

Łuć, Ireneusz

The 'praefecti praetorio' of the Julio-Claudian dynasty

Res Historica 29, 95-108

2010

Artykuł został zdigitalizowany i opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez **Muzeum Historii Polski** w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej **bazhum.muzhp.pl**, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Ireneusz Łuć

Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin

THE *PRAEFECTI PRAETORIO* OF THE JULIO-CLAUDIAN DYNASTY*

The prefect of the Praetorian Guard (*praefectus praetorio*)¹ was one of the most important clerks in the Roman state in the period of the Empire. People who held this office often belonged to the most trusted advisers of the *princeps*. During the rule of the Julio-Claudian dynasty (27 BC–68 AD) the function of *praefectus praetorio* was occupied generally by representatives of *ordo equester*. The post of the *praefecti cohortes praetoriae*, in contrast to the offices of the republican origin², was occupied for life by persons who were appointed by the Roman emperors. However, in practice the time was undefined and duties of the prefects were fulfilled to the moment of dismissal from this function. The main task of the *praefecti praetorio* was to command the soldiers in the Praetorian Guard³.

For the first time the creation of the office of the *cohortes praetoriae* prefects arose in 29 BC. Then, as Cassius Dio writes, there were discussions between Octavian Augustus, Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa and Gaius Cilnius Maecenas. Although it is uncertain whether the account is reliable⁴, it is worth considering for at least two reasons. First, it is doubtless that this is one of the few fragments directly concerning the office of *praefecti praetorio*. The second reason is of course the information about the criteria of recruitment for this function and the tasks performed by the praetorian prefects.

* This paper was prepared thanks to the grant of the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education (N 108 043 32/2002).

¹ *Praefectus praetorio / praetorii* = *praefectus cohortes praetoriae* = διοικητορικῆς ἀρχοντα.

² J. Zabłocki, A. Karwacka, *Publiczne prawo rzymskie*, Warszawa 2005, 102–103.

³ Cass. Dio LII 24; M. Reinhold M., *From Republic to Principate. An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History Books 49–52 (36–29 B.C.)*, vol. VI, Atlanta 1988, 195; L. L. Howe, *The Praetorian Prefect from Commodus to Diocletian (A.D. 180–305)*, Roma 1966, 10. The praetorian prefect was basically and originally the commander of the imperial bodyguard. In strict legal theory, in fact, he was merely the channel through which the emperor exercised his command over the praetorian cohorts, just as he exercised his rule over the imperial provinces through his legates and over Egypt through his prefect.

⁴ Reinhold, *op. cit.*, 179–182; L. Mrozewicz, *Zamiast wstępu*, [in] *Cassius Dio Cocceianus, Oratio Maecenatis (Historia Romana LII 14–40)*, transl. M. Stuligrosz, P. Sawiński, Poznań 2004, 8–9.

The office of the *praefecti praetorio* should be occupied by two persons originating from the *ordo equester*⁵. Two, because it would be too risky to give the command of the *cohortes praetoriae* to only one person. On the other hand, if the praetorians were commanded by a greater number of commanders, it would inevitably be difficult to maintain discipline. Thus, even if one of these two praetorian prefects was ill, the second would take over his duties.

The persons who were appointed as praetorian prefects, were supposed to have had experience in the military. They ought to have participated in military campaigns and performed various administrative functions. Their duties as the *praefecti praetorio* included commanding the soldiers who served in the *cohortes praetoriae* and other military units which stationed in Italy, and also the *Καίσαρείων* and the emperor's headquarters (*praetorium*). To the praetorian prefects would be vested the right to punish by death those soldiers who committed a crime. However, they could not try Roman officers in the rank of *centurio* and persons who were under senatorial jurisdiction. The senatorial clerks would have to check the qualifications of the persons who applied for the post of praetorian prefects. The function the *praefectus cohortes praetoriae* would be lifelong and also the highest among all of the prefectures instituted by the will of the Roman emperor⁶.

As one can see, there were several reasons why the office of the praetorian prefects was created. The most important of them was the improvement of the command of the soldiers who served in the praetorian cohorts. The excess of duties placed on the shoulders of Octavian August forced him to resign from personally commanding the praetorians. In the year 2 BC he appointed two praetorian prefects for the first time: Quintus Ostorius Scapula and Publius Salvius Aper⁷. The first of them belonged to the *gens Ostoria* originating from Amiternum. Quintus Ostorius Scapula performed the function of the *praefectus praetorio* from 2 BC to about 4 AD. The representatives of the *gens Ostoria* entered the Roman senate under the rule of Tiberius (Tiberius Claudius Nero). His brother Publius Ostorius Scapula was the prefect of Egypt from 3 to 10 AD. Quintus Ostorius Scapula was an owner of slaves and he was supported by Livia (Livia Drusilla; Iulia Augusta), the wife of Octavian August, and her son Tiberius⁸. Publius

⁵ Cass. Dio LII 24, 1; Reinhold, *op. cit.*, 195.

⁶ Cass. Dio LII 24, 1–6; Reinhold, *op. cit.*, 195–196.

⁷ Cass. Dio LV 10, 10; M. Absil, *Les Préfets du prétoire d'Auguste à Commode 2 avant Jésus-Christ 192 après Jésus-Christ*, Paris 1997, 29–31, 35, 119–121.

⁸ A. E. Hanson, *Two Copies of a Petition to the Prefect*, ZPE, 47, 1982, 234–239; Idem, *Publius Ostorius Scapula: Augustan Prefect of Egypt*, ZPE, 47, 1982, 243–246; B. Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*, London 1986, 43; S. Demougin, *Prosopographie des chevaliers romains Julio-Claudiens (43 av. J.-C. – 70 ap. J.-C.)*, Rome 1992, nr 94, 98–99; 199, 123–124.

Salvius Aper originated probably from Brescia and held an office of the praetorian prefect from 2 BC to about 10 AD, but nothing more is known about him⁹.

