to have Drusus present at the meeting of the senate and to appear to be in no hurry to deal with the Pannonian legions: but Drusus probably had instructions to move quickly once Tiberius had weathered the crucial senatorial meeting and had reassured Germanicus by the grant of imperium proconsulare.

3) Wellesley finds it strange that Tiberius should not have asked for imperium proconsulare for Drusus if he knew before the meeting that Drusus was going to be away from Rome.

As has been noted above, Tiberius wished to reassure Germanicus and it would not have been diplomatic, in view of the military situation, for Tiberius to have granted both his sons equal honours. Drusus had already been honoured—he was consul designate—but in order that he should not be humiliated Tiberius found pretexts for not making a similar grant to him.

It is not surprising that Tacitus does not mention the mutiny in connection with the senate meeting: he was chiefly concerned to show the awkward relationship between Tiberius and the senate and does not elsewhere interrelate the mutinies of A.D. 14 and events in Rome. He had no real understanding of the difficulties that faced Tiberius after Augustus' death. Besides, Tiberius took care to conceal his concern about the mutiny at this stage and contemporary historians probably did not realise the part it played in determining his attitude at this meeting of the senate.

Thus the chronology of Tacitus' narrative can be defended: Drusus could have attended the senatorial meeting and still been in Pannonia with his troops by the 26th September A.D. 14.

NOTES

3. Loc. cit.
8. Loc. cit.
9. For a summary of other theories on this point see B. Levick, Tiberius the Politician, Thames and Hudson, 1976, 71–73 and 247 note 8; see also the comments of K. Wellesley, art. cit., 25–26.
11. Approximate distances only have been calculated.
14. B. Levick, op. cit., 73.
15. It has to be assumed that sailing conditions would be favourable enough for the ships to log 4½ knots: see L. Casson, Speed under sail of ancient ships, TAPA 82, 1951, 130–148. Thus before Goodyear's suggestion can be finally accepted, detailed information about sailing conditions in the Adriatic at this time of year is needed.

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I6. Tac. *Ann.* 1, 27, 2 'nece multo post digredientem eum a Caesare ac provisus periculi hiberna castra repetentem'. No previous visit to this winter camp is recorded by Tacitus.

17. Tac. *Ann.* 1, 24, 1. They may well have been accompanied by some of the Praetorian cavalry and the German bodyguards (*Ann.* 1, 24, 2). Wellesley (art. cit., 25) rejects the supposition, also advanced by Brunt (*JRS* 51, 1961, 238), that the main body of troops left Rome before Drusus. He believes that evidence of haste would have provided Tacitus with a gibe too good to miss. Yet this is mere assumption; and there is nothing in Tacitus' narrative, which omits all details of the journey to Pannonia, to prove that Drusus and the troops travelled together. Nor is Wellesley convincing on the difficulties of arranging a rendezvous. For an answer to Wellesley's final point—Tiberius' reasons for wanting Drusus to be present at the meeting of the senate—see below.


19. 57, 3, 1.


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**CONSTANTINE AND CRISPUS, A.D. 326***

The execution of Crispus in 326 was an episode surrounded by obscurity in antiquity; it has received some attention from modern scholarship, but without much positive result. The discussion which follows attempts to break some new ground in proposing that the usual explanations of treason, adultery or palace plots do not meet the circumstances depicted by what evidence is available, but rather that Crispus was detected in the use of magic, and had his position and activities misrepresented to Constantine.

The starting point for this study was an article published in 1966, in which Patrick Guthrie advanced a novel if unconvincing explanation for the sudden removal of the Caesar.¹ He based his argument on the pervasive post-eventum theory of Eusebius that Constantine's central concern in his position as vicegerent of God on earth was the justification of the possession of his absolute temporal powers by exercising them in the interests of his subject. An important part of the justification, Guthrie suggested, would therefore rest on the transmission of the imperial powers to legitimate heirs; Crispus in his view was illegitimate and could not succeed, and because he would therefore be a very serious embarrassment to the legitimate sons, was executed in a dynastic murder.² This kind of argument can only be sustained if it can be shown that the legitimate transmission of his powers did in fact exercise Constantine to the extent that his possibly illegitimate and very successful son would need to be got rid of in order to protect and advance the interests of the much younger but legitimate sons; further, evidence would have to be led showing that there is a direct connection between the Eusebian Constantine's ideological role as emperor and the record of his personal conduct—and such evidence does not exist.

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