

A Calpurnian Conspiracy:
Anti-Neronian Themes in the *Eclogues* of Calpurnius Siculus

The details of the Pisonian Conspiracy, save for the incomplete executions provided by Tacitus in book 15, are mostly lost to us. Though some names and works of key members come down to us, those not made an example by the leery emperor Nero remain shrouded in mystery, but connections can be made elsewhere. In this paper, I intend to bring light to the overlooked *Eclogues* of Calpurnius Siculus while establishing their dubious dating at the height of the turmoil of Neronian Rome. Not only this, but while reviewing his syntax and word choice I will compare his stylings to fellow Neronian authors linked to the conspiracy by Tacitus placing Calpurnius Siculus in good terms with his possible kinsman and leader of this conspiracy, Gaius Calpurnius Piso.

Dating these *Eclogues* has been a dubious topic in past and present scholarship. Not until the mid-nineteenth century did a proposal for their dating in the time of Nero appear (Champlin, 1989), which still remains contested. Though evidence in word choice, such as the phrase “in sua... viscera” (Calp. Ecl. 1.48), brings about the idea of suffering and civil war, evoking images found in Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, a text wrought with scathing views of Emperor Nero by an author killed for involvement in the conspiracy. Along with civil war imagery, namely the bookends of *Eclogue 1* are strongly reminiscent of expected pastoral terminology, while the meat of the poem concerns itself with Roman violence, contrasting the images an *Eclogue* of Vergil would present. Apart from simply word choice, the themes of Lucan’s *Pharsalia* and Calpurnius Siculus’s *Eclogue 1* (civil war, an emperor watching as a god, images of thunder, etc.) convey a direct correlation in their Caesar of choice.

Another piece of evidence which will not act as the forefront of this paper but still bears relevance to the argument is the *Laus Pisonis*, a lyric poem of uncertain origin. With its similar style to the *Eclogues* of Calpurnius Siculus, some have suggested they share an author (Green, 2010), though no definitive evidence exists. But regardless of a direct connection to Calpurnius Piso through Panegyric, the stylings of Calpurnius Siculus present images of the city Rome which can all be found within the time of Nero, primarily descriptions of the amphitheatre (Townend, 1980).

While conflating imperial poets to an anti-Caesarian conspiracy has become popular in the previous decades, this paper aims not to simply join the bandwagon for a lesser read author, but to illuminate an author whose thoughts rarely see the limelight and reveal the political implications possibly hidden within his poetry which may or may not have led to his death almost two thousand years ago.

Bibliography

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