[Publius] Valerius Ligus was appointed the next praetorian prefect¹⁰. He was probably *eques* and fulfilled this function at the end of Octavian Augustus' rule. He was rewarded with a triumphal statue (εἰκόνα) and with the right to accompany the *princeps* in the curia of the Roman senate (ἔδραν ἐν τῷ βουλευτικῷ)¹¹. It is conceivable that together with [Publius] Valerius Ligus the function of praetorian prefect was performed by Lucius Seius Strabo. He was *eques* and originated from Volsinii (Bolsena) in Etruria. Lucius Seius Strabo, thanks to his marriage with Cosconia Gallita, his second wife, bound himself to the patrician *gentes* of Cornelii Lentuli. He commanded the *cohortes praetoriae* from 14 AD to 16 AD after the death of Octavian Augustus. In 14 AD Lucius Seius Strabo swore an oath of faithfulness to Tiberius together with Caius Turranius (Gracilis), who was the *praefectus annonae*, doing it earlier than the senators, the soldiers and the people of Rome¹². In the same year, 14 AD, Tiberius appointed a new praetorian prefect, Lucius Aelius Seianus, who was Lucius Seius Strabo's son and was described as *collega Straboni*. Lucius Seius Strabo himself, one year later, received position of the prefect of Egypt, where he died. Lucius Aelius Seianus became the commander of the praetorian cohorts in 15 AD. He performed the function of the *praefectus praetorio* from 14 to 31 AD.¹³ Lucius Aelius Seianus was born about the year 46 BC in Vulturna, Etruria. He came on his father's side from one of the most influential families of *equites* (*gens Seia*). When he was adopted by *eques* Quintus Aelius Gallus, who fulfilled the function of the prefect of Egypt (25 BC–24 BC), he entered *gens Aelia*. On his mother's side, Cosconia Gallita, he was related to the Roman senatorial aristocracy. His (consular) brothers were: Lucius Seius Tubero, the consul in the year 18 AD, Marcus Seius Veranus, who was the consul under Tiberius, Quintus Aelius Tubero, the consul in the year 11 BC, and Sextus Aelius Castus, who was the consul in the year 4 AD¹⁴.

⁹ Demougin, *op. cit.*, nr 95, 99; Absil, *op. cit.*, 121.

¹⁰ Demougin, *op. cit.*, nr 128, 129; Absil, *op. cit.*, 122.

¹¹ Cass. Dio LX 23, 2–3; A. Passerini, *Le coorti pretorie*, Roma 1939, 276.

¹² Tac., *Ann.* I 7; H. F. Bird, *L. Aelius Seianus and his Political Significance*, „Latomus”, 28, 1969, 62; F. R. D. Goodyear, *The Annals of Tacitus*, vol. I, Cambridge 1972, 139; Levick, *op. cit.*, 80; Demougin, *op. cit.*, nr 451, 372–373; Absil, *op. cit.*, 123.

¹³ Tac., *Ann.* I 24; IV 1; Cass. Dio LVII 19, 5–6; R. S. Rogers, *The Prefects of Egypt under Tiberius*, TAPhA, 72, 1941, 365–369; Levick, *op. cit.*, 53–54, 159; R. H. Martin, A. J. Woodman, *The Annals of Tacitus, Book IV*, Cambridge 1989, 81; Demougin, *op. cit.*, nr 207, 181–183, 234–235; Absil, *op. cit.*, 124.

¹⁴ Vell. Pat. II 127; II 128; Tac., *Ann.* IV 1; IV 2; VI 8; F. Adams, *The Consular Brothers of Sejanus*, AJP, 76, 1955, 70–76; Bird, *op. cit.*, 61–63; R. J. A. Talbert, *The senate of imperial Rome*, Princeton 1984, 95; Levick, *op. cit.*, 53, 158–159; Demougin, *op. cit.*, nr 272, 234–237; Absil, *op. cit.*, 124–126.

The beginning of the career of Lucius Aelius Seianus should be associated with the expedition of Caius Iulius Caesar (20 BC–4 AD) to the East (1 BC–4 AD). He took part in this expedition as a member of staff – the retinue of Octavian Augustus' grandson. Lucius Aelius Seianus was in the rank of *tribunus militum*. After the death of Caius Iulius Caesar he could continue his military service in Germania or Pannonia, under the orders of Tiberius¹⁵.

Lucius Aelius Seianus owed his splendid career to Tiberius, the successor of Octavian Augustus. He was united with the *princeps* by friendship¹⁶. There was a similarity of characters, as Cassius Dio states, between Lucius Aelius Seianus and Tiberius. Thanks to this emperor, Lucius Aelius Seianus got the *ornamenta praetoria* in the year 20 AD as the first *eques*. From the year 29 AD his birthday was publicly observed¹⁷. The separate envoys were sent to him and to Tiberius by the senate, by the *equites* and also by the *populus Romanus*. Besides, bronze statues were erected for him. In theatre Lucius Aelius Seianus was sitting on a golden chair on the same level as Tiberius. Senators decreed to erect the *ara clementiae* and the *ara amicitiae* with the statues of Tiberius and Lucius Aelius Seianus¹⁸.

Since January till May in 31 AD he was a consul (*consul ordinarius*) together with Tiberius, though he was appointed for the period of five years. Then Lucius Aelius Seianus was appointed by the senate the *imperium proconsulare*. Briefly before his death in October of 31 AD he was called by Tiberius „his colleague” (σύναρχος τοῦ Τιβερίου)¹⁹.

The soldiers of the praetorian cohorts owed a lot to Lucius Aelius Seianus. As Tacitus states, „he strengthened the hitherto moderate powers of his office by concentrating the *cohortes* (*praetoriae* and *urbanae*) scattered throughout the capital into one camp”. He began to promote the centurions and the tribunes; he also decorated soldiers. Thus, Lucius Aelius Seianus took over the competences which earlier belonged to *princeps*²⁰.

