

Assess tiberius' ability  
to achieve an  
effective relationship



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“ Tiberius remarked...that, although he did not feel himself capable of the whole burden of government, he was nevertheless prepared to take on any branch of it that might be entrusted to him. ” (Tacitus The Annals p 40)

Tiberius was the second emperor of Rome who succeeded Augustus in 14AD (Bradley, 1990). Throughout his reign as Emperor, Tiberius made numerous attempts to try and achieve an effective relationship with the Senate.

Primarily seen in Tiberius' treatment of the Senate and increasing senatorial powers Tiberius attempted at achieving a positive relationship.

However, due to their increasing subservience, Tiberius was unsuccessful in his ability to achieve an effective relationship with the Senate. In the early stages of his reign, Tiberius made many attempts to achieve an effective relationship with the Senate in order to co-rule the Empire (Salmon, 1968).

As seen in Source A, Tiberius needed the Senate's help as running the Empire was an enormous task (Tacitus, Woodman, 2004).

Tiberius genuinely sought their aid, sometimes in matters that were not of their concern. ...Asking for advice in every matter that concerned the national revenue and the construction or repair of public buildings...”

(Suetonius, Graves, Rives, 2007 p30) Through treating the Senate, individually and as a whole, with respect, Tiberius believed it would achieve an effective relationship with the Senate. Source A states that Tiberius was “ prepared to take on any branch”, suggesting his willingness to try anything to acquire a successful relationship with the Senate (Tacitus, Woodman, 2004, p40).

An effective relationship was essential because Tiberius believed that in order to rule the Empire, he must have the full support of the Senate (Webb, 2013). Tacitus stated that, " Tiberius wanted to seem like the person chosen by the Senate" (Tacitus, Woodman, 2004). This suggests the amount of respect Tiberius felt towards the Senate as well as the importance of the Senate in ruling the Roman Empire. " Tiberius made a habit of allowing the consuls the initiative, as though the Republic still existed. " (Tacitus, Woodman, 2004 p35)

This represents that Tiberius attempted to present himself as equal to the senators as well as projecting his Republican ways. In doing so, Tiberius may have held unrealistic expectations from the Senate to act as they did in the Republican years. This may be seen through maintaining the traditional position of the Senate. Not seeking to offend, Tiberius refused any honours bestowed upon him by the Senate, for example, the renaming of months after himself and his mother (Syme, 1958). Tiberius " detested flattery" and rather endeavoured to elevate the status of the Senate (Tacitus, Woodman, 2004).

It can then be seen that Tiberius tried to have an effective relationship with the Senate by initially treating them with respect and dignity. Additionally, H. H. Scullard argues that Tiberius " genuinely tried to cooperate with the Senate and extended its administrative duties. " (Scullard, 2003, 229) These duties included restoring popular liberties by returning the election of the magistrate from the comitia to the Senate, placing Senators on boards of enquiry, appointing the Senate as the chief criminal court (primarily for maiestas) and encouraging freedom of speech (Cameron, 1990).  
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In some instances, the Senate overruled Tiberius and he did not veto their decision, attempting to encourage more independence (Cameron, 1990).

Tiberius also invited the Senate to appoint the new governor of Africa, but the Senate was unable to make a decision – expressing their lack of independence (Webb, 2013). Tiberius, espousing his Republican views, complained that the senators were “men fit to be slaves” (Tacitus, Woodman, 2004, p65).

Tiberius wished the Senate would act on their desires instead of explicit requests, however, after forty years under Augustus' reign, the Senate had become extremely subservient towards the Emperor (Wasson, 2012, July 19). Barbara Levick believes that under Augustus, “the power of the principate was indivisible”, suggesting that at this time in history, the Senate was not accustomed to being independent and were expected to conduct a role they had very little experience in (Levick, 1976, p115).

This suggests that Tiberius would always be unimpressed by the Senate's servility, thus making any attempts of acquiring an effective relationship futile (Levick, 1976). However, Tiberius maintained the role of the censor, allowing Tiberius to control who would remain a senator (Webb, 2013). Fearing that Tiberius would end their political career, senators were not willing to speak freely, thus increasing their servility towards the Emperor (Webb, 2013). Scullard stated, “though at first the Senate showed some real independence, it soon realised the risk of encroaching too far. (Scullard, 2003, p231)

It can then be seen that although Tiberius attempted at achieving an effective relationship with the Senate by showing respect and increasing their duties, he was unsuccessful due to his unrealistic expectations and contradiction by maintaining the role of the censor. Despite encouraging independence, the Senate was one of increasing subservience. Salmon argued that “ the Tiberian senate usually behaved like a subservient, but malevolent rubber stamp” (Salmon, 1968, p127) A main factor contributing to this sycophantic behaviour was the unclear distinction between free speech and treason.

Tiberius generally respected those that spoke frankly, but failed to impart this onto the Senate because of his enigmatic and cryptic nature (Tacitus, Woodman, 2004). Cassius Dio wrote that Tiberius had a “ most peculiar nature. He never let what he desired appear in conversation” (Dio, 1990 p57). Due to Tiberius' reserved temperament, senators were unable to know what he was thinking, thus making them unprepared to speak freely and risk persecution (Salmon, 1968). Tacitus describes how the reign of Tiberius gradually disintegrated owing to the way the laws of treasons were invoked (Tacitus, Woodman, 2004).

Salmon argues that in the latter stages of Tiberius' reign, Tacitus' remarks are more exaggerated, due to his disdain over the Principate, and cannot be held entirely accurate (Salmon, 1968). Furthermore, another factor for the failed relationship between the Senate and Tiberius was Sejanus, Tiberius' *socius laborum* “ partner of my labours”. (Tacitus, Woodman, 2004) Senators feared the power wielded by Sejanus (commander of the Praetorian guard) and his influence over an ageing Tiberius (Cameron, 1990).

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When Tiberius retired to Capri (26AD), Sejanus became the conduit between the emperor and the politics in Rome (Cameron, 1990). During this time, treason trials became more frequent and subsequently, the sycophancy amongst the senators increased (Levick, 1976). The trials and activities of the Praetorian Guard created an environment of extreme fear and tension, causing further reluctance from the senators to speak freely and “ seek relief in flattery” (Tacitus, Woodman, 2004 p194).

According to Suetonius, Tiberius knew that Sejanus was plotting against him (Suetonius, Graves, Rives, 2007). Through a series of steps, Tiberius denounced Sejanus as a traitor (Suetonius, Graves, Rives, 2007). However, Suetonius is known for only being concerned with the scandalous events of the Empire, questioning the reliability of the gruesome details associated with Sejanus' death. After the downfall of Sejanus, Tiberius did not return to Rome (Wasson, 2012, July 19).

It can then be seen that although Tiberius made many attempts to have an efficacious relationship with the Senate, this was ultimately not achieved due to the unclear nature of what constitutes as treason, Tiberius' cryptic manner and rise of Sejanus. It can then be seen that Tiberius made many attempts at obtaining an effective relationship with the Senate, including treating the Senate with respect and increasing senatorial powers. However, seen in the rise in subservience due to the unclear nature of what constitutes as treason, Tiberius' cryptic manner and rise of Sejanus, Tiberius was ultimately unsuccessful.