

## XIV. Heirs and Rivals to Nero

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It has been subject of comment that the programme set forth in the legends on the coins of Gaius and of Nero does not include attention to the problem of the succession, by contrast with the emissions of Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius and Claudius-Agrippina.<sup>1</sup> It might perhaps be sufficient to remark that Tiberius was fifty-six when he acceded and Claudius fifty, whereas Gaius was in his twenty-fifth year, and Nero not yet seventeen. But it is not without interest to trace Nero's presumable hopes and expectations of an heir through his successive arrangements to provide one.

### I

At some date in A.D. 53 Nero had married Octavia; the union was apparently a dynastic *mariage de convenance* arranged by Agrippina, aided by Pallas, to strengthen her son's designation as heir to Claudius' throne in preference to his adoptive brother, Britannicus.<sup>2</sup> Upon his accession, therefore, he had been married a year, more or less, his expectation of an heir would be, quite obviously, centered upon that marriage, but there was as yet no issue. But Nero quickly tired of the marriage, and in reply to friends' criticism callously remarked that Octavia ought to be satisfied with the "insignia" of wife (Suet. 35.1).

In 55 he formed an attachment for a freedwoman, Acte, admitting Otho and Claudius Senecio to his confidences. His mother was

<sup>1</sup> C. H. V. Sutherland, *Coinage in Roman Imperial Policy* (London 1951) 178 f.: "the imperial coinage also drew attention to the need for continuity in the Principate. Dynastic types bulked large under Augustus, when, since the first formal transference of power had not yet taken place, the problem of succession was doubly urgent and dangerous. The dynastic theme was not, it seems, wholly absent from the Tiberian coinage. Gaius neglected it, but Claudius saw its importance at once, and Agrippina, in Claudius' last years, employed it with truly Augustan vigour in favour of herself and of Nero, who, in turn, paid no attention to it."

<sup>2</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 12.58.1; 12.25; Dio, 60.31.8-32.2, 33.2; cf. 62.13.2. (References to Dio are to the Loeb edition, where the sections are more clearly differentiable than in the mosaic of Boissevain. Unless otherwise specified, all references to Tacitus are to the *Annals*, and those to Suetonius are to the *Nero*.)

at first ignorant of the affair, then vainly opposed; for the *amici Caesaris*, presumably Seneca and Burrus specifically, were complacent: the marriage with Octavia was hopeless anyway for Nero hated her, and a freedwoman was harmless object for his passions. Now Agrippina raged that she would not tolerate a freedwoman as her rival, a servant-maid as a daughter-in-law. Nero ignored her, and Seneca arranged that Annaeus Serenus, a relative of his, by pretense of love for Acte should provide a cover for Nero's intrigue. Agrippina now tried the opposite tactic: the *affaire* was perfectly proper and appropriate to his age and rank, and the lovers were welcome to the accommodations of her home. But Nero was not deceived and his suite added warnings besides. He sent his mother a generous gift of robes and jewelry from the imperial wardrobes; and Agrippina raged again (Tac. 13.12 f.).

So the liaison went on, and Nero began to think of marriage with Acte. There were, we are told, *consulares* suborned to take their oath that she was descended from royal ancestry, the Attalids in fact. Suetonius says that Nero almost did marry her. The alternative to acceptance of this story is to suppose it merely an example of the literary convention familiar from Horace's *Ne sit ancillae tibi amor pudori*. But the ex-consuls ready with their oath incline one to take the matter more seriously. And the reason why Nero did not actually marry Acte is presumably the appearance in his circle of Poppaea Sabina, whom he met in 58, and who asserted her own nobility by scorn and ridicule of Acte.<sup>3</sup>

Poppaea, heiress of her mother's famous beauty, had been wife of Rufrius Crispinus, the praetorian prefect whom Agrippina had deposed in 51. Attracted by the younger, handsomer Marcus Salvius Otho, born in 32, she had become first his paramour and then his wife; now through Otho's intimacy with Nero she made the Emperor's acquaintance and determined upon his conquest (Tac. 13.45 f.). This was an ambitious project, for the necessary divorce of Octavia was not possible so long as Agrippina maintained her power (Tac. 14.1). The latter obstacle was removed in March of the next year, 59, when Agrippina was assassinated.<sup>4</sup> But then Poppaea must wait yet three years more for the marriage. Was it

<sup>3</sup> Suet. 28.1: "Acten libertam paulum afit quia iusto matrimonio coniungeret, summissis consularibus viris qui regio genere ortam peierarent;" Dio, 61.7.1; Hor. *Od.* 2.4; Tac. 13.45.1, 46.4.

<sup>4</sup> Tac. 14.1-11; Henzen, *Acta Frat. Arv.* 77 f.

the opposition of Burrus (Dio, 62.13.1), who died in 62? Finally the wedding was deferred, according to Tacitus, because of Nero's fears of Sulla and Plautus, until those threatening rivals were executed.<sup>5</sup>

So then, in 62, after failure to sustain a disgraceful, trumped-up charge against an Alexandrian flute-player, Eucærus, of adultery with Octavia,<sup>6</sup> Nero divorced her on the announced ground of her sterility, and twelve days later married Poppaea (Tac. 14.60.1; Suet. 35.3). Octavia has received sympathy and pity from the first century to the twentieth; and no wonder, for she is a very appealing and sympathetic figure, which her imperial husband is not. But it is no more than mere justice to note that their union had been *mariage de convenance* no less for Nero than for her, and that in the nine years, or nearly, of the marriage she had borne him no child.

Nero could know, at least, that his new wife was not barren, for she had given Rufrius Crispinus a son; he may even have known that she was pregnant by him, for their child was born 21 January in the next year, 63. It was a daughter, and Nero was in ecstasy of joy. What if it had been a son and heir! But the little girl lived less than four months. In 65 Poppaea was pregnant again, but died in the autumn.<sup>7</sup>

Nero sought at once to marry Antonia, the elder half-sister of Octavia and widow of Faustus Sulla whom he had executed in 62. But she refused and was executed under a charge of treason, as involved in the Pisonian conspiracy (Suet. 35.4; cf. Tac. 15.53.4). This astonishing episode will engage our attention again below (209).

In the first half of 66, apparently,<sup>8</sup> he made Statilia Messalina his third wife. Her fourth husband, Atticus Vestinus, had married

<sup>5</sup> Tac. 14.59.4; cf. further, below, 203–5.

<sup>6</sup> Tac. 14.60.2–4, 62.1; Dio, 62.13.4. The case of Eucærus should give some pause to those who insist that the Empire was an autocratic, capricious, utterly lawless tyranny. Had it been that, this malicious and fraudulent indictment, which served the wish and will of Nero and Poppaea, should have been successful; it failed, and they must seek other means to their end. The shortly following case of Anicetus (below, 206) succeeded; it was fraudulent too, but there *was* a confession (though perjured) by the defendant, the case was tried *in camera*, and Seneca and Burrus were no longer among the *amici Caesaris*, the former retired, the latter deceased.