¹⁵ Vell. Pat. II 102–123; Suet., *Tib.* 9; Bird, *op. cit.*, 61; Levick, *op. cit.*, 159.

¹⁶ Tac., *Ann.* I 69; IV 1; IV 2; Suet., *Tib.* 55; F. R. D. Goodyear, *The Annals of Tacitus*, vol. II, Cambridge 1981, 129.

¹⁷ Suet., *Tib.* 65; Cass. Dio LVII 19, 7.

¹⁸ Tac., *Ann.* I 7; 11; 59; 74; Suet., *Tib.* 65; Cass. Dio LVII 19, 5–7; LVII 21, 3–4; LVIII 2, 7–8; 4, 4.

¹⁹ Cass. Dio LVIII 4, 3; 6, 2; 7, 4. Cf. Tac., *Ann.* VI 5, 6: *ille* (id est Tiberius – I. Ł.) *quidem qui collegam et generum adsciverat sibi ignoscit*; R. Sealey, *The Political Attachments of L. Aelius Seianus*, „Phoenix”, 15, 1961, 97; A. Boddington, *Sejanus. Whose Conspiracy?*, *AJP*, 84, 1963, 2; Bird, *op. cit.*, 84; Demougin, *op. cit.*, 234.

²⁰ Tac., *Ann.* IV 2: *Vim praefecturae modicam antea intendit, dispersas per urbem cohortis una in castra conducendo*; Cass. Dio LVII 19, 6; S. J. De Laet, *Les pouvoirs militaires des préfets du prétoire et leur développement progressif*, „Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire”, 25, 1946–1947, 510, 515 (Ils ont le droit de nommer les sous – officiers et les officiers jusqu'au grade de centurion exclusivement et ils ont la juridiction sur eux.), 516–518; Bird, *op. cit.*, 64; K. Gilliver,

Lucius Aelius Seianus was a skilful politician, organizer and commander. Especially the latter features became conspicuous in the year 14 AD, during the mutiny of the legions in Pannonia. Tiberius Claudius Drusus was given the task of calming this revolt of legionaries. With him was Lucius Aelius Seianus, who had to advise and direct the son of Tiberius as the *rector iuveni*. Also the emperor approved the actions of this prefect, which were connected with the reorganization of the praetorian cohorts. Tiberius valued his conscientiousness and diligence. Therefore, he spoke about him very commendably not only in private conversations, but also in his letters to the senate and the *populus Romanus*. In 22 AD, thanks to intervention of Lucius Aelius Seianus it was possible to control the fire at the theatre of Pompey the Great in Rome. Senators enacted for him the statue which had to be placed in this rebuilt theatre²¹.

Tiberius owed Lucius Aelius Seianus the saving of his life. In 26 AD the emperor spent time in a villa called *Spelunca* (*Cave Sperlonga*), which was placed on hill. There was the natural cave at foot of this hill, in which the feast was prepared for Tiberius and persons from his retinue. When all was prepared, and the emperor was inside with the guests, suddenly stones fell at the entry to the cave, killing several servants. Some table companions escaped. In the cave Lucius Aelius Seianus stayed by Tiberius' side. He was kneeling and keeping his hands over the *princeps*, supporting the fallen stones. They were found in this position by the soldiers who arrived to help²².

Lucius Aelius Seianus played a characteristic part in the trial of Tiberius with Vipsania Agrippina (Maior), Germanicus' widow, and with her sons Nero and Drusus. In 20 AD, Junilla, Sejanus' daughter, was promised as future wife to Claudius Drusus, who was Claudius' son²³. But for the ambitious prefect it was not sufficient. Although he was the second most important person in the country, he wanted more. His aspiration thrust him to a seduction of Claudia Iulia Livilla, wife of Tiberius' son, Drusus, and then, with her help, to murdering her husband in October 23 AD²⁴. Lucius Aelius Seianus expelled his wife Apicta from his house, although she had given him three children, because he wanted to marry Livilla. But in 25 AD Tiberius did not agree to this marriage²⁵. Lucius Aelius Seianus

The Augustan Reform and the Structure of the Imperial Army, [in] *A Companion to the Roman Army*, ed. P. Erdkamp, Blackwell Publishing 2007, 196.

²¹ Vell. Pat. II 127; Tac., *Ann.* I 24; III 72; IV 40; Bird, *op. cit.*, 63–65.

²² Tac., *Ann.* IV 59 (*in villa cui vocabulum Speluncae*); Suet., *Tib.* 39 (*in praetorio, cui Speluncae nomen est*); Martin, Woodman, *op. cit.*, 227–228; H. D. Stöver, *Die Prätorianer Kaisermacher – Kaisermörder*, München 1994, 240–244f.

²³ Tac., *Ann.* III 29; Suet., *Claud.* 27; Bird, *op. cit.*, 64.

²⁴ Tac., *Ann.* III 7; 8; 12; 17; 59; 60; 67; VI 24; Suet., *Tib.* 53; 54.

²⁵ Tac., *Ann.* IV 39; 40; VI 8; Suet., *Tib.* 55; J. Bellemore, *The Wife of Sejanus*, ZPE, 109, 1995, 255–256f., 260–266.

strived for the senators' support for his plans to assume power after Tiberius. He tried to create a support group (*Seianiani*)²⁶. He got support by giving them gifts and helping them to hold different public offices. From 27 AD, when Tiberius went to Capri, the power in Rome and indirectly the supremacy over the state administration went into the hands of Lucius Aelius Seianus. However, his brilliant career was finished tragically on the 18th of October 31 AD. When Tiberius found out that his hitherto loyal friend began to lead a double-dealing game to take over the power in the Roman empire, he decided to counteract²⁷. At Capri Quintus Naevius Macro *praefectus cohortes vigilum* was called by Tiberius²⁸. The *princeps* gave him two letters: the appointment of Quintus Naevius Macro as the *praefectus praetorio* and a promise to make a payment (*donativum*) for every soldier for maintaining faithfulness to the emperor. The second letter was directed to the senate, and apparently officially awarded the *tribunicia potestas* to Lucius Aelius Seianus. That second letter was read in the senate²⁹. However, instead of new praises and honours, there was an unpleasant surprise for Lucius Aelius Seianus. He was accused of betrayal and arrested immediately. Consul Publius Memmius Regulus ordered to take him out of the senate's curia by soldiers of the *cohortes vigilum*, who were commended by Graecinius Laco, the *praefectus vigilum*³⁰. Lucius Aelius Seianus was taken to prison, where he was quickly executed. His children were also murdered, and his wife Apicta committed suicide. Lucius Aelius Seianus' property was confiscated by the senate's decree³¹.

