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# The Career of Sex. Palpellius Hister; the Praetorian Proconsulate during the Early Empire Reconsidered\*

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Introducing a current debate on Roman administration

The Roman ruling classes controlled their vast Empire through a civil and military bureaucracy. Recently a vivid debate has flared up regarding the functioning of this administration: how did an individual official make headway? Did he advance through his own merits, by collecting experience and adding service-years, or by invoking the help of benefactors with influence at the Emperor's court, on whose decision success ultimately depended?

The answer to these questions is important not only for the study of Roman bureaucracy, but relates very much to the study of social promotion in the Roman world as well. No family could hope to reach the top of the social pyramid without at least some of its members serving the state and holding the higher civil or military offices.

The current debate sees two opposing sides which we might call, with an obvious risk of oversimplifying the matter, the traditional prosopographers and a more sociologically minded, primarily English school.<sup>1</sup>

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\* I am grateful to Professor Heikki Solin for useful guidance during the preparation of this paper. For the views expressed I am, of course, solely responsible

<sup>1</sup> Geza Alföldy has given the latest traditionalist summing-up of the debate, even if he considers only the period AD 138—180 (G. Alföldy, *Die römische Gesellschaft*, Stuttgart 1986, 139—61) where he counters criticism from Keith Hopkins (*Death and Renewal*, Cambridge 1983, 120—200) and comments on the other work of the same tendency (R.P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire*, Cambridge 1982 and J.B. Campbell, *The Emperor and Roman Army*, Oxford 1984).

The traditionalists maintain a more meritocratic view, while their critics argue that favours and patronage should be regarded as the most important factors in the career and social rise of a senator, these factors nearly always being of decisive importance in pre-industrial societies. (Have things changed very much today, one wonders . . .).

The purpose of this paper is to deal with some questions relating to this general problem. The period considered will be 27 BC—AD 54 (the end of Claudius' reign), a period not often discussed in this perspective, partly because we do not have much material to work on and partly because scholars have considered the period beginning with Augustus' reorganization of the provincial administration in 27 BC as too confused for the establishment of any meaningful administrative structures.<sup>2</sup>

This common opinion might be correct, but at the same time administrative patterns of office-holding from later, more regular periods, are tacitly introduced to fit the times of the early Julio-Claudians as well. A reconsideration of certain aspects of this period, in this case above all the pretorian proconsulate, might therefore be called for.

### An inscription concerning the neglected career of Palpellius Hister

We will begin by considering a somewhat neglected inscription from the middle of the first century AD, which in the usual way gives the career of a senator named Sex. Palpellius Hister. The epigraph, which unfortunately is no longer in existence, has, according to its editors, the following text (CIL V 35 = D 946 = I.It. X, 1, 66 from Pola in Histria):

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<sup>2</sup> It is symptomatic that this period is often left out when discussing the senatorial career structure (Cf. A.R. Birley, *Notes on Senator's Imperial Service, Epigrafia e ordine senatorio I*, Roma 1982, 239—49) and that no comprehensive treatments has been given this period, while they are found for later times. (Cf. W. Eck, *Senatoren von Vespasian bis Hadrian*, München 1970; W. Eck, *Beförderungskriterien der senatorischen Laufbahn dargestellt an der Zeit von 69 bis 138 n. Chr.*, ANRW II,1 (1974) 158-228 and G. Alföldy, *Konsulat und Senatorenstand unter den Antoninen*, Bonn 1977. R. Syme, *Tacitus I—II*, Oxford 1958 deals primarily with the later part of the first century).

Sex. Palpellio P. f. Vel.  
 Histro  
 leg. Ti. Claudi Caesaris Aug.  
 pro                      cos  
 pr., tr. pl., X vir stl. iud., tr. mil.  
 leg. XIII Geminae comiti  
 Ti. Caesaris Aug. dato ab Divo Aug.  
 C. Precius Felix Neapolitanus  
 memor benefici

From a passage by Pliny (nat. 10, 35) we know that Hister was consul in March AD 43 together with L. Pedanius Secundus. This pair of consuls has also appeared in epigraphic contexts.<sup>3</sup> Another literary passage (Tac. ann. 12, 19) shows that our man was consular governor (*legatus Augusti pro praetore*) in Pannonia in the early 50s, but this is all the ancient sources can tell us about him.

Much of the attention given to Palpellius Hister has concentrated upon these two later offices. In his earlier career it is above all the post as *comes* of Tiberius that has received most notice. Scholars consider the appointment to have been around AD 10 in Mogontiacum in Germania Superior, when Hister would have been a military tribune there.<sup>4</sup>

Being the *comes* of the future Emperor it would seem if as things looked well for young Hister, even though he came from a family of no

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<sup>3</sup> For Hister see PIR P 53; RE XVIII,2 (1949) 279f nr 2 (Hanslik). The consular pair in CIL VI 2105 = XIV 2241. It is further encountered on two wax-tablets, TP 43 = AE 1973, 166 where the date somewhat surprisingly is July 20th (For this see C. Bruun, *Arctos* 19 [1985] 8ff) and TP 127 = RAAN 53 (1978) 266.

<sup>4</sup> J. Crook, *Consilium principis*, Cambridge 1955, 176; W. Reidinger, *Die Statthalter des ungeteilten Pannonien und Oberpannonien von Augustus bis Diokletian*, Bonn 1956, 38f; S. Demougin, *Epigrafia e ordine senatorio I*, Roma 1982, 100; J. Šašel-B. Marušić, *Arh. Vestn.* 25 (1984) 318 (who, however, also suggests that Hister was Tiberius' companion during the AD 6–9 Dalmatian campaign).