<sup>7</sup> The *Oclavia*, 181, 590 ff., represents that Poppaea's pregnancy was known before the marriage. For the birth, Tac. 15.23; *CIL* VI 2043 I 18, 20; for Poppaea's death, Tac. 16.6.1: "post finem ludicri Poppaea mortem obiit." The *ludicrum* probably was celebrated at the anniversary of Nero's accession, 13 October.

<sup>8</sup> *PIR* S 625 and *reff.* there.

her though he knew she was Nero's mistress, and had then, as consul in 65, fallen victim of the suspicions following the Pisonian conspiracy (Tac. 15.68 f.). There was, it appears, no issue of this third marriage when Nero committed suicide in the middle of his thirty-first year, 9 June 68.<sup>9</sup>

Thus throughout the years of his reign Nero might have always reasonable expectation of an heir of his own blood. Only if he were ill, and dangerously so, need he give any thought to the succession of other than his own anticipated heir. Had Augustus paid the matter any particular attention before his desperate illness in 23 B.C.? He was then nearly forty.

Now Suetonius (51) informs us: "ter omnino per quattuordecim annos languit, atque ita ut neque vino neque consuetudine reliqua abstineret." We are able to identify one of the three occasions with absolute certainty as A.D. 60 (Tac. 14.22.6); a second very probably in 66;<sup>10</sup> and possibly the third, as in 68 (Suet. 41.1; Dio, 63.26.1). The accounts of the two latter illnesses make no allusion to any question of the succession; but on the occasion in 60 there is an extremely interesting discussion of it.

In that year Tacitus reports (14.22.6), immediately after the withdrawal of Rubellius Plautus to Asia (see below, 202), that Nero went bathing in the source of the Aqua Marcia and in consequence suffered a grave illness, "secutaque anceps valetudo." In another passage (14.47.1) the historian relates that flattering courtiers round about the Emperor said, "If anything happens to your Majesty, the end is at hand for our Empire." "Oh no," replied Nero, "the Commonwealth has resource." When his friends then asked, "In whom, particularly?" Nero added, "Well, in Memmius Regulus."

Who and what was Memmius Regulus?

Publius Memmius Regulus was an Italian, a *novus homo*, whom Tiberius had selected for advancement to senatorial rank. That is a strong witness to his abilities. *Quaestor Tiberi* and praetor, he became *consul suffectus* 1 October 31, as colleague of Lucius Fulcinus Trio who was semester consul from 1 July. On the night of 17 October Sertorius Macro arrived in the capital from Capreae, newly commissioned praetorian prefect and bearing despatches

<sup>9</sup> *PIR*<sup>2</sup> D 129 and reff. there.

<sup>10</sup> Philostr. *Vit. Apollon.* 4.44; *CIL* VI 2044 g, h; cf. Tac. 16.13.1-3, where Nero is not named, but an epidemic is recorded as divine punishment for the crimes of A.D. 65. Cf. also Tac. 16.22.1, Thræsea accused in 66: "numquam pro salute principis aut caelesti voce immolavisse."

from the Emperor to Regulus, to the *praefectus vigilum*, Graecinius Laco, and to the Senate. And the next day Sejanus was overthrown. Since Trio appears to have favored Sejanus, one wonders whether Tiberius had not been waiting until the loyal, dependable Regulus entered office before attempting to strike down the conspirator. Regulus and Trio passed the rest of their consular term in wrangling, mutual recriminations and reciprocal threats of prosecution.

When in 35 Poppaeus Sabinus died at his post of governor of Achaëa, Macedonia and Moesia, Tiberius named Regulus to succeed him; Gaius and Claudius retained him in that important function. His governorship was briefly interrupted in 38 for him to accompany his wife, Lollia Paulina, to Rome, whither Gaius had summarily commanded her, to become his own consort.

Under Claudius, between 47 and 51, Regulus was proconsul of Asia. He was *Frater Arvalis*, *Septemvir Epulonum*, and *Sodalis Augustalis*; he was moderately wealthy, with estates in the territory of Aricia; and he had a grown son who would become consul in 63.<sup>11</sup> His age was now presumably in the middle sixties; that was not too old for the imperial position; Augustus and Tiberius had ruled effectively until their upper seventies, and Galba would succeed at 70, Vespasian at 60, and Nerva at 66.

<sup>11</sup> In general, *PIR* M 342; de Laet, *De Samenstelling van den Romeinschen Senaat gedurende de eerste eeuw van het prinsipaal* (Antwerp 1941) (hereafter cited as "de Laet") No. 682; cf. Rogers, *Criminal Trials and Criminal Legislation under Tiberius* (Middletown 1935) 115, 127. I have accepted as historical Tacitus' anecdote of Nero's nomination of Regulus, finding nothing inherently improbable in the story. Groag, however, bluntly denies its historicity. "Diese Erzählung ist schon darum ungeschichtlich, weil sie ähnlich aus verschiedenen Zeiten und von verschiedenen Personen berichtet wird (z. B. von Philipp II von Makedonien, von Traian, Septimius Severus u.a.). [Note that Groag means to equate these persons with Regulus, not with Nero, in the story.] Zudem ist die Übertragung der Wanderanekdote auf Nero und Regulus (die Tacitus natürlich nicht selbst vorgenommen hat) nichts weniger als glücklich. Der Erzählung lässt sich nur die eine Tatsache entnehmen, dass sich Regulus hohen persönlichen Ansehens im Reiche und bei Nero selbst erfreute. Dies bezeugt auch die Ehre des eponymen Consulats, die Nero nach dem Tode des Regulus seinem Sohne zuteil werden liess" (*RE* 15.635). I have searched in vain for either ancient sources or modern discussion of his reference to Philip, Trajan and Septimius Severus.

The existence of historical parallels does not of itself necessarily make an incident unacceptable. There is no disposition to deny the historicity of Augustus' delivery of his ring to Agrippa in 23 B.C., which is very similar, if not precisely parallel, occurrence. It may be remarked also of the three persons specified by Groag that, since all came eventually to power, there was a motivation for attaching to their names a story which would evidence the recognition of their worthiness to rule, before their actual elevation; this motivation does not obtain in the case of Regulus.

Here, indeed, was an able, distinguished, experienced and loyal servant of the State. Tacitus says of him: "auctoritate, constantia, fama, in quantum praeumbrante imperatoris fastigio datur, clarus" (14.47.1). It is difficult to deny that Nero had named a sound and suitable candidate for the imperial throne. All that was lacking was a relation to Augustus, "quod tunc spectaretur" (Tac. 13.1.2).