If the overthrow of Lucius Aelius Seianus should prove unsuccessful, Tiberius had the intention of liberating Drusus, Germanicus' son, imprisoned on Palatine, and putting him as the commander in chief of army, which had to fight against the all-powerful praetorian prefect. Tiberius himself wanted to sail away eastwards and place himself under the care of the legions. That day, i.e. the 18th of October, when Lucius Aelius Seianus was executed, was turned into a holiday under the leadership of four priests. On that day, horse-races and animal fights had to be held³².

Quintus Naevius Macro became a new praetorian prefect in October of the year 31 AD. He held the office from 31 to 38 AD³³. He was an *eques*. He origi-

²⁶ Cf. Cass. Dio LVIII 4, 2; Z. Stewart, *Sejanus, Gaetulicus and Seneca*, AJP, 74, 1953, 70–74f.; Bird, *op. cit.*, 75–77 f.

²⁷ Jos., *AI XVIII* 181–182.

²⁸ R. Sablayrolles, *Libertinus Miles. Les cohortes de vigiles*, Roma 1996, 475–476.

²⁹ Suet., *Tib.* 48; 65; F. de Visscher, *La caduta di Seiano e il suo macchinatore Macrone*, „Rivista di Cultura Classica e Medioevale”, 2, 1960, 248–249; R. Auguet, *Kaligula, czyli władza w rękę dwudziestolatka*, przeł. W. Gilewski, Warszawa 1990, 17.

³⁰ Sablayrolles, *op. cit.*, 476–477.

³¹ Tac., *Ann.* VI, 5, 9; 2; Cass. Dio LVIII, 9, 1 – 6; 10, 1 – 8; 11, 1–7.

³² Suet., *Tib.* 65; Cass. Dio LVIII 12, 5; 13, 1.

³³ Demougin, *op. cit.*, nr 325, 276 – 277; Absil, *op. cit.*, 127–128.

nated from Alba Fucens and belonged to *tribus Fabia*³⁴. Quintus Naevius Macro founded the amphitheatre for the inhabitants of Alba Fucens, which is certified by the following inscription:

*Quintus Naevius Cordus Sutorius Macro, son of Quintus, of the Fabia (tribus), the praefectus cohortes vigilum, the praefectus praetorio of Tiberius Caesar Augustus, he left this through his last will and testament*³⁵.

Quintus Naevius Macro had commanded the *cohortes vigilum* earlier, before he was appointed the *praefectus praetorio*. For his role in overthrowing Lucius Aelius Seianus the senate awarded him a money prize, the rank of the *propraetor* and the right to carry a purple-framed toga during the votive holidays. In 38 AD he was appointed the prefect of Egypt by Caligula. He was married to Ennia Naevia Thrasylla, who was also Caligula's mistress³⁶.

Since 32 AD Quintus Naevius Macro supervised the arrest of persons (mainly the senators and *equites*) who were related to Lucius Aelius Seianus or who might have acted against Tiberius and Rome³⁷. Five years later, i.e. in 37 AD, his faithfulness to Tiberius is doubtful because he joined Caligula and helped him to take over the power in Rome. In the March of 37 AD Tiberius was murdered by them both³⁸. Then Quintus Naevius Macro was sent by Caligula to Rome, and there, before the senators, he introduced Tiberius' will. He contributed to the rejection of Tiberius' last will and testament, because the testator „was not fully in his intellectual powers” at the moment of writing. This is apparently confirmed by the fact that Caligula and Tiberius Gemellus (Tiberius Julius Caesar Nero Gemellus 19–37/38 AD), then still a boy, got equal rights to hold power in Rome³⁹.

Quintus Naevius Macro probably accompanied Caligula in 37 AD, during the inspection of the soldiers of praetorian cohorts. The emperor arrived at the *castra praetoria* and distributed money among them. It was *legatus* from the testament of Tiberius. Later, Caligula together with the senators witnessed

³⁴ F. de Visscher, *La carrière et le testament d'un préfet du Prétoire de Tibère*, „Bulletin de la Classe des Lettres de l'Académie Royale de Belgique”, 43, 1957, 168–173f.; Idem, *Macro, Préfet des Vigiles et ses cohortes contre la tyrannie de Séjan*, [in] *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire offerts à André Piganiol*, éd. R. Chevallier, Paris 1966, 761–766f.

³⁵ F. de Visscher, *L'amphithéâtre d'Alba Fucens et son fondateur Q. Naevius Macro, préfet du prétoire de Tibère*, „Rendiconti Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei Classe di Scienze Morali Storiche e Filologiche”, 12, 1957, 42–45f.; Smallwood, 72, no 254: Q(uintus) Naevius Q(unti) f(ilius) Fab(ia tribu) Cordus Sutorius Macro, praefectus vigilum, praefectus praetori Ti(beri) Caesaris Augusti testamento dedit).

³⁶ Tac., *Ann.* VI 45; Suet., *Cal.* 12; Cass. Dio LVIII 12, 7; LIX 10, 6; de Visscher, *La caduta...*, 250–251; Demougin, *op. cit.*, 277.

