Organized opposition to a principate in transition?

Sanjaya Thakur

ANDREW PETTINGER, *THE REPUBLIC IN DANGER: DRUSUS LIBO AND THE SUCCESSION OF TIBERIUS* (Oxford University Press 2012). Pp. ix + 265. ISBN 978-0-19-960174-5. $99.

This volume, revised from the author's Ph.D. thesis (University of Sydney 2003), offers an imaginative vision and, at times, insightful analysis of the final years of the reign of Augustus (from the adoption of Tiberius in A.D. 4) and Tiberius' subsequent assumption of the principate. This period of succession is hampered, in part, by a paucity of primary sources. Thus the mere presence of a book that looks beyond later historical accounts to examine the events and figures that lie behind them is most welcome.[1] From the outset, Pettinger's main thesis is to challenge the idea that the principate was well-received by all, with little to no opposition. Pettinger's study goes a long way to try and uncover some of the voices of dissent we believe to have existed.[2] Pettinger invites us to re-examine the evidence for this period; he uses the trial of M. Scribonius Drusus Libo as a vehicle to see continued (organized) opposition to Augustus.[3] Using Libo's trial as a case-study, Pettinger reveals that the embrace of Augustus and his policies was far from universal. Pettinger is certainly correct in this regard, and the correction to simple narratives outlining Augustan succession is his most valuable contribution.[4] On the other hand, Pettinger is a bit ambitious in his desire to connect Libo's actions to a larger conspiracy to topple the principate.

In chapt. 1, Pettinger outlines the charges against Libo, setting the conspiracy against others of the later Augustan age. It was claimed that Libo personally marked out the names of senators and the imperial family (presumably for harm or execution). Tacitus (*Ann*. 2.27-32) records information on the trial and provides background on the individuals involved, but Pettinger illustrates well that the way in which the trial was handled indicates it held greater significance, at least politically, than Tacitus avows. Tacitus makes Libo out to be a naïve young man who is rather maliciously prosecuted for his poor choices and actions. Pettinger begins with the record of the event preserved in the *Fasti Amiternini*; the fact that the date became a holiday indicates the seriousness with which the charges were treated in the senate, and he also persuasively argues for the trial's gravity by pointing out that it interrupted the *Ludi Romani*.

In chapt. 2, Pettinger moves to the trial itself and its outcome. He describes how Libo was unable to find an advocate and eventually committed suicide. He reports the results of the subsequent investigation[5] of which the outcome was significant — Libo's image could not appear in family funerary processions, and none of the Scribonii could bear the *cognomen* Drusus.[6]

---

1 Two recent works of note dealing with the period are M. M. McGowan, *Ovid in exile: power and poetic redress in the* Tristia *and* Epistulae ex Ponto (Leiden 2009) and C. Vout, "Tiberius Julius Caesar Augustus and the invention of succession," in A. G. G. Gibson (ed.), *The Julio-Claudian succession: reality and perception of the "Augustan" model* (Leiden 2012) 59-77. Previously, excellent, comprehensive biographies on Tiberius were provided by B. Levick, *Tiberius the politician* (London 1976, rev. edn. 1999) and R. Seager, *Tiberius* (London 1972, rev. edn. 2005).

2 Cf. D. Feeney, "*Si licet et fas est*: Ovid's *Fasti* and the problem of free speech under the Principate," in A. Powell (ed.), *Roman poetry and propaganda in the age of Augustus* (London 1992) 1-25.

3 D. C. A. Shotter, "The trial of M. Scribonius Libo Drusus," *Historia* 21 (1972) 88-98, has been the standard treatment of the case.

4 Pliny's summary of the latter years of Augustus' principate (*N.H.* 7.149-50) is illustrative, not only in listing the various adversities Augustus faced during the period, but also how (admittedly later) Romans viewed them.

5 Pettinger counts Scribonia among Libo's few supporters, a member of a group of *primores feminae* (Tac., *Ann*. 2.29.1), but it should be emphasized that she is identified only on the basis of a reference in Seneca (*Ep. Mor*. 70.10).