A year after this incident Regulus died, and Tacitus expresses some amazement that Nero had allowed him to live on to a natural death, but explains that he was protected by his retirement and the facts that he was neither of ancient nobility nor of immoderate wealth (14.47.1 f.). We may note with interest the clear implication that the historian considered him a worthy imperial candidate; and we may decline to share Tacitus' astonishment that Nero had spared his life, for in A.D. 60 rivals potentially far more dangerous than Regulus were still living in the State with Nero's sufferance. This leads us naturally to the other and larger topic of this paper.

## II

Nero was saluted as Emperor by the praetorian guard 13 October 54. Three months later, on 15 December, he would be seventeen years of age. At the time of his accession there were quite obviously the following several persons who might reasonably be regarded with some apprehension as potential rivals to Nero's throne:

1. Preëminently, of course, there was Britannicus (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 820), own son of Claudius, from whom the adoption of Nero, 25 February 50,<sup>12</sup> had preëmpted the succession to his father. Britannicus, born 12 February 41, was now midway in his fourteenth year.

2. Faustus Cornelius Sulla (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 1464; de Laet, 997) the last descendant of the Dictator and heir to a famous name; half-brother of the late Empress Messalina, husband of Claudius' daughter Antonia, consul (?*ante tempus*) during the whole year 52. If, as Groag believes, Sulla's consulship had been advanced by Claudius, he would now be aged probably about thirty.

3. Rubellius Plautus (*PIR* R 85; de Laet, 1667), as son of Rubellius Blandus and Julia, the granddaughter of Tiberius, was "pari ac Nero gradu a divo Augusto" (Tac. 13.19.3). His parents were married in 33; he may have been, then, perhaps three years Nero's senior.

<sup>12</sup> Tac. 12.25; *CIL* VI 2041.58; 32353.

4. Marcus Junius Silanus (*PIR* I 553/55; de Laet, 1034), son of the homonymous consul of A.D. 19 and Aemilia Lepida, great-granddaughter of Augustus; so, also, "pari ac Nero gradu"; born A.D. 14, consul 46 (for the whole year);<sup>13</sup> he was now proconsul of Asia and aged forty. Tacitus (13.1.1) characterizes him as "segnis et dominationibus aliis fastiditus, adeo ut Gaius Caesar pecudem auream eum appellare solitus sit."

5. Decimus Silanus Torquatus (*PIR* I 558; de Laet, 1036), brother of the foregoing, so, again, "pari ac Nero gradu;" consul, 53; he would now be, therefore, about thirty-three.

6. Lucius Junius Silanus Torquatus (*PIR* I 560; de Laet, 1440), son of No. 4 above, and so one generation farther from Augustus than Nero, but probably much of an age with him. He had been brought up by his aunt and her husband, Gaius Cassius Longinus, the jurispudent.

7 and 8. Annius Pollio (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> A 678; de Laet, 1295), and Annius Vinicianus (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> A 700; de Laet, 1297). These brothers were sons of Lucius Annius Vinicianus (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> A 701; de Laet, 498). The elder Vinicianus had been very active in opposition to earlier Emperors. In A.D. 32, together with his father Annius Pollio, and Appius Silanus, Mamercus Scaurus and Calvisius Sabinus, he had been charged with *maiestas*;<sup>14</sup> indictment of Silanus and Sabinus was refused, and trial of the other three was deferred to await Tiberius' attendance upon court; Scaurus was tried on other charges two years later, but against Pollio and Vinicianus, so far as we know, no further action was taken. Vinicianus attained the consulship, we do not know when. He was friend of Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, executed by Gaius in 39 for treason. He was a principal member of the conspiracy which assassinated Gaius in January 41, and was protected by his fellows from the Emperor's German bodyguard. He tried then to elevate Gaius' brother-in-law, Marcus Vinicius, but was prevented by the consuls; he succeeded, however, in thwarting the ambitions of Valerius Asiaticus; and he was himself regarded as a worthy candidate. The next year he instigated the rebellion of Camillus Scribonianus against Claudius, and when it collapsed in failure he committed suicide. That man's sons might have similar sentiments and aspirations. And further, if Borghesi's conjecture is correct, they were connected with the family of the

<sup>13</sup> De Laet's "45" is evidently a typographical error.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Rogers (above, note 11) 138 f.

Caesars. Marcus Vinicius, mentioned above as Gaius' brother-in-law, had married Julia, daughter of Germanicus and Agrippina. Borghesi plausibly posits a Vinicia married to an Annius Pollio as explanation of the name of our Annius Vinicianus, father and son.<sup>15</sup>

A few other possible rivals emerge as the years of Nero's reign run on, and we shall notice them as they make their appearance.

No reader, probably, will be surprised that Nero destroyed all these potential rivals sooner or later. But almost every reader, perhaps, will be surprised to discover how very late rather than soon the end came for most of them. This curious fact of the deferment of their fall, it seems, demands some explanation, which we shall endeavor to provide. Let us now, with an eye single to the security or insecurity of Nero's throne, survey his reign annalistically, for only so, of course, does it appear how much delayed the overthrow of a rival often was.

In a phrase which closely repeats his statement of the alleged assassination of Agrippa Postumus forty years before,<sup>16</sup> Tacitus reports: "prima novo principatu mors Iunii Silani proconsulis Asiae ignaro Nerone per dolum Agrippinae paratur."<sup>17</sup> Though Pliny holds Nero culpable, Tacitus is quite clear that Agrippina was responsible; and it is not difficult to believe that there were persons who would obey orders from the domineering dowager. Her agents were a Roman knight, Publius Celer, and an imperial freedman, Helius; they brazenly poisoned Silanus at a dinner party. Tacitus (13.1.2 f.) details Agrippina's motivation: first, she feared his vengeance for her destruction of his younger brother Lucius, whom Vitellius, in her service, had convicted of incest in the last days of 48, and who had committed suicide on the wedding day of Claudius and Agrippina early in 49 (Tac. 12.4, 8.1); secondly, there was widespread popular demand for Silanus instead of Nero as Emperor (Nero was little more than a boy, and a crime had brought him to the throne; Silanus was man of competent years, unsullied, noble and descended from Augustus). The first motive is not very convincing: Silanus was no larger threat to the Empress than he had been for now five years. But the second is much more cogent and perfectly adequate explanation.

<sup>15</sup> Borghesi, *Oeuvres Compl.* 4.477-88.

<sup>16</sup> Tac. 1.6, "Primum facinus novi principatus fuit Postumi Agrippae caedes;" but cf. W. Allen, Jr., in *TAPA* 78 (1947) 131-39.

<sup>17</sup> Tac. 13.1.1; cf. Pliny, *N.H.* 7.58; Dio, 61.6.4 f.

If one ask why Silanus was the only victim as the new Emperor assumed power, the answer seems to be the restraint of Seneca and Burrus. "Ibaturque in caedes, nisi Afranius Burrus et Annaeus Seneca obviam issent" (Tac. 13.2.1). Agrippina would not have stopped so short; it was later alleged against her that "pericula viris inlustribus struxisset" (Tac. 14.11.1).

Before the expiration of A.D. 54 occurred an incident, briefly recorded by Tacitus (13.10.3), interesting in its implications. An indictment was sought against an equestrian, Julius Densus, otherwise unknown, on the charge that he had favored Britannicus. The indictment was rejected. The law of treason, until 397,<sup>18</sup> comprehended only overt action; a man's thoughts, sentiments, wishes were not indictable. The new reign was no tyranny.

The year 55 was excitingly eventful. Agrippina's power was waning (Tac. 13.12.1); she failed to prevent the liaison with Acte, she failed to stop it, she failed to win patronage over it; her son, with the support of his ministers, ignored or defied her; Nero dismissed Pallas from the secretaryship he had occupied these many years, and he had been Agrippina's right-hand man (Tac. 13.12-14). Agrippina lost her temper; she denounced and threatened Nero. She said, according to Tacitus, that Britannicus was now old enough for the throne, the true and worthy heir to his father's power, now wielded by the engrafted adopted son through the wrongs herself had committed; she would willingly reveal all the woes of the unhappy house, including her marriage to Claudius and her poisoning of him; the gods and she had taken one precaution — her stepson still lived; she and Britannicus would go to the praetorian camp; the Guard would listen to her, Germanicus' daughter, not to the weak and crippled Burrus nor to Seneca, exile and schoolmaster. She threatened physical assault, she hurled insults, and swore by her now deified late husband, the shades of the brothers Silani and all her now frustrated crimes (Tac. 13.14.3-6). So the Tacitean rhetoric; but none of it is improbable; rather all is utterly in Agrippina's character.

The immediate consequence was the assassination of Britannicus at the very beginning of 55.<sup>19</sup> It is not relevant to rehearse that

<sup>18</sup> *Cod.* 9.8.5.pr. (Arcadius and Honorius, A.D. 397).

<sup>19</sup> Tac. 13.15-17; Dio, 61.7.4; Suet. 33.2 f. For the date, "propinquo die, quo quartum decimum aetatis annum Britannicus explebat," Tac. 13.15.1; cf. Suet. *Claud.* 27.2, for Britannicus' birthday, 12 February.

gruesome and familiar story, but only to note that Agrippina had posed a genuine and very serious threat to Nero's security on his throne, which made the continued existence of Britannicus an insupportable hazard.

Agrippina, defeated but undeterred, consoled with Octavia, conferred secretly with her friends, reached passionately for money in all directions, cultivated army officers, and paid court to any nobles she considered eligible (Tac. 13.18.3). Was this the time when she toyed with Aulus Plautius, the nephew of Plautia Urgulanilla, Claudius' one-time Empress, and put ideas in his silly young head (Suet. 35.4)? And did she not probably consider Rubellius Plautus (No. 3 in our list above), as would shortly be charged? Nero withdrew from their attendance upon her the soldiers of the Guard and of the German bodyguard, and moved her out of the palace into Antonia's house (Tac. 13.18.4 f.). It was effective; nobody called on Agrippina except ladies who either loved or hated her. The latter included Junia Silana, who thus had opportunity to know what she presently alleged — if it was true.

Silana had suffered an unforgivable, unforgettable offense from Agrippina. She chose two of her clients, Iturius and Calvisius, to circulate charges against the Empress-Mother, nothing familiar and ordinary, says Tacitus, such as mourning Britannicus or gossiping Octavia's wifely wrongs, but that she had determined to make Rubellius Plautus her husband (she was forty, he was probably twenty-one, but this would hardly balk Agrippina), set him on the throne, and thus regain her ascendancy in the State. Iturius and Calvisius disclosed this to Atimetus, freedman of Nero's aunt Domitia; Atimetus was delighted, for Domitia had good reason to hate Agrippina; Atimetus urged the actor Paris, another freedman of Domitia, who had entrée with Nero, to denounce Agrippina at once to the Emperor (Tac. 13.19).

The night was far advanced and Nero was in his cups when Paris entered, unwontedly serious, and set forth the whole information in order. Nero, beside himself with panic and rage, cried out for the execution of Agrippina and Plautus. Burrus, maintaining poise and reason, promised that Agrippina should die if she were convicted of this crime; "but anybody, most of all your mother, must have a trial, an opportunity for defense;<sup>20</sup> these are no formally, legally lodged charges; there is only the word of a single person

<sup>20</sup> Any reader who considers the early Empire a lawless tyranny, N.B.

from an unfriendly household; it is still dark, the hour is late, you've been up all night drinking, don't act rashly on what you do not know" (Tac. 13.20).

So in the morning the ministers waited upon the Empress "ut nosceret obiecta dissolveretque vel poenas lueret." That is, there would be some sort of pretense, at very least, of judicial procedure (with Court sitting in the defendant's home!), and, in case of conviction, there would be rather summary execution of sentence. "Burrus iis mandatis Seneca coram fungebatur." Does not this mean that Burrus was duly and specially commissioned to act as the Emperor's deputy in the trial, with Seneca sitting as *assessor*? There were present also some freedmen of Nero's suite, in the approved manner of oriental monarchy,<sup>21</sup> as "arbitri sermonis"; they would assure that the Emperor's interests were served. If there is no apparent provision that the defendant should have counsel, it will be immediately evident that that was the least of Agrippina's requirements; for she was her own incomparably able counsel.

Burrus then declared what the charges were and who were their authors, and indicated in no uncertain terms that a very categorical dissipation of those charges was of the essence. Agrippina poured out her venom upon Silana and Domitia; she denounced the charges as worthy only of a stage-play; she asked where the witnesses were who would testify that she had seduced the city troops or undermined the loyalty of the provinces or bribed Caesar's slaves and freedmen; could she have survived if Britannicus were on the throne? And if Plautus or anyone else became Emperor, she must inevitably be tried on charges of which *only* Nero could acquit her.

It was a skilful, clever, shrewd defense. It still avails her today. Henderson says, "the absurdity of the fabricated charges became quickly apparent"; and Momigliano, "the falsity of the accusation was soon detected." The present writer is much less sure.<sup>22</sup> She completely convinced the Court, who now endeavored to soothe and pacify her. She demanded audience with Nero; to him she made no allusion to her defense, for her case had been established;

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Tac. 14.59.3, "eum [sc. Rubellium Plautum] centurio trucidavit coram Pelagone spadone, quem Nero centurioni et manipulo, quasi satellitibus ministrum regium, praeposuerat."

<sup>22</sup> B. W. Henderson, *The Life and Principate of the Emperor Nero* (London 1905) 70; A. Momigliano, in *CAH* 10.711. But W. H. Alexander, "The Tacitean 'Non Lique' on Seneca," *Univ. Calif. Publ. Class. Philol.* 14 (1952) 305, has his doubts: "The tale was first-rate fiction, if fiction it was."

she did not even reproach him with ingratitude for her services to him; she simply demanded vengeance on her accusers and prizes for her friends. Four major appointments were awarded to her nominees. Silana was exiled; Iturius and Calvisius were banished; Atimetus was executed, but Paris spared; Rubellius Plautus was ignored (Tac. 13.21 f.).

This same year also indictment of Burrus and Pallas was asked by a certain Paetus, who made a business of collecting debts for the treasury. Paetus charged that they had plotted to elevate to the throne Cornelius Sulla (our No. 2 above), son-in-law of the late Emperor. Nero tried the case in his own court, with Burrus sitting among the assessors (evidently the accusation against him was not even regarded seriously) and Seneca defending. Tacitus says Paetus was "vanitatis manifestus"; the defendants were acquitted and penalty of false and malicious prosecution imposed on Paetus, who went into exile (Tac. 13.23; Dio, 61.10.6).

Two years then passed in perfect quiet, it seems; Tacitus and Dio both have very brief accounts of A.D. 56 and 57.

But in 58 Cornelius Sulla (our No. 2) fell under some suspicion; and Nero considered that Sulla's attitude of apparent indifference was a shrewd pretense. According to Tacitus' narrative, an imperial freedman, Graptus (well versed in palace intrigue by long experience which had commenced under Tiberius!), played upon Nero's suspicions with an ingenious fabrication. It was Caesar's habit to enjoy his nocturnal pleasures in the vicinity of the Mulvian Bridge, outside the city. An ambush had been plotted to take the Emperor unaware as he returned along the Via Flaminia; but by happy accident Nero had on that night taken a different route which brought him to Sallust's Gardens. Sulla, Graptus said, had laid the ambush. According to Tacitus, the factual basis of the whole story was that some of Nero's attendants, returning by the Via Flaminia as usual, had been set upon by a band of young bloods and given a bad scare. No one from Sulla's household had been recognized; and Sulla's character was completely at variance with what was charged. But as though he had been convicted Sulla received orders to leave Rome and reside in Marseilles (Tac. 13.47).

In 59 Nero compassed the assassination of Agrippina. The familiar story needs no retelling here (Tac. 14.1-13). But part of the aftermath has interesting implication relevant to the present discussion. Nero, in order, Tacitus says, to increase the odium toward

his mother and demonstrate that his own clemency was the greater now that she was gone, restored Junia Calvina and Calpurnia and the ex-praetors Valerius Capito and Licinius Gabolus, and allowed the return of Lollia Paulina's ashes and the erection of a tomb to receive them. All these had been victims of Agrippina. And he recalled Iturius and Calvisius, "nam Silana fato functa erat" (Tac. 14.12.5 ff.). Does Tacitus' phrase possibly mean that Nero declared he would have restored Silana also, had she still been living, or only that mention of Iturius and Calvisius has reminded the historian to record Silana's end? However that may be, does not the restoration of her two clients mean that Nero had now changed his mind about the charges made four years before by Silana, that Agrippina was plotting to set Rubellius Plautus on the throne? Perhaps four more years' experience of the unscrupulous and resourceful Agrippina had raised doubts of her facile and fluent defense against those charges. But no action was taken respecting Plautus.

From early August to early December of A.D. 60 a comet was conspicuously visible.<sup>23</sup> Since this phenomenon was commonly interpreted to portend an imminent change of ruler, Rome gossiped about the identity of Nero's successor. Speculation centered upon Rubellius Plautus; he was noble on his mother's side, for she was Julia, daughter of Tiberius' son Drusus; his character was exemplary, his conduct old-fashioned and his manner retiring. And when lightning destroyed Nero's picnic table at Lake Subiaco near Tibur, which had been the seat of Plautus' father's family, everyone was assured that heaven had destined Plautus to be Nero's successor. And there were some who thought the gods' will should be assisted toward fulfilment. Nero therefore wrote Plautus that it would promote the tranquillity of the capital if he withdrew, and suggested he should take up residence on the estates in Asia inherited from Drusus. Plautus complied and, accompanied by his wife, Antistia Pollitta, retired to Asia (Tac. 14.22). It was immediately following this episode that there occurred the illness of Nero which was the occasion of his suggesting Memmius Regulus as a good successor to the throne.

On the death of Burrus in 62 Nero appointed to the command of the praetorian guard Faenius Rufus, one of Agrippina's men, who

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Rogers, "The Neronian Comets." *TAPA* 84 (1953) 237-49.

from seven years' efficient administration of the grain supply had the approval of the populace, and Ofonius Tigellinus, who had been *praefectus vigilum* (Tac. 14.51).

Tigellinus, finding that Nero's principal anxiety was the two possible rivals, Sulla and Plautus, advised that it had been a mistake to remove them from Rome where surveillance was feasible. For this he held Burrus culpable by implication, declaring that he, unlike Burrus, was single-mindedly devoted to the Emperor — once again a hint that there had been substance in Silana's allegation that Agrippina intended to elevate Plautus in Nero's stead. What was Nero's fear of them now? Sulla had been four years in banishment at Massilia; Plautus had been two years in his Asian retirement. Tigellinus asserted that both were in close proximity with provincial armies; Nero himself evidently feared the reaction of both to his marriage with Poppaea, for Tacitus says, after the execution of Sulla and Plautus, "*posito metu nuptias Poppaeae ob eius modi terrores dilatas maturare parat*" (Tac. 14.57–59).

Tigellinus alleged that the Gallic provinces were excited by the presence in Massilia of a person bearing the great dictator's name, and, as Nero had done four years before, interpreted Sulla's apathetic manner as mask and pretense; and that Plautus' nobility was stirring the people of Asia, that he did not even pretend to like retirement, but emulated Romans of an earlier generation and had even taken up Stoicism, which was dangerous stimulus. Tacitus makes no mention of judicial process, but reports only that Sulla's executioner on the sixth day out of Rome reached Massilia, found Sulla at the dinner table unfearful, unwarned even by rumor, despatched him and returned to Rome with his head. Nero made fun of the fact that Sulla was very prematurely gray: he would be not yet forty.<sup>24</sup> We hear of no aftermath of Sulla's death. Is it possibly a later reflection of the suspicions respecting Sulla that, five years after, on suggestion of Paccius Africanus (otherwise unknown), the brothers Sulpicii Scribonii, Rufus and Proculus (de Laet, 1109, 1110; *PIR* S 216, 217, 219), were summoned by Nero to Greece under threat of some prosecution and, failing to obtain trial, committed suicide (Dio, 63.17.2 ff.)? These two had been the governors of Upper and Lower Germany, A.D. 59 to 67; Sulla was resident in

<sup>24</sup> Nero seems to have been prolific of more or less gruesome jests over the bodies of his victims; cf., in the case of Plautus, below, 204; Aulus Plautius, Suet. 35.4; Agrippina, Dio, 61.14.2.

Massilia, 58 to 62, and Tigellinus found alarming his nearness to the German armies.<sup>25</sup>

On Plautus' end there is much more information; in fact there was a quite delightful, if somewhat bewildering, diversity of reports.

1. Gossip in Rome said Plautus was in negotiation with Corbulo (based lately in Cappadocia and Galatia, now in Syria, and campaigning into Armenia and Parthia); that Asia had revolted in support of him; that the party sent to carry out his execution had gone over to the rebels (Tac. 14.58.1 f.). All this Tacitus rejects,<sup>26</sup> as of course he must, considering Plautus a victim of tyranny.

2. A freedman of Plautus succeeded in reaching Asia in advance of the executioner with injunctions from Plautus' father-in-law, Lucius Antistius Vetus: "Fight; if you defeat the execution party of sixty [Tacitus later calls the detachment a maniple, and says a centurion was in command, with the eunuch Pelago accompanying, 14.59.3], there will be time, before others can arrive from Rome, in which anything can happen, even war; you have everything to gain and nothing to lose by resisting" (14.58.3-5). This Tacitus ("ceterum" 14.58.3) appears to accept. But Plautus was unmoved by these admonitions, whether, Tacitus suggests, unarmed exile, he saw no resource for resistance, or was tired of dubious prospects, or out of love for wife and children wished to placate the Emperor by removing himself as a challenge to Nero's security (Tac. 14.59.1).

3. Other sources familiar to Tacitus had a different version of Antistius' message to Plautus: "tamquam nihil atrox immineret." What possible meaning can this have, unless Antistius was utterly deceived (14.59.2)?

4. The same sources reported that two teachers of philosophy, an otherwise unknown Coeranus and the famous Musonius Rufus, advised Plautus to have the courage to choose suicide instead of life in uncertainty and fear (*ibid.*). Tacitus will not vouch for either 3 or 4 ("certe" 14.59.3).

5. The executioner found him at exercise and decapitated him in the presence of his wife (Tac. 14.59.3; 16.10.4). His head was carried back to Rome, and Nero, seeing it, soliloquized "Why were you afraid of a man with such a long nose?" (Tac. 14.59.4; Dio, 62.14.1). Dio (Xiphilinus) has *only* Nero's grim *bon mot*; Suetonius, astonishingly enough, has never a word of Rubellius Plautus at all.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. the linking of Plautus with Corbulo, below, and 211.

<sup>26</sup> Tac. 14.58.3, "vana haec more famae credentium otio augebantur."

Nero despatched a message to the Senate, not reporting the death of Sulla and Plautus, but stating that both were of dangerous disposition (“*turbidum ingenium*”) and that he himself was at great pains to maintain the Commonwealth unharmed. Thereupon the Senate voted a *supplicatio* in recognition of the Emperor’s care for the State, and that Sulla and Plautus be deprived of their senatorial rank. This, comments Tacitus, was more of a mockery than a misfortune to them (14.59.5 f.). And Plautus’ case had aftermath a few years later, which will concern us below.

Now, with possible rivalry of Sulla and Plautus removed, Nero laid aside his fear and prepared to hasten divorce of Octavia<sup>27</sup> and marriage of Poppaea Sabina. Poppaea’s son by Rufrius Crispinus Nero ordered put out of the way, Suetonius says (35.5), because he played at being a general and an emperor. Was Nero consciously precluding the possibility that an elder stepson might displace his future son and heir in the succession, as he himself had supplanted Britannicus? Octavia’s divorce and banishment to Campania roused voluble and public protest by the populace of Rome. Tacitus aptly and grimly remarks, “. . . vulgum, cui minor sapientia et ex mediocritate fortunae pauciora pericula sunt” (14.60.6). For had there not been this popular uprising, Octavia’s life at least might have been spared; but the people’s favor was her doom. Somehow — it is not clear in the obelized text of Tacitus — the impression or the rumor became current that Nero had recalled Octavia as his wife. Thereupon the exultant people, under arms (or so at least Tacitus presently makes Poppaea assert), ascended the Capitoline to thank the gods, threw down Poppaea’s statues, paraded with images of Octavia on their shoulders, and swarmed toward the palace to celebrate Nero’s praises. But now troops appeared to disperse the mob with cudgel and sword. And Poppaea’s statues were restored (14.59.5–60.2).

The scene is vividly reminiscent of another some thirty-odd years before. The populace had paraded images of the elder Agrippina and her son Nero in A.D. 29 (Tac. 5.4.3). As on that occasion Sejanus to Tiberius, so now Poppaea to Nero made the obvious, inevitable interpretative comments: “*arma illa adversus principem sumpta; ducem tantum defuisse, qui motis rebus facile reperiretur, omitteret modo Campaniam et in urbem ipsa pergeret, ad cuius*

<sup>27</sup> Now occurred the trial of Eucærus, above, 192.

nutum absentis tumultus cierentur." And, "et modicis remediis primos motus consedissee: at si desperent uxorem Neronis fore Octaviam, illi maritum daturus."<sup>28</sup>

Followed now the shameful, trumped-up case of Anicetus, tried before Nero and the *amici Caesaris*. Instrument of the assassination of Agrippina three years before, Anicetus now confessed adultery with Octavia and much else besides; he was exiled to Sardinia. Then, an imperial edict: that Octavia had tried to corrupt Anicetus, the prefect of the fleet, to treason, had aborted her adulterous child by Anicetus (Nero forgot that he had said she was sterile), and that all this had been established to him by evidence; he ordered her confinement by the military in Pandateria off the Campanian coast. A few days later the order for her death followed, 9 June.<sup>29</sup>

In 62 also Claudius Doryphorus, Nero's *a libellis*, and Pallas, ex-procurator *a rationibus*, died. Tacitus reports that Nero "was believed" to have poisoned both, because the former had opposed his marriage of Poppaea (and this is the reason for inclusion of the matter here), and Nero could not wait longer to inherit the latter's huge estate (Tac. 14.65.1). But, noting that Pallas was admittedly well along in years, "longa senecta," one may assume with much probability a natural death in both cases.<sup>30</sup>

The fourteenth book of the *Annals* closes with two sentences, enigmatic in their brevity, touching on an incident with large implication. Tacitus writes (14.65.2): "Romanus secretis criminationibus incusaverat Senecam ut C. Pisonis socium, sed validius a Seneca eodem crimine percussus est. unde Pisoni timor et orta insidiarum in Neronem magna moles et inprospera." It appears from the juxtaposition to Doryphorus and Pallas that Romanus also was imperial freedman. He made charges privately, one supposes within the suite of *amici Caesaris*, at any rate not by formal indictment, that Seneca was associated as partner with Piso. But Seneca successfully made the charge recoil upon Romanus' head. In consequence of the incident Piso had reason to be fearful, and this was the origin of a vast complex of plotting against Nero.

<sup>28</sup> Tac. 14.61.4, 7; cf. "quid reliquum, nisi ut caperent ferrum, et quorum imagines pro vexillis secuti forent, duces imperatoresque deligerent?" 5.4.5. The *Octavia* has repeated reference to popular support of Octavia: 183 ff., 780 ff., 820 ff., 864 ff., and in 877 ff. there is a statement, not unlike that of Tacitus, that the popular favor was fatal.

<sup>29</sup> Suet. 57.1; cf. *PIR*<sup>2</sup> D 129.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *TAPA* 78 (1947) 148 f.

Here, then, emerges a new potential rival to Nero, Gaius Calpurnius Piso,<sup>31</sup> for association with him is evidently recognized as suggesting treasonous intent. Piso inherited from his father (whom we cannot identify) connection with many distinguished families, and from his mother great wealth, which he lavished on beneficiaries of all classes. Tall, good-looking, affable, an eloquent advocate in the courts, he might sometimes pass for a man of high character, but was not. Like Memmius Regulus, he had lost a wife to Gaius, but subsequently stole for himself another man's wife, Atria Galla, who was beautiful but low-born. Exiled by Gaius, restored by Claudius, he had held a consulship, but governed no province. He declaimed, he sang on the tragic stage, he wrote poetry, he played a sensationally expert game of draughts, and he owned a villa at Baiae. He had now conceived imperial ambitions. It is most interesting that while on the one hand Piso was frightened by the disclosures in the exchange of charges between Seneca and Romanus, on the other hand Nero evidently ignored the same revelations, complacently allowing Piso to wait his time.

In 63 Nero's daughter was born in January and died in May (above, 192).

The next year Decimus Silanus Torquatus (No. 5 in our list) was indicted, evidently for treason. The prosecution asserted that he had been so extravagant that revolution was his only hope of recovery, and that he had organized his household in the manner and with the titles of the imperial bureaucracy (Tac. 15.35). The present writer has argued elsewhere<sup>32</sup> that this, like many another Tacitean narrative of treason-trial, represents a highly selective and misleading report. Silanus committed suicide. Nero averred in the Senate that he would have spared the defendant's life, evidently guilty though he was. One is entitled to feel some surprise that Silanus, obviously qualified rival, had been permitted to live through ten years of Nero's reign unmolested.

19 April 65 the conspiracy of Piso was discovered. It is quite unnecessary to the present purpose to rehearse the story of its frustration and the punishment of the conspirators. Let the reader peruse again for himself the vivid Tacitean narrative (15.48-74). But it is relevant here to call attention to several specific incidentals

<sup>31</sup> *PIR*<sup>3</sup> C 284 and reff. there, but esp. Tac. 15.48.

<sup>32</sup> Rogers, "A Tacitean Pattern in Narrating Treason-Trials," *TAPA* 83 (1952) 279-311; for Silanus, cf. 303.

in the story. First, Piso is reported to have feared that, after he had achieved Nero's assassination, Lucius Silanus (our No. 6) might gain the throne, acceptable to elements which had not joined with Piso in the conspiracy (Tac. 15.52.3). Secondly, Tacitus cites from Pliny Piso's intention to be accompanied by Antonia, the daughter of Claudius and widow of Faustus Sulla, when he should be presented to the praetorians by the prefect, Faenius Rufus. Tacitus however rejects the story on the grounds that Antonia would not lend her name nor hazard her safety in such a futile enterprise, and that Piso loved his wife too much thus to entangle himself with another woman — unless, the historian adds a qualifying reservation, the desire for supreme power is more compelling than other emotions (15.53.4 f.). It may be added further that Piso's wife was less than noble (above) and he might well have doubts that she would enhance his prospects; Antonia would. More important, perhaps, some involvement of Antonia is necessary to Suetonius' report that, when she declined Nero's offer of marriage after this conspiracy, he executed her for treason (35.4).

Thirdly, it is recorded (Tac. 15.65) that there were some among the military in the conspiracy whose intention it was, as soon as the aim of Nero's removal was attained, to despatch Piso also and deliver the imperial position to Seneca. And Henderson<sup>33</sup> has demonstrated how much very good reason there is for accepting a definite complicity of Seneca in the plot. It was certainly true, as Tacitus (15.65.2) quotes one of the officers, that there was no gain in removing the lyre-player, only to put in his place a tragic singer.

Fourthly, Nero was very badly frightened by the Pisonian conspiracy ("magis magisque pavido Nerone," Tac. 15.57.4); it is no wonder, for the plot had failed very narrowly of success. It is therefore quite understandable if Nero's attitude toward his rivals appears less generous, or even vindictive, in the remainder of his reign.

Fifthly, it cannot too strongly be emphasized, *there was a judicial proceeding*. The case was tried in Nero's court; we read of arrests, questioning, evidence, tortures (the law so provided respecting slave witnesses), state's witnesses, confessions. After the conclusion of the trial there was a full publication of the proceedings by Nero, in address to the Senate and in edict to the people, including testimony and confessions (Tac. 15.73.1). And Tacitus

<sup>33</sup> *Op. cit.* (above, note 22) 280–83.

states categorically in summation (15.73.3) that those at the time who had any care for the truth did not doubt that a conspiracy had been proved, and that persons who were exiled upon conviction, when they were restored after Nero's death, admitted their guilt.<sup>34</sup> This is of the very greatest significance. For in the circumstances of this case, if ever, one might expect tyrannous lawlessness to manifest itself. But no. There is orderly procedure under law. We are, then, justified in some hesitancy and skepticism when Tacitus in narrating other cases denies, directly or by omission, that there was any trial.

One of the persons exiled on conviction of treason with Piso (Tac. 15.71.6) was Annius Pollio, No. 7 in our list of possible rivals. It is difficult to imagine that he would have been satisfied with Piso.

When Poppaea died in the autumn of 65 there occurred certainly one of the most curious and puzzling episodes of the reign. Nero sought to marry Antonia (Suet. 35.4). He would thus obtain again the same strengthening of his imperial position as his first marriage, with Octavia, had provided. He would also deprive the opposition of a person who might be advantageous rallying point and become effective supporter of rival claimant to the throne. One doubts there was any emotion involved. To Antonia here was amnesty for her complicity in the conspiracy of Piso, and free offer of what she might have won if Sulla had succeeded in treason, or if Piso had removed Nero and set aside his own wife for a more suitable Empress. Antonia refused. If her blood was thicker than water, she could hardly accept. Nero had displaced her brother as heir, and then come to the throne by assassination of her father; then he had poisoned her brother; he had banished and then executed her husband; and he had divorced, then banished, and finally executed her half-sister.

Nero executed Antonia on charges of treason (Suet. *ibid.*). We have seen (208) that Pliny's version of the Pisonian conspiracy named Antonia in a connection with the leader of the plot which gravely compromised her. She may indeed have been guilty of complicity. But whether she actually was or not, it was clear that if she lived any future rival to Nero might possibly win powerful

<sup>34</sup> In despite of Tacitus, it has yet been said that the trial of the conspirators differed little in principle from Hitlerian and Stalinist purges! So, Chester G. Starr, *Civilization and the Caesars* (Ithaca 1954) 161.

ally to his ambition in this daughter of Claudius. There was political justification for her removal.

In 65 also, Gaius Cassius Longinus, the jurispudent, and his wife's nephew, Lucius Junius Silanus (our No. 6), were tried in the Senate for treason. Young Silanus had been brought up by the jurist. Longinus was brother of the one-time husband of Gaius' sister Drusilla. Their case has been discussed in detail by this writer elsewhere,<sup>35</sup> as one among those over which Tacitus, with the skill he had learned in the law courts, has cast an obscuring veil. Longinus was deported to Sardinia, and Silanus, supposedly en route to exile on Naxos, was executed at Barium (Tac. 16.9). Silanus' death is much less surprising than the fact that he had survived to this rather late date.

Despite the execution for treason of Rubellius Plautus in 62, two years later his father-in-law, Lucius Antistius Vetus (*PIR*<sup>3</sup> A 753/776; de Laet, 944), had become proconsul of Asia, 64/5. Now, returned from his province, he was in 65 indicted by his freedman Fortunatus together with a Claudius Demianus. Perhaps accused with him were his mother-in-law, Sextia, and his daughter, Antistia Pollitta, Plautus' widow. Clearly the indictment was for treason. All three committed suicide; conviction followed (Tac. 16.9-11). But not much more can be extracted confidently from the obscurity of the case by Tacitus; it has been shown elsewhere<sup>36</sup> that one cannot even know whether all three, or two, or only one of the trio, was actually prosecuted under the indictment. But it was evident earlier (above, 204) that one of the various stories surrounding Plautus' execution plainly implicated his father-in-law as abetting his treason. Fortunatus may have brought forward damning evidence which had not been revealed in 62; or we may perhaps suppose that some vindictiveness inspired by the Pisonian conspiracy made Nero now regard what he had chosen to ignore three years before in Vetus' conduct.

The trials in 66 of Thræsea Paetus and some lesser co-defendants, and of Barea Soranus and his daughter Servilia (Tac. 16.21-35), have been discussed in considerable detail elsewhere.<sup>37</sup> The case of Thræsea, it was there concluded, was part of the aftermath of the Pisonian conspiracy; Thræsea was probably accused of instigating

<sup>35</sup> Rogers (above note 32) 303-5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 305-7.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 285-95.

and encouraging that treason, if no more. Barea Soranus evidently was convicted of attempting to raise a revolt in support of Rubellius Plautus in Asia, where he was the proconsul 61/2. It was more tentatively suggested that Servilia had been involved, perhaps, along with her husband, Annius Pollio (above, 209), in the Pisonian plot. For the prosecution of Thræsea, Cossutianus Capito and Eprius Marcellus received each five million sesterces; Ostorius Sabinus, prosecutor of Barea Soranus, got twelve hundred thousand and the *insignia quaestoria* (Tac. 16.33.4). Nero, who was greatly embarrassed financially, will not have paid out such sums as those except for what he *believed*, at least, were very high services, the conviction of very real and dangerous traitors.

Also in 66 occurred another conspiracy; our information, limited by the failure of *Annals* XVI to a half-sentence in Suetonius and probable mention in a fragment of the Acta Arvalium, comprises only the fact, the place (Beneventum), and the name of the titular leader, Annius Vinicianus (our No. 8).<sup>38</sup> We assume that he was executed.

The next year, when Nero was in Greece, we hear of the summons thither of Scribonius Sulpicius Proculus, his brother, Scribonius Sulpicius Rufus (above, 203), and the more famous Gnaeus Domitius Corbulo. Corbulo had been denounced by a subordinate, Arrius Varus, but on what charges we do not hear (Tac. *Hist.* 3.6.1). We have seen also a report that Rubellius Plautus negotiated with Corbulo in 62 (above, 204). Nero now ordered Corbulo's execution which that general anticipated by suicide. The Scribonii Sulpicii, under threat of indictment and therefore shunned, took their own lives also (Dio, 63.17.2 ff.).

As was remarked above, it is by no means surprising that all discoverable potential rivals of Nero had been soon or late destroyed. Marcus Junius Silanus was removed at once by Agrippina; Britannicus fell before Nero had been on his throne a year. Aulus Plautius was put away as soon as he appeared to be a danger. But excuse for the death of Sulla could have been found in 55, and certainly in 58; he did not die until 62. Rubellius Plautus might have been cut down even in 55, or in 59, or in 60; he too died in 62. There was clear indication in 62 that Piso was dangerous; he was overlooked until in 65 he presented crucial menace. It was not until 64 that

<sup>38</sup> Suet. 36.1; *CIL* VI 2044 I 2 f.

anything befell Decimus Silanus, and it was another year beyond that before his nephew Lucius was brought down. Nothing at all was done about Annius Pollio until he appeared among the accomplices of Piso in the conspiracy of 65; nor about his brother Vinicianus until he himself conspired to assassinate Nero the next year.

Does not all this seem to call for some explanation?

We have seen Nero, questioned in illness about the succession to the Empire in case of his death, make a thoroughly responsible answer to the question, and suggest an eminently qualified person as possible candidate (above, 193).

If we suppose Nero considered, out of sense of responsibility to the State, that, until and unless he should have an heir of his own, he must not destroy anyone who might in future perhaps be needed as head of State, except only in the eventuality that such individual became a clear, real, critical threat to his own security upon his throne, would this not account for the phenomenon we have observed? If not this, what does explain it?

Or *is* no explanation needed?