³⁷ Cf. Tac., *Ann.* VI 7; VI 8; 47; 48; Cass. Dio LVIII 21, 3–4; 24, 2; 27, 2.

³⁸ Tac., *Ann.* VI 46; 50; Suet., *Cal.* 12; Cass. Dio LVIII 28, 1–5.

³⁹ Cass. Dio LIX 1–2.

the marching parade of the praetorians⁴⁰. The event was represented on the reverse of Caligula's *sestertius* with a legend: ADLOCVT(IO) COH(ORTIUM)⁴¹.

However, Quintus Naevius Macro's devotion to Caligula did not protect him against the final death. In the spring of 38 AD Quintus Naevius Macro faced unfounded accusations of procurement, and together with his wife Ennia Naevia Thrasylla had to commit suicide⁴².

Until 41 AD the cohorts of the praetorians were commanded by two prefects. One of them was the *eques* Marcus Arrecinus Clemens, who fulfilled the function of *praefectus praetorio* from 38 to 41 AD⁴³. On January 24 in 41 AD, Marcus Arrecinus Clemens indirectly participated in the assassination of Caligula. He promised the tribune Cassius Cherea and the others conspirators that the praetorians would not react on the day of the assassination. Cornelius Sabinus, who was the *Germani corporis custodes* tribune, made a similar promise. His soldiers were greatly feared, because Caligula was adored by them⁴⁴.

We know nothing about the second praetorian prefect, who was Marcus Arrecinus Clemens's colleague⁴⁵. The fact that Marcus Arrecinus Clemens declared himself as a supporter of the killers of Caligula and the senate was the main reason for his dismissal by Claudius.

Catonius Iustus and Rufrius Pollio were new commanders of the praetorian guard. They held this office from 41 to 43/44 AD and both belonged to the *ordo equester*⁴⁶. Catonius Iustus served as the *primus pilus* in the one of legions in Pannonia, when in 14 AD the revolt of legionaries began. He was murdered in 43 AD. The person responsible for his death was Valeria Messalina because he wanted to denounce her before Claudius⁴⁷. Rufrius Pollio took part in Claudius' expedition in 43 AD. When he returned to Rome, his bravery was awarded by

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, LIX 2, 1.

⁴¹ RIC, vol. 1, no 23–25, 113, 117; RIC², vol. 1, 37–38 A.D., 110, no 32; 39–40 AD, 111, no 40; 40–41 AD, 111, no 48; Smallwood, nr 276, 277; L. Rossi, *La guardia pretoriana e germanica nella monetazione Giulio-Claudia. Elementi storici ed archeologici per una nuova interpretazione*, RIN, 69, 1967, 15, 24, 27f.; M. Sommer, *Der Kaiser spricht. Die adlocutio als Motiv der Kommunikation zwischen Herrscher und Heer von Caligula bis Konstantin*, [in] *Krieg – Gesellschaft – Institution. Beiträge zu einer vergleichenden Kriegsgeschichte*, hrsg. B. Meißner, O. Schmitt, M. Sommer, Berlin 2005, 335–339.

⁴² Suet., *Cal.*, 26; Cass. Dio LIX 10, 6.

⁴³ Suet., *Titus* 4; Demougin, *op. cit.*, nr 422, 345–346; Absil, *op. cit.*, 129–130.

⁴⁴ Suet., *Cal.*, 56; Jos., *AI XIX* 22–23; 37–50; Auguet, *op. cit.*, 117–118; T. P. Wiseman, *Flavius Josephus, Death of an Emperor*, Exeter 1991, 49, 51–53; Demougin, *op. cit.*, 345–346; J. Edmondson, *Dio: the Julio-Claudians. Selections from Books 58–63 of the Roman History of Cassius Dio*, London 1992, 185–187.

⁴⁵ In T. Wiseman's opinion (*op. cit.*, 51–52, 69) it is possible that Arruntius Stella (Demougin, *op. cit.*, nr 521, 433) was the other praetorian prefect.

⁴⁶ Absil, *op. cit.*, 131–132.

⁴⁷ Tac., *Ann.* I 29; Cass. Dio LX 18, 3; Demougin, *op. cit.*, nr 428, 352–353.

Claudius with the triumphal statue and from the senate he received the right to accompany the emperor at the senate's curia⁴⁸.

Probably already in 44 AD⁴⁹ the post of Rufrius Pollio was granted to Lucius Lusius Geta and Rufrius Crispinus. They commanded the soldiers of the praetorian cohorts from 44 to 51 AD⁵⁰. They both owed their nominations to Messalina, Claudius' wife. They were probably *equites*. Rufrius Crispinus got the *ornamenta praetoria* and, as Tacitus writes, the *ornamenta consularia*⁵¹. He committed suicide in the year 66 AD, when he was exiled to Sardinia. In this way Rufrius Crispinus forestalled the order of his death. Lucius Lusius Geta, on the contrary, was appointed the prefect of Egypt in 54 AD⁵².

In 51 AD Sextus Afranius Burrus became the commander of the praetorian cohorts. He was the *praefectus praetorio* from 51 to 62 AD⁵³. The main reason for the dismissal of Lucius Lusius Geta and Rufrius Crispinus was their connection with Messalina. In the year 48 AD neither supported Narcissus, the influential Claudius' *libertus*, too active in her overthrow and murder. Agrippina the Younger, who became Claudius' new wife in 49 AD, supported Sextus Afranius Burrus as the new *praefectus praetorio*. „Accordingly, as the emperor's wife persistently affirmed that faction was rife among these cohorts through the rivalry of the two officers, and that there would be stricter discipline under one commander, the appointment was transferred to Sextus Burrus Afranius, who had a brilliant reputation as a soldier, but knew well to whose wish he owed his promotion"⁵⁴.

Sextus Afranius Burrus was born in or near Vasio Vocontiorum (modern Vaison), located in Gallia Narbonensis since citizens of that area were regularly from the Voltinian tribe. He was a member of the equestrian class⁵⁵. Before he became the commander of the praetorians, he was the *tribunus militum* (probably in the *legio VIII Augusta*)⁵⁶ and the *procurator* of Livia, the wife of Octavian August, as well as Tiberius and Claudius. He was Nero's teacher (*paedagogus*). Thanks to Sextus Afranius Burrus, Nero took over power in Rome in October 54 AD. During the years 54–62 AD Sextus Afranius Burrus received the *ornamenta*

⁴⁸ Jos., *AI* XIX 267; Cass. Dio LX 23, 2–3; Demougin, *op. cit.*, nr 452, 373–374.

⁴⁹ Or 47–48 AD.

⁵⁰ Absil, *op. cit.*, 133–134.

⁵¹ Tac., *Ann.* XI 4; XVI 17.

⁵² Demougin, *op. cit.*, nr 484, 394–395, 586, 485–486; Absil, *op. cit.*, 46.

⁵³ Tac., *Ann.* XII 42; Demougin, *op. cit.*, nr 552, 460–461; PME, A, 96; Absil, *op. cit.*, 135–137.

⁵⁴ Tac., *Ann.* XII 42: *Igitur distrahi cohortis ambitu duorum et, si ab uno regerentur, intentionem fore disciplinam adseverante uxore, transfertur regimen cohortium ad Burrum Afranium, egregiae militaris famae, gnarum tamen cuius sponte praeficeretur*; C. W. MacDermont, *Sextus Afranius Burrus*, „Latomus”, 8, 1949, 235.

⁵⁵ MacDermont, *op. cit.*, 231, 233.

⁵⁶ PME, A, 96.

consularia. He was probably the second of the praetorian prefects who received this honour which entitled him the right to wear distinctive *tunica, toga* and *calcei* and to sit at public festivals with the *consulares*⁵⁷. In 55 AD Nero wanted to dismiss Sextus Afranius Burrus from the function of the praetorian prefect. In his place the *princeps* planned to nominate Caecina Tuscus, who, however, never undertook this function. Lucius Annaeus Seneca [Minor] interceded with Nero for Sextus Afranius Burrus and he kept the command over the praetorian cohorts⁵⁸.

The ambitions of Agrippina the Younger, who wanted to take over whole power in Rome, were the largest threat to the government of Nero. Finally, this fight finished for the emperor's mother tragically. In 59 AD Nero decided to murder Agrippina the Younger but Sextus Afranius Burrus and the praetorians did not participate in this⁵⁹.

Sextus Afranius Burrus, together with Lucius Annaeus Seneca, tried to overcome the artistic and circus fancies of Nero, which were inappropriate to the majesty of *princeps*. Sextus Afranius Burrus tried also to prevent the divorce of Nero and Octavia, Claudius' daughter. But his death hindered him in this endeavour in 62 AD. It is not certain whether his death was natural or caused by poisoning⁶⁰. Lucius Annaeus Seneca, together with the death of Sextus Afranius Burrus, lost his influence on Nero completely⁶¹.

Lucius Faenius Rufus and Ofonius Tigellinus were appointed by Nero as new praetorian prefects in 62 AD⁶². The first of them was popular among the inhabitants of Rome and held the office of the *praefectus praetorio* from 62 to 65 AD. Ofonius Tigellinus, in turn, commanded the praetorians from 62 to 68 AD. Lucius Faenius Rufus belonged to those who were closely connected with Agrippina the Younger. He got, thanks to her, the function of *praefectus annonae* in 55 AD⁶³.

⁵⁷ Jos., *AI* XX 152–153; Tac., *Ann.* XII 69; CIL XII 5842 = ILS 1321 Vasio (Gallia Narbonensis) (the years 54–62 AD): (Vasiens(es) Voc(ontii) patrono Sex(to) Afranio Sex(ti) f(ilio) Volt(inia tribus) Burro trib(uno) mil(itum) proc(uratori) Augustae proc(uratori) Ti(berii) Caesar(is) proc(uratori) divi Claudi praef(ecto) pra[e]tori, ornam[ent]is consular(ibus) – The Vocontii of Vasio erected this statue in honour of their patron, Sextus Afranius Burrus, son of Sextus, of the tribe Voltinia, tribune of the soldiers, procurator of Augusta, of Tiberius Caesar, and of the deified Claudius, the commander of the praetorian guard, recipient of the insignia of an ex-consul); Passerini, *op. cit.*, 281; MacDermont, *op. cit.*, 231–235; Absil, *op. cit.*, 46.

⁵⁸ Tac., *Ann.* XIII 20; PIR², A, 617; S. J. de Laet, *Cohortes prétorienne et préfets du prétoire au Haut-Empire*, „Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire”, 23, 1944, 505.

⁵⁹ Tac., *Ann.* XIV 7; M. Jallet-Huant, *La Garde Pretorienne*, Valmy 2004, 52–53.

⁶⁰ Tac., *Ann.* XIV 14; 15; 51; Suet., *Nero* 35.

⁶¹ Tac., *Ann.* XIII 2; 6; XIV 52.

⁶² Tac., *Ann.* XIV 51; MacDermont, *op. cit.*, 241; Demougin, *op. cit.*, nr 577, 478–479, 651, 549–550; Absil, *op. cit.*, 138–139.

⁶³ H. Pavis D'Escurac, *La préfecture de l'annone service administratif impérial d'Auguste à Constatnin*, Rome 1976, 322.

His efficiency in providing the inhabitants of Rome with food made him popular⁶⁴. This was the main reason for his nomination to the praetorian prefect, after the death of Sextus Afranius Burrus.

