



Questions on Galba's Death

Find below some study questions on how Tacitus' account of Galba's death differs from those of Suetonius and Plutarch.

Study Questions

1. Compare these two accounts with Tacitus' description of Galba's death. What details are similar/different?
2. How does the presentation of Galba differ in each of the accounts?
3. Which account do you feel is most balanced?
4. Which account do you feel is most entertaining?
5. What is the difference in tone between the three authors?

Suetonius' Description of Galba's Death (The Life of Galba 20-21)

Some say that at the beginning of the disturbance he cried out, "What mean you, fellow soldiers? I am yours and you are mine," and that he even promised them largess. But the more general account is, that he offered them his neck without resistance, urging them to do their duty and strike, since it was their will. It might seem very surprising that none of those present tried to lend aid to their emperor, and that all who were sent for treated the summons with contempt except a company of German troops. These, because of his recent kindness in showing them great indulgence when they were weakened by illness, flew to his help, but through their unfamiliarity with the city took a roundabout way and arrived too late.

He was killed beside the Lake of Curtius and was left lying just as he was, until a common soldier, returning from a distribution of grain, threw down his load and cut off the head. Then, since there was no hair by which to grasp it, he put it under his robe, but later thrust his thumb into the mouth and so carried it to Otho. He handed it over to his servants and camp-followers, who set it on a lance and paraded it about the camp with jeers, crying out from time to time, "Galba, thou Cupid, exult in thy vigour!" The special reason for this saucy jest was, that the report had gone abroad a few days before, that when someone had congratulated him on still looking young and vigorous, he replied:

"As yet my strength is unimpaired."



From these it was bought by a freedman of Patrobius Neronianus for a hundred pieces of gold and thrown aside in the place where his patron had been executed by Galba's order. At last, however, his steward Argivus consigned it to the tomb with the rest of the body in Galba's private gardens on the Aurelian Road.

He was of average height, very bald, with blue eyes and a hooked nose. His hands and feet were so distorted by gout that he could not endure a shoe for long, unroll a book, or even hold one. The flesh on his right side too had grown out and hung down to such an extent, that it could with difficulty be held in place by a bandage.

Translation taken from

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Suetonius/12Caesars/Galba*.html – accessed 15:13 on 22/01/2018

Plutarch's Description of Galba's death (Life of Galba 27)

The litter was upset at the place called Lacus Curtius, and there Galba tumbled out and lay in his corselet, while the soldiers ran up and struck at him. But he merely presented his neck to their swords, saying: "Do your work, if this is better for the Roman people." So, then, after receiving many wounds in his legs and arms, he was slain, as most writers state, by a certain Camurius, of the fifteenth legion. Some, however, ascribe his death to Terentius, others to Lecanius, and others still to Fabius Fabulus, who, they say, cut off Galba's head and was carrying it wrapped in his cloak, since its baldness made it difficult to grasp; 3 then, since his companions would not suffer him to hide his deed of valour, but insisted on his displaying it to all eyes, he impaled on his spear and thrust on high the head of an aged man, who had been a temperate ruler, a high priest, and a consul, and ran with it, like a bacchanal, whirling about often, and brandishing the spear all dripping with blood.

Translation taken from

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