6 But Pettinger's statement that Concord's "presence [in the senate decree] implies that Drusus Libo's disgrace accompanied a profound rupture in Rome's socio-political fabric" (9, cf. 44) seems farfetched to me. The Temple of Concord in the forum was dedicated by Tiberius, and it is generally

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759413000524 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Pettinger then ties Libo to Clemens (the pseudo-Agrippa; cf. Tac., *Ann*. 2.40.1), as part of a larger conspiracy to overthrow Tiberius. Agrippa Postumus was adopted at the same time as Tiberius by Augustus in A.D. 4, but then sent into exile (A.D. 7) and killed shortly after Augustus died. The former slave Clemens was reported to have assumed the identity of Augustus' dead son, and attempted to lead a revolt against Tiberius. Unfortunately, Pettinger has no evidence upon which he can base such a hypothesis except that both events culminated in the same year, though months apart. If such a connection could be made, one might assume that Tacitus or another ancient historian would have proposed it. Pettinger offers little to convince, beyond the mere statement of a relationship.

In an attempt to fortify his claim of a connection between Libo and pseudo-Agrippa, Pettinger moves backwards in time, starting in chapt. 3, to discuss the circumstances that surrounded Gaius Caesar's death and Augustus' subsequent adoption of Tiberius and Agrippa. Pettinger has a penchant for creative imagination over fact, an example being his colloquium between Tiberius, Livia and Augustus, outlining a mechanism and motivations for the adoption of Agrippa (53). He concludes that Augustus wished to be Agrippa's rôle model and saw adoption as a means to have greater control over Agrippa and those with whom he associated. Pettinger believes these associates were the real threat that Agrippa represented, for through Agrippa they thought that they could challenge Augustus and Tiberius. Identifying this group with supporters of Gaius who saw their hopes dashed by his premature death, Pettinger believes that many reported incidents and disturbances in Rome during the late Augustan age relate to actions originating with this group of Agrippan promoters. He also offers theories on Tiberius' withdrawal from Rome to Rhodes and Agrippa's exile to Planasia, an island midway between Cosa and Corsica. He argues that Agrippa Postumus had a seedy character but not a defective mind. As an *abdicatus*, Agrippa would not inherit any property, though he was probably still not *sui iuris*. Thus Agrippa remained in a liminal state that served, together with his physical isolation, to separate him from Augustus, yet stay under the *princeps'* control.

Pettinger begins chapt. 5 with a description of the situation in Rome and the empire in A.D. 5: flooding and damage to crops led to a serious grain shortage, and problems ensued in paying soldiers. A revolt in Illyricum resulted in Romans in the region being killed. Pettinger argues that the state of affairs in the city and empire sparked revolutionary plots, including those of Publius Rufus and Lucius Aemilius Paullus (permanently exiled on *maiestas* charges in A.D. 6). Pettinger sees L. Aemilius Paullus as a rival to Tiberius, one who saw his own influence waning and moved against the emperor in cahoots with Agrippa.

In chapt. 6, Pettinger returns to the topic of Agrippa's dismissal, pointing out (105) how the remote location of Agrippa's relegation is indicative of the threat he posed to Augustus and Tiberius. He goes on to discuss electoral practices and changes in electoral procedures (such as the *lex Valeria Cornelia*), as background to the elections of A.D. 7, at which time there is evidence for civil unrest. Based on a passage in Suetonius (*Aug*. 51), Pettinger theorizes (117) about a pamphlet circulating under the name of Agrippa Postumus which was critical of the *princeps*, and responsibility once again falls on Agrippa's (anti-Tiberius) 'supporters'.

In chapt. 7 Pettinger considers the fate of Julia the Younger. Pettinger believes Julia had no role in Paullus' conspiracy. He claims Julia was not charged with adultery for her indiscretions (with D. Junius Silanus), but *stuprum*, yet admits that the crime of *stuprum* was treated in the *lex Iulia de adulteriis* (126). He believes that Ovid was aware of her pregnancy from D. Junius Silanus (129), which was the reason for the poet's exile. Pettinger seems hesitant to decide whether Julia was adopted by Augustus (132), or remained *sui iuris* (scholarly consensus) after the affair.

In chapts. 8-10, Pettinger covers the years A.D. 11-14. He begins with Suetonius' account (*Aug*. 19) of an unsuccessful attempt in A.D. 11/12 to free Agrippa and Julia the Elder (138). Pettinger associates defamatory tablets circulated in A.D. 12 with Augustus' announcement that the senate

---

agreed to be associated with familial (i.e., within the imperial house) concord; I think we should think of "Concord" in this light — exactly what should be celebrated and honored following a plot to destroy numerous members of the imperial *domus*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759413000524 Published online by Cambridge University Press

was to be placed in Tiberius' care.[7] His analysis is interesting, insightful and characteristic of his close examination of scholarship and historical sources. Pettinger then investigates Tiberius' actions following Augustus' death, specifically Tiberius' hesitancy to assume the principate. Various sources report that shortly before his death Augustus visited Agrippa (accompanied by Paullus Fabius Maximus) to reconcile with him.[8] Pettinger reviews all the historical accounts to determine whether the visit occurred and asks why P. Fabius Maximus committed suicide. He concludes (173-74) that the visit was made up in A.D. 16 to help legitimize Clemens' revolt. Agrippa was killed shortly after Augustus died, and Pettinger investigates whether Tiberius or someone else was responsible. Pettinger affirms that Tiberius was Augustus' chosen heir and that the pair had developed succession plans well before Augustus' death. However, concerning the death of Agrippa, Pettinger believes Tiberius did not know of the order (and assumes that Augustus would have told him had he ordered it), and so lays the responsibility on Sallustius Crispus (178-80). Tiberius, however, did little to publicly settle rumors of his involvement with Agrippa's death, contributing to gossip disparaging the new *princeps*; such rumors and a lack of communication became hallmarks of Tiberius' reign.

Chapter 11 focuses on the legionary revolts in Pannonia and Germany at news of Augustus' death. Pettinger believes them to be unrelated to Tiberius' 'hesitation' in the senate in September of A.D. 14. Pettinger sees Germanicus as loyal to Tiberius, but possessing a different leadership style. But he identifies parties (albeit in generic terms) in both Caesars' camps who looked to drive the pair apart. Pettinger is convincing throughout; I am inclined to agree on all accounts with his reappraisal of Tacitus' version of affairs and depiction of the relationship between the two Caesars.

Pettinger ends the book with a return to the circumstances surrounding Libo's conspiracy. I found the conclusions in chapter 12 particularly disappointing because they do not seem to be based in any historical fact. Pettinger states (201) that, "men who had formerly supported Gaius, Aemelius Paullus, and finally Agrippa embraced the politics of reform to destabilize a government moving firmly into Tiberius' grasp". Even if we dismiss Tacitus' characterization of Libo as a young man who simply made poor decisions — we have no evidence that anyone was consorting with him and, if so, who they were. Pettinger continues to invent specific seditious groups for whom we have no evidence. For example, he states (202, cf. 207) that, "Agrippa's continued existence, in exile, had allowed his supporters to hope". Who were these supporters and why would they have any hope after Agrippa had been in exile for so many years? Pettinger even believes that had the Libo-Clemens conspiracy succeeded and Tiberius been deposed, the principate would have ended, a Republic would have reemerged, and Germanicus would not have opposed such a settlement. I doubt such conclusions are justified and Pettinger bases them solely on Drusus' (Germanicus' father) supposed affinities to Republicanism. He also argues that Augustus' opponents wanted 'a return to the Republic'. I am hesitant to follow such a tagline; after the assassination of Julius Caesar, it became abundantly clear that a return to Rome's prior political organization was impossible, and I think those opposing Augustus would have known the same. That said, it is quite possible their plan was to depose Augustus, and figure out the rest later. Pettinger adds three appendices, the most valuable of which is a lengthy prosopography of Libo; but, even here, Pettinger's tendency is to ignore past history that led to the creation of the principate, and to associate the views of former family members with the political positions and aspirations of a later generation.

