

DID C. CAECINA TUSCUS BECOME A PRAETORIAN PREFECT?

by

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ABSTRACT: This study is aimed at answering the title question of whether C. Caecina Tuscus became a praetorian prefect, or was at least considered as a candidate for this office. Doubts are raised due to the report by Tacitus (*Ann.* XIV 19 f.) regarding the plot against Nero in AD 55. Tacitus mentions that according to Fabius Rusticus (the author of a historical work used by Tacitus), the prefect of the Praetorian Guard, Sex. Afranius Burrus, was also among those suspected of being involved in the plot. As a result, Caecina Tuscus was appointed as his successor and had it not been for the intervention of Seneca, Burrus would have been dismissed. Tacitus questions this side of the story and eventually declares himself in favour of the views put forward by Cluvius Rufus and Pliny the Elder, who claimed that the fidelity of Burrus had never been doubted. Nevertheless, a structural analysis of Tacitus' passage, knowledge about the sources he used, as well as certain details in his narrative, incline us to suppose that the information provided by Fabius Rusticus is highly likely to be true.

THE BEGINNING OF NERO'S REIGN

Tacitus' twelfth book of the *Annals* is crowned by the description of emperor Claudius' death and the elevation of the nearly seventeen-year-old Nero to the throne. The next book, starting with a depiction of the new reign, leaves the reader with no doubts whatsoever. Already the first sentence shows the features of the forthcoming years: death sentences and rivalry as regards the influence of Agrippina the Younger (the imperial mother) and other advisers of the young emperor (XIII 1, 1). The death of Claudius initiated the first such period in the history of the Roman Empire when a young ruler was a figurehead for many years whilst the real power was in somebody else's hands. Many people aspired to dominate in the state, but the final struggle was between Agrippina on the one hand and the pair of imperial advisers: Seneca, the former teacher of Nero, and Sextus Afranius Burrus, who held the crucial office of the prefect of the Praetorian Guard, on the other (XIII 2; cf. 6, 3; 11, 2). Although the rivalry was eventually won by the two advisers, and Agrippina herself fell victim, five years later, to matricide, the position of Burrus and Seneca was all the time endangered – their activity reminded one of the dangerous manoeuvring among the intrigues of various court coteries. At the very beginning, however, it was Agrippina who