Hister's early career, primarily his entry into the Senate, is further commented upon especially by D. McAlindon, *Entry to the Senate in the Early Principate*, *JRS* 47 (1957) 199ff and by Demougin 100.

prominent standing.<sup>5</sup> But then there were *comites* of different kinds. Sometimes this term was used for an older counsellor of the Emperor or a member of the Imperial family, sometimes for a friend or companion of the same age. In this case the *comes* was a considerably younger man. (Tiberius was born in 42 BC, while Hister is thought to have been born around 10 BC).

It is impossible to say how it came that Hister was called *comes* in the honorary inscription above; certainly a recently voiced assumption that the nomination was due to Hister having served Tiberius as a local guide during the latter's Dalmatian campaign in AD 6—9 is pure speculation,<sup>6</sup> while it would be easy to come forward with other theories, based on the not so pleasant rumours about Tiberius' various interests, that Suetonius let out. This indeed would give the term *comes* a new meaning in Roman epigraphy.

#### A rarity: twice praetorian governor

Considering Hister's age and the promising beginning to his public career, it would already have been possible for him to have reached the consulate under Tiberius, but things did not turn out that way. Our man is in fact often mentioned as one of the few cases of exceptionally retarded promotion to the consulate under the Julio-Claudians.<sup>7</sup> He would be past his fiftieth year when he was appointed consul for AD 43.

A consulate at such an advanced age seems rather strange, the more so, it is argued, because we know nothing of Hister's praetorian career, i.e. his offices after the praetura and before the consulate. But is that really so?

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<sup>5</sup> A Sex. Palpellius Mancina was *duovir* in Pola at the end of the first century BC (I.It. X,1,343 and Arh. Vestn. 25 (1984) 306 nr 19). Cf. T.P. Wiseman, *New Men in the Roman Senate*, Oxford 1971, 249. He might well have been the grandfather of our man, who surely was the first of his family to enter the Senate.

<sup>6</sup> Šašel-Marušić 317f. Crook 176 in his monograph on Imperial *comites* does not go into the nature of Hister's function.

<sup>7</sup> R. Syme, *JRS* 60 (1970) 29 lists a handful of senators who had to wait a long time for the consulate, among them Cn. Domitius Afer, *praet.* AD 25, *cos.suff.* 39 and C. Ummidius Durmius Quadratus, *praet.* 19, *cos.suff.* ca 40.

It looks as though the *cursus* inscription has been strangely neglected when considering the career of Palpellius Hister:

Surely both line 3 and 4 in CIL V 35 each contains a reference to a provincial governorship, styled respectively *leg(atus) Ti. Claudi Caesaris (pro praetore)* and *proco(n)s(ul)*.<sup>8</sup> Yet scholars who have dealt with Hister's *cursus* have, if not completely left the question of these provincial commands aside, at least not clearly taken notice of them.<sup>9</sup>

Sometimes it has, obviously carelessly, been assumed that the imperial governorship mentioned in the inscription must refer to the province of Pannonia, which Tacitus mentioned in his passage. This can hardly be the case. The legateship of Pannonia was a consular office, while at the time when the inscription was composed, Hister clearly had not yet held the consulate, as there is no mention of this most important office anywhere. (Remember, line 4 reads *proco(n)s(uli)*, not *pro( . . . ?), co(n)s(uli)*).

If the inscription were an epitaph, or if we somehow could show that it was composed at the end of Hister's career, then we would have to change our minds, and the imperial legation could well be Pannonia. But we do not deal with funeral inscription, but with an honorary one, which a certain Precius Felix Neapolitanus set up out of gratefulness for some favour, *memor beneficii*.

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<sup>8</sup> The possibility that the two lines might be read *leg. Ti. Claudi Caesaris Aug. pro (praetore), co(n)s(uli)* can be ignored. There is no absolute rule that the consulate should be mentioned at the beginning of a career inscription, but it is nearly always the case. Further, it would be very awkward to shorten a governor's title *leg. Aug. pro (praetore)*. During the Early Principate it is usual to leave aside both the whole attribute *pro.pr.*, which defines the task given the governor, and the geographical specification of the province. (Cf. D 923. 932. 945. 947 etc.) Because of this epigraphic practice it can further be assumed that the *legatio* was not a common legionary command, *legatus legionis illius* (the name of the legion would be missing, which is not usual).

<sup>9</sup> Two commands are recognized in PIR, RE, by H. Dessau in ILS, P. Sticotti (AMSI 24 [1908] 302) and by B. Forlati-Tamaro in I.It. and M. Corbier, *L'aerarium Saturni et l'aerium militare*, Roma 1974, 357 n. 3. Wiseman 248f is not quite clear (he seems to have left out the later Pannonian command). Reidinger 39 seems to regard *leg. Ti. Claudi Caesaris Aug. procos.* as a single appointment, while A. Dobo, *Die Verwaltung der römischen Provinz Pannonien*, Amsterdam 1968, 28f dates the proconsulate after the consulship. Neither Crook, Šašel-Marušić nor G. Alföldy, *Epigrafia e ordine senatorio II*, Roma 1982, 330 mention the question.

## Precision about Hister's provinces difficult

In this paper we shall only briefly give further attention to Palpellius' two praetorian governorships, which we now as a working hypothesis hold for granted.

According to epigