This offspring of Drusus, the ill-fated son of the emperor Tiberius, has received scant attention from modern critics for reasons that are only too obvious. The materials for a biography are lacking, and it has been thought unquestionable that by the end of his life Tiberius had made plans for Caligula’s succession. But was it so inevitable that Caligula would succeed to the throne in AD 37?2

Gemellus was one of twins born to Liuia Julia in AD 20.3 The other twin, Germanicus Gemellus, did not outlive childhood.4 Nor did Drusus, the father of the twins, and only son of Tiberius last beyond AD 23. After the fall of Sejanus in AD 31 rumour circulated that Drusus had fallen victim to a plot on the part of Liuia Julia and Sejanus, and had been surreptitiously poisoned. The tale was given credence by information Sejanus’ wife Apicata was supposed to have laid at Tiberius’ door, and gossip that Tiberius had tortured slaves to confirm the information.5 The adultery of Liuia Julia and Sejanus has undoubtedly polluted the attitude of the sources, and little trust can be placed in any hostile comments about the personality of Liuia Julia.6 But the impact of the adultery was sufficient to promote speculation that this had disadvantaged Gemellus in the succession stakes since the child of an adulterous mother could be considered of dubious paternity.


Tacitus *Annals* 2.84.1, dated late AD 19, but corrected in *PIR* (2nd ed) I 224,226.

He died in AD 23 (Tac.Ann.4.15.1; Vell.2.130.3). See *PIR* (2nd ed) I 224.

Suet.*Tiberius* 62.1; Tacitus *Annals* 4.3-11; Dio (Xiphilinus) 57.22; Dio 58.11.6. Normally slaves could only be questioned under torture against their masters in very restricted circumstances. These included adultery, which may be the justification here. But Augustus commonly had slaves sold to himself or the state in such cases to obviate the problem. See P. A. Brunt, ‘Evidence given under Torture in the Principate’, *ZRG* 97 (1980), 256-65.

For a recent discussion of her characterisation in Tacitus see P. Sinclair, ‘Tacitus’ Presentation of Livia Julia, Wife of Tiberius’ Son Drusus’, *AJPh* 111 (1990), 238-56 and see 238 n.2 for a full bibliography.

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2 On the dynastic policy of Tiberius in the last years of his reign see especially F. de Visscher, ‘La politique dynastique sous le règne de Tibère’, *Synteleia V. Arangio-Ruiz* 1 (1964), 54-65. A sceptical approach to the sources on the succession problem is also taken by E. Meise, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der julisch-claudischen Dynastie* (1969), pp. 50-55.

3 Tacitus *Annals* 2.84.1, dated late AD 19, but corrected in *PIR* (2nd ed) I 224,226.

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What emerges from the above is that the story that Drusus was poisoned by his wife cannot have been in circulation before AD 31, whether it represents a true or a false version of events. If it is a fraudulent story, one could speculate about those with the most interest in promulgating such a tradition, and it is worth considering the motives of Caligula. Liuia Julia was the sister of Germanicus and Claudius and thus Caligula’s aunt. But the call of family solidarity seems frequently to have been overwhelmed by the pressures of court intrigue. Caligula’s claim to the throne in terms of blood was not nearly so good as that of Gemellus, although he had an important priority in terms of age. Caligula was after all merely the grandson of Tiberius, through Tiberius’ adoptive son Germanicus, and it is well known that tensions existed in that quarter. The adoptive relationship was sufficient to give Caligula legal priority over Gemellus, but Tiberius’ own preferences still could have damaged his claim. Even if Caligula did gain the support of Tiberius at the end of his life he had good reason for discrediting Gemellus as they both grew older. Gemellus had potential to cause trouble as a focus for disaffection with the rule of Caligula. He is known to have had supporters prior to the death of Tiberius, and an effective method of undermining Gemellus’ claim to the throne would have been to attack the reputation of his mother, which was vulnerable as a result of the association with Sejanus.

In assessing the plausibility of this reconstruction we must keep in mind that most of our sources for the period are far from contemporary. An example here is Tacitus who allows Tiberius to consider Gemellus’ claim to the throne seriously, but quickly dismisses him as unsuitable on grounds of age. It is noticeable that his paternity does not come into the reckoning. The sources that have taken up the theme of Gemellus’ adulterous conception are Suetonius and Dio, neither of whom is infallible nor immune from the temptation to sensationalise the interpretation of matters relating to imperial women. The notion seems unfounded, since Tacitus first notes the intrigue of

7 One can note in passing that Caligula is supposed by some sources to have had a very peculiar attitude to the reputation of family members (Suet. Caligula 23.1-2; Seneca De Const. Sap. 18.1; Dio 59.20.2).
8 On the faction of Gemellus see Philo. In Flaccum. 9. Little is known of parties in the age of Tiberius. For discussion of their possible composition see F.B. Marsh, ‘Roman Parties in the Reign of Tiberius’, AHR 31 (1925-26), 233-50, and the response by W. Allen Jr., ‘The Political Atmosphere of the Reign of Tiberius’, TAPA 72 (1941), 1-25, who is unwilling to countenance Republican style faction-fighting. But court intrigues can still divide into cabals which do not differ in substance from parties. We can blame our poor knowledge of the working of such a system on the interests of our main authorities.
9 Tacitus Annals 6.46.1. His unsuitability is somewhat exaggerated, as discussed below. Suetonius Tiberius 62.3; Dio 58.23.1-2.
Livia Julia and Sejanus under AD 23. In defence of Tacitus it can be added that he too is inclined to misogyny, but does not indulge himself on this occasion. The loss of the Caligulan books of the *Annales* deprives us of his further analysis of this angle on the succession problem.

Special attention should be paid to the account of Philo, who participated in an embassy during Caligula's reign, and should have had a good grip on contemporary public opinion. There are two works in which he makes observations about Gemellus. In the first of these, the *In Flaccum*, he alludes to the death of the emperor Tiberius as a cause of the decline in the standard of Flaccus' prefecture of Egypt. This was significant because Flaccus had backed the wrong faction at court, that supporting Gemellus, instead of the adoptive line through Germanicus. He had compounded this mistake by joining in the attack on Agrippina at the time of her trial. Flaccus was detrimentally affected by all of this when Gemellus was killed, but only engaged in savagery in Egypt after the execution of Macro, from whom he expected protection from the imperial wrath. What this passage shows is that Gemellus had influential supporters, something which is barely evident from the later sources.

In the *Legatio ad Gaium* the whole question of the succession is canvassed in some detail. The emphases in this account are interesting. Philo sees Gemellus as the rightful heir, and underlines Caligula's adoptive status. He points out that Gemellus was grandson by birth, and signals the alleged conspiracy of Gemellus as a mere pretext for disposing of a rival. He goes further and suggests that Tiberius would have eliminated Caligula from the succession if he had lived longer. The theme that Tiberius was only too well aware of Caligula's eccentricities, but hoped to gain stature through comparison of their relative abilities first appears in Philo and is repeated with

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11 Tacitus *Annales* 4.3. Of course it could be argued that Gemellus was the product of another intrigue on the part of the suspect wife.
12 Philo *In Flaccum* 9. Philo says that Flaccus was initially the most able man to hold the prefecture.
13 Philo *In Flacc.* 10-11. We must presume that he had already enjoyed this protection for the years since the trial of Agrippina.
15 There is some sign in Suetonius' account of Tiberius' will of how Caligula discredited it by the claim that it had been witnessed inadequately (Suet.*Tib.* 76: *obsignaueratque humillimorum signis*). At any rate, the will named Caligula and Gemellus as co-heirs, but was declared null and void in the senate. According to Dio this had been pre-arranged, and was done expressly to deprive Gemellus of his entitlement (Dio 59.1-2). Despite the overthrow of the will, the main bequests were paid in full since they assisted in consolidating Caligula's popularity (Suet.*Caligula* 16.3; Dio 59.2.1-3).
16 Philo *Leg.* 23.
17 Philo *Leg.* 24-25.
Tiberius Gemellus

embellishments in later sources. Importantly Caligula succeeded before Tiberius could reverse his decision, and immediately put in train a Machiavellian scheme to outmanoeuvre Gemellus. The first stage of this was to allow Gemellus a deceptive share in imperial power, which was to be conferred through adoption as heir. Philo interprets the adoption as a means to obtain absolute control over Gemellus through patria potestas, and thus to exercise the power over life and death. The adoption is unusual and clearly dynastic in its implications since it was unprecedented for so young a man as Caligula to adopt an heir. Philo may be right in interpreting the adoption as a deceptive sop to the joint heir of Tiberius. Within a short time moves were afoot to eliminate Gemellus. It is apparent from Philo that the official version of Gemellus’ death was that he was conspiring against Caligula, and that this was not accepted in all quarters at court. Indeed Philo rather naively counters the suggestion of conspiracy by pointing to the age of Gemellus. But what would count for the seventeen year old Gemellus would be his backers. Even the slightly older Caligula had need of support from Macro to establish his claim to the throne, and it will be recalled that Octavian was only two years older when he became a potent political force.

The death of Gemellus has also attracted some sensational accretions. Philo’s version has him instructed on the art of suicide by a centurion and military tribune after receiving a command to end his life from his ‘father’. This is probably a culturally biased comment from Philo directed against the excesses of the Roman patria potestas. But Suetonius goes much further. His Gemellus was believed by Caligula to have dosed himself with antidote against poison, which is taken as treason by the impulsive emperor, who on the spur

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18 Tacitus *Annals* 6.20; 6.46; Suetonius *Caligula* 11; Dio 58.23.3; cf. Philo *Leg.* 33; *In Flacc.* 10; 12.
19 In addition to the adoption he received the title of princeps iuventutis, first bestowed on Gaius and Lucius Caesar (Suet. *Caligula* 15.2; Dio 59.1.3).
20 For the retention of this power in circumstances of adoption see Cicero *De domo* 77; Aulus Gellius *NA* 5.19.9.
21 The usual rule was that the prospective father had to be at least 18 years older than the boy he was planning to adopt (Justinian *Inst.* 1.14.1). Normally he would be of such an age or in such physical condition as to make it impossible for him to have children of his own (Digest 1.7.15).
22 Philo *Leg.* 23.
24 Philo *Leg.* 30.
25 We can note here that very few instances are known even from the Republic in which a Roman father exercised his power over the life of a son. See W.V. Harris, ‘The Roman Father’s Power of Life and Death’, in *Studies in Roman Law in memory of A Arthur Schiller* (1986), 81-95.
of the moment sends a military tribune to deal him a fatal blow. In reality Gemellus was using medicine to cure his cough, so Suetonius would have us believe.26 This sort of material has an element of *chronique scandaleuse* about it, influenced by subsequent speculation over the precise workings of court life, but attempts by Claudius to belittle his predecessor may also be relevant.27

The above argument shows that there were courtiers prepared to take the claim of Gemellus to the throne seriously. His faction was outmanoeuvred by Macro and Caligula, who had a conspicuous advantage in Caligula’s age. The strongest argument in favour of preferred status for Caligula is his summons to Capri in AD 31, when Caligula was 19.28 At that moment Tiberius was chronically short of potential heirs, and doubtless traumatised by the pressures of dealing with Sejanus. By the time of his death some six years later the situation was rapidly changing as Gemellus reached maturity. We can only speculate over what Tiberius wanted to happen. Perhaps his failure to adopt an heir reveals something. Caligula consciously reacted against the Tiberian approach to the succession not only by adopting Gemellus, but after his death by nominating Drusilla as heir during his illness late in AD 37.29 When she died he is supposed to have talked of nominating Aemilius Lepidus.30 His plans for the succession seem to have become chaotic after the conspiracy of AD 39.

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26 Suetonius *Caligula* 23.3; 29.1.
28 Suet. *Caligula* 10.1. This may have occurred before the fall of Sejanus, since Dio says that Caligula was appointed to the pontificate at the same time as Sejanus and his son in AD 31 (Dio 58.7.4; 8.1).
29 Suetonius *Caligula* 24.1
30 Dio 59.22.7