Pettinger's methodology involves stripping away ancient interpretations and opinions of events to determine the historical circumstances behind them. Such efforts, for example in the case of his analysis of Tacitus' account of the Libo trial itself, are informative and revealing. Regrettably I find Pettinger's affinity to then compose an all-encompassing alternate narrative history to be over-zealous. There is no basis to assume supporters of Gaius switched allegiances to Agrippa Postumus and maintained hopes that he was a viable alternative to Tiberius over the course of his exile. There is even less evidence to connect Libo and Clemens. I do not think

7 141-44; cf. Dio 56.26.2.

8 Tac., *Ann*. 1.3; cf. Dio 56.30.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759413000524 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that Pettinger needs to argue for such an all-encompassing plot; instead, he could simply state that the numerous conspiracies demonstrate ongoing opposition to the principate when it was most vulnerable — late in Augustus' reign when Tiberius was campaigning in Germany and Augustus had reached an advanced age, and during the period of transition early in Tiberius' reign when the new *princeps* was attempting to validate and fortify his status and authority. I believe others might find Pettinger's conclusions more convincing, but all should agree his initial approach merits praise. Pettinger does not consider that the Libo case and subsequent senate decree could demonstrate Tiberius' (secure) status, which the senate wanted to reaffirm with the decree, further ingratiating themselves to him with its wording and passage. Finally, it should be noted that Libo's conspiracy was against Tiberius, and has more to do with the Augustan succession and Augustus' own successor than with Augustus himself. Thus it might not be the best example to examine Pettinger's professed desire, the opposition to Augustus.

Pettinger offers something broader than an excursus on a single case; he provides valuable insight into various conspiracies of the period, which he treats with the attention they merit. The book is well-written, very well-researched and enjoyable to read, whether one agrees with his conclusions or not. He offers an original interpretation of a period we all feel that we 'know', a feat which is noteworthy in and of itself. The study, then, fills an important gap and will hopefully draw greater attention to the period of Augustan succession.

Sanjaya.Thakur@coloradocollege.edu Colorado College

The emperor (Claudius) in the Roman world

Lee L. Brice

JOSIAH OSGOOD, *CLAUDIUS CAESAR: IMAGE AND POWER IN THE EARLY ROMAN EMPIRE* (Cambridge University Press 2010). Pp. xv + 357, ills. 63, maps 5, tables 4. ISBN 978-0-521-70825-8 (paperback) $32.99 ($80 cloth).

Biographies of Roman emperors will probably never disappear as a genre. J. Osgood's second book,[1] covering the history of the early Empire while focusing on Claudius, is a stimulating read. It is as much of a biography as can be constructed given the limits of our evidence. In trying to tackle Claudius in a chronological format, Osgood's book provides a strong historiographical discussion; it expands upon and complements, rather than replaces, B. Levick's biography of the same emperor.[2] He is interested in rehabilitating Claudius' reign — seeing the emperor as a kind of hero who saved the dynasty and perhaps the empire from dissolution — at which the author is only partially successful, failing to achieve all he set out to accomplish.

The Prologue sets the historical stage for those readers unfamiliar with the context of events just before Claudius became emperor. In setting out the historiography clearly, the Introduction demonstrates why our recollection of Claudius is complicated and why evaluations of him have been so mixed; this section should be required reading for anyone trying to make sense of the modern historiography enveloping Claudius. Here Osgood also sets out his goals for the rest of the volume: they include a chronological examination of Claudius's reign in order to put acts in contexts, to use the reign as a means to examine the early evolution of the Principate, and to challenge F. G. B. Millar's model (see below) for understanding how the emperor operated. Of these goals, the book manages to achieve the first and, to some extent, the second.

The chronological discussion begins (chapt. 1) with an examination of Claudius' selection by the Praetorians and the state of affairs in Rome at the time of and shortly after the accession. Here Osgood begins successfully to demonstrate how Claudius' reign can provide a window into the evolution of the Principate. The troubled topic of Claudius' agency in the Praetorians' selection is mentioned but, in view of the nature of the evidence, appropriately sidestepped.

1 His first was *Caesar's legacy: civil war and the emergence of the Roman empire* (Cambridge 2006).

2 B. Levick, *Claudius* (New Haven, CT 1990).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759413000524 Published online by Cambridge University Press