Ofonius Tigellinus was of low origin and being a lover of Agrippina the Younger he was driven out from Italy by Caligula in 39 AD. In Greece he became a fisherman⁶⁵. He returned to Italy during Claudius' rule. His material situation allowed him to stay away from the imperial Palatine. Thanks to the money which he inherited, Ofonius Tigellinus could breed horses in Apulia and Calabria. Before 62 AD (from 55 AD?) he served as *praefectus vigilum*⁶⁶. The passion of horse-racing was the basis of his friendship with Nero. Nero owed him an efficient execution of the counterfeited process against Octavia, who was accused of adultery with Anicetus, freedman prefect of the fleet from Misenum. Anicetus falsely claimed to be her lover⁶⁷. Ofonius Tigellinus gathered the rest of evidence, such as accusations of Octavia from her servants, who were tortured. Nero and Octavia were divorced. Octavia was banished and later she was murdered by the emperor's order. Ofonius Tigellinus tried to gain Nero's goodwill and organized sumptuous parties, for example on the raft on Agrippina the Younger's pond⁶⁸.

In 65 AD Caius Calpurnius Piso entered into a conspiracy against Nero. Three tribunes⁶⁹ and three centurions⁷⁰ of the praetorian cohorts took part in this conspiracy. The conspirators expected Lucius Faenius Rufus to support them because he had bad relations with Ofonius Tigellinus. He had been accused by him of supporting Agrippina the Younger in the past⁷¹. This conspiracy, however, was revealed. Nero together with Ofonius Tigellinus conducted investigation in a ruthless way. Also Lucius Faenius Rufus supported them until informers revealed him, too. He was sentenced to death when his part in this conspiracy was confirmed, and later executed⁷².

Nero repaid Ofonius Tigellinus for his energetic participation in crushing the conspiracy of Caius Calpurnius Piso, granting to him the *ornamenta triumphalia*. Besides, the emperor ordered to put his statues (*imagines*) on the forum and in the imperial palace. Ofonius Tigellinus earned a huge property in return for overcoming the conspiracy and for the repression which fell on its participants.

⁶⁴ Tac., *Ann.* XIII 22.

⁶⁵ Cass. Dio LIX 23, 9; T. K. Roper, *Nero, Seneca and Tigellinus*, „Historia”, 28, 1979, 346–347.

⁶⁶ Roper, *op. cit.*, 346; Sablayrolles, *op. cit.*, 480–481.

⁶⁷ PIR², A, 589.

⁶⁸ Tac., *Ann.* XIV 64; XV 37.

⁶⁹ Subrius Flavus, Gavius Silvanus, Staius Proxumus.

⁷⁰ Sulpicius Asper, Maximus Scaurus, Venetus Paulus.

⁷¹ Tac., *Ann.* XV 49–50; Roper, *op. cit.*, 349; L. Keppie, *The Praetorian Guard before Sejanus*, [in] *Idem, Legions and Veterans 1971–2000*, Stuttgart 2000, 111.

⁷² Tac., *Ann.* XV 58; 66; 68.

Other sources of his wealth were the inheritances made in testaments: some well-off senators and *equites* gave him parts of their properties, trying in this way to save the rest for their families⁷³.

In 65 AD Caius Nymphidius Sabinus, a soldier, was nominated by Nero the new praetorian prefect. He also received the *consularia insignia* for his part in crushing the conspiracy of Caius Calpurnius Piso⁷⁴. Caius served earlier as the *praefectus alae*. Next he was transferred to the praetorian cohorts, where he got the office of praetorian tribune. Nimfidius Sabinus was of lowly origin⁷⁵. According to Plutarch, Nimfidius Sabinus might have said about himself that his father could have been Caligula. But in the opinion of the Greek writer his real father was gladiator Martinus and the mother was Kallista, Kallistus, daughter. Nimfidius Sabinus commanded soldiers of the praetorian cohorts from 65 to 68 AD⁷⁶.

In the spring (March–April) of 68 AD Servius Sulpicius Galba, a Roman governor in the province of Spain Tarraconensis, and Caius Iulius Vindex, the governor of Gallia Lugdunensis, refused to obey Nero. Nimfidius Sabinus supported Servius Sulpicius Galba as the new *princeps* of Rome. He informed the praetorians about Nero's intention to escape to Egypt, for which reason they deserted the emperor. Then he convinced the soldiers of the praetorian guard to proclaim Servius Sulpicius Galba the new *princeps* of Rome, for which each of them would get 30.000 *sestertii* (= 7.500 *denarii*). The praetorians would receive this money after the arrival of the new ruler to Rome⁷⁷.

Ofonius Tigellinus did not lift a finger in the defence of Nero. The senate deprived Nero of his power and sentenced him to death. Nero, deserted by all, committed suicide on the 9th of June 68 AD. Nimfidius Sabinus forced Ofonius Tigellinus to resign from the post of the praetorian prefect. He thought that Servius Sulpicius Galba would appoint him the *praefectus praetoriae* and that he would fulfil this function for life. When Nimfidius Sabinus found out, however, that Servius Sulpicius Galba, yet in Spain, nominated Cornelius Laco as the new praetorian prefect in place of Ofonius Tigellinus, he decided to take over the power in Rome for himself. But the praetorians, who swore an oath of faithfulness to Servius Sulpicius Galba, were not going to obey him longer. Nimfidius Sabinus was murdered briefly before the arrival of Servius Sulpicius Galba to Rome⁷⁸.

⁷³ Tac., *Ann.* XVI 17.

⁷⁴ Tac., *Ann.* XV 72; Demougin, *op. cit.*, nr 640, 541–542.

⁷⁵ Tac., *Ann.* XV 72; CIL III 4269; CIL III 6621 = ILS 1322; Passerini, *op. cit.*, 282–283.

⁷⁶ Plut., *Galba* 9, 1–3; Absil, *op. cit.*, 141.

⁷⁷ Plut., *Galba* 2, 1–2; 14, 2–3; Cass. Dio LXIII 2, 3; LXIII 3, 3; Ch. L. Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction Galba to Domitian. An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History Books 64–67 (A.D. 68–96)*, Atlanta 1999, 34, 37–38.

⁷⁸ Tac., *Hist.* I, 5; 16; Plut., *Galba* 8 1–2; 13 1–4; 14 1–6; Absil, *op. cit.*, 142; Murison, *op. cit.*, 34–35.

Ofonius Tigellinus had a little more luck because the new *princeps* saved his life, despite the fact that the former's death was demanded by the inhabitants of Rome. Servius Sulpicius Galba made a public announcement in his defence, in which he rebuked the inhabitants of Rome for cruelty. But when on the 15th of January of 69 AD Servius Sulpicius Galba was murdered by soldiers, Ofonius Tigellinus was condemned to death by Marcus Salvius Otho. He cut his own throat in Sinuessa, where he had his estate⁷⁹.

Nimfidius Sabinus and Ofonius Tigellinus were the last prefects who commanded the *cohortes praetoriae* under the government of Nero, the last *princeps* who belonged to the Roman Julio-Claudian dynasty.

Conclusions

The biographies of persons who were praetorian prefects show that the decision about the appointment to this function was always made by the *princeps*. But there were various circumstances and the reasons which might have influenced this decision. Sometimes it was pure luck or coincidence. According to Cassius Dio, very important was the candidates' earlier experience, such as holding different kinds of functions, especially of a military and administrative character⁸⁰. And so Lucius Aelius Seianus, before he became the praetorian prefect, took part in expeditions and war campaigns. The service in the Roman army was also done by Catonius Iustus (*primus pilus*), Sextus Afranius Burrus (*tribunus militum*) or Nimfidius Sabinus (*praefectus alae, tribunus cohortis praetoriae*). The high position of the *praefectus vigilum* was held by Quintus Naevius Macro and Ofonius Tigellinus. The administrative functions were performed by Sextus Afranius Burrus, who was the *procurator Augustae*, the *procurator Ti(berii) Caesar(is)*, the *procurator divi Claudii*, as well as the patron of Vasio (Vocontiorum), the city in Gallia Narbonensis. Lucius Faenius Rufus, in turn, was first the *praefectus annonae*. He was responsible for supplies to the inhabitants of Rome.

Taking care about the safety of the emperor and his family was the most important task of the praetorian prefects. But not all of the prefects fulfilled this duty well. For example, Quintus Naevius Macron was doubtless disloyal to Tiberius and participated in his murder personally. Some of the praetorian prefects were, in part, responsible for the overthrow and the death of the *princeps*: Marcus Arrecinus Clemens (the murder of Caligula in 41 AD), Sextus Afranius Burrus (Claudius' death in 54 AD), Nimfidius Sabinus and Ofonius Tigellinus (the overthrow and the death of Nero in 68 AD).

⁷⁹ Suet., *Galba* 15; Plut., *Galba* 17, 2–5; *Othon* 2, 1–3; Cass. Dio LXIII 3, 3; Murison, *op. cit.*, 38.

⁸⁰ Cass. Dio LII 24, 2.

Lucius Aelius Seianus had a large influence on organizing the praetorian cohorts. Thanks to him the *castra praetoria* was built in Rome for soldiers of the praetorian and the urban cohorts. As first Lucius Aelius Seianus tried to undermine the emperor's monopoly in granting officer degrees to soldiers of the praetorian cohorts, as well as decorating them when in service (the *dona militaria*).

The activity of Lucius Aelius Seianus and his successors allow therefore to compile a catalogue of tasks fulfilled by the praetorian prefects. These were: commanding expeditions against the revolts of troops in the Roman army, as well as suppressing civilian riots; taking part by the emperor's side in war campaigns; fighting against conspiracies; keeping some people, e.g. senators, the *equites* as well as the emperor's closest family, under surveillance; performing judicature over the soldiers of the praetorian cohorts; supervising the military discipline; advising the emperor on the foreign policy of Rome; controlling the internal situation of the *Imperium Romanum*, especially the moods of the society and over religious sects; participating on the emperor's side in public ceremonies, as well as during the debates in the Roman senate.

The praetorian prefects were treated with respect. Some of them were honoured by the emperors, the senate and the people of Rome. This was in large part done in order to gain their support or to reduce the risk of falling into the disgrace of such „personages” as Lucius Aelius Seianus, Quintus Naevius Macro or Ofonius Tigellinus. The positive feelings which the inhabitants of Rome showed to the praetorian prefect, seldom resulted from the actual gratitude for the latter's service. Their work is evaluated by ancient writers⁸¹.

In the case of Quintus Naevius Macro, Rufrius Pollio, Rufrius Crispinus, or Nimfidius Sabinus, the nomination to the praetorian prefect was an honour and the first step to become a member of the highest layers of Roman society. For Sextus Afranius Burrus and Lucius Faenius Rufus it was a crowning of their political or military career. The appointment of Lucius Seius Strabo or Lucius Lusius Geta as the praetorian prefect was indispensable to achieve the position of the prefect of Egypt. The office of *praefectus praetorio* was the first step to obtain the power for Lucius Aelius Seianus and Nimfidius Sabinus. For each of them the command of the *milites praetoriani* was a chance to improve their financial situation. Generally, the praetorians treated their commanders well: no conflicts between them are known. The *milites praetoriani* accepted every activity of the praetorian prefect, which was done for an improvement of their situation and material conditions. However, in situations of conflict between the praetorian prefect and the emperor, the praetorians almost always took the side of the *princeps*.

⁸¹ Cf. Vell. Pat. II 127; 128; Jos., *BJ*, IV 492–493; Tac., *Ann.* I 69; III 16; 29; 66; 72; IV 1; 7; 8; 10; 11; 12; 47; 48; 68; VI 8; 29; 38; 45; 46; 51; XII 42; XIII 2; 6; XIV 51; 57; XV 58; 61; *Hist.* I 72.