

The Death of Augustus

“Behold, I found Rome of clay, and leave her to you of marble.” These were the last words publicly said by Augustus Caesar who died on the 19th of August 14AD marking the end of his 39 year reign as emperor of Rome. Some authors from the time see Augustus’ adoption of Tiberius as signifying the end of his reign, however there is no way to actually assess what the relationship between Augustus and Tiberius was like. The main reason for this being that Augustus appeared to have prepared Tiberius specifically to succeed him in the event of his death though this also goes for Tiberius’ brother Nero Claudius Drusus Germanicus who Augustus appeared to favour, nonetheless Augustus ensured that they were both in positions of power though after the death if Drusus, Tiberius officially adopted Tiberius granting him the powers of a tribune and proconsul and by 13AD Tiberius was awarded his second triumph and equal of imperium to that of Augustus, this made Tiberius the perfect choice of successor to Augustus.



The circumstances surrounding Augustus’ death are varied as the main belief is that he died of natural causes, given that he was 75 at the time of his death this isn’t that far fetched. However, there are some that believe that it was in fact his wife Livia that killed him by poisoning him using a poisonous fig so that Tiberius could succeed Augustus as emperor. There is also an alternative theory to this that suggests that Augustus conspired with Livia to his own death so that Tiberius could succeed him. A reason for this could be that Augustus knew that with his old age he did not have long left before his death, an example of this being that he took a backseat to a lot of the duties and left them to others to do such as handing off the delegation of the northern wars to Tiberius, further proving that he was preparing Tiberius to take over as emperor. When he died, Augustus was buried in his mausoleum and it was proclaimed that he had joined the company of the gods of the Roman pantheon playing along with the image he had created for the people of Rome with his association with the divine. The also plays into his last words in private which were “Have I played the part well? Then applaud as I exit.” this is referring to the image he had put on while he was emperor.



Bust of Tiberius

The reaction to Augustus’ death was met with a large reaction though no surprise due to how old Augustus was at the time of his death. He was respected enough that people travelled from Nola to Rome to go to his funeral and on the day of his funeral all private and publicly owned businesses closed for the day. It was Tiberius that delivered the eulogy and, though Tiberius having enough reason to have disdain for Augustus because of his favouring of the Julian line rather than the Claudian line, he was quick to shut down any who criticized Augustus. A reason for this could be attributed to a letter pointed out by historian R. Shaw-Smith where Augustus displays his affection towards Tiberius and held Tiberius’ military merits in high regard.

Bibliography

Southern, Pat, *Augustus* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014)

Everitt, Anthony, *The First Emperor* (London: John Murray, 2007)



Mausoleum of Augustus