

Book I.
Title XLIII.

Concerning the Office of the Prefect of the Watch.
(De officio praefecti vigilum.)

1.43.1. Emperors Valentinian, Theodosius and Arcadius to Hebradius, Prefect of the City.
The prefects of the watches of this city must not, by their authority, give any decision in capital cases, but if any such case arises, must report it to your Highness, so that a decision by higher authority may be made in such cases.
About 385-389.

Note.

Prefect of the Watch. A thorough examination of the duties and rights of the prefect of the watch and the men under him has been made by P. K. Baillie Reynolds in his The Vigiles of Imperial Rome (1926). There was no sufficient fire protection during Republican Roms. Augustus organized the vigils (watchmen-firemen), 7,000 strong, consisting of seven cohorts of 1,000 men each, each cohort being required to watch over the fires and the peace in two of the fourteen regions of Rome. They also acted as night-policemen. The policing during the daytime was probably done by the so-called urban cohorts consisting of 3,000 men. The prefect of the watch was appointed by the emperor, and probably held office until he was promoted or retired. His duties were mainly confined to the night-time. He was required to refer capital cases to the city prefect.

Justinian created a praetor of the people for Constantinople, as already noted under C. 1.39, who occupied the same relative position as the prefect of the watch at Rome, but was given more power in judicial matters, aside from his duties in connection with fires. It is not unlikely that a like prefect existed in all the large cities. See Cass., Var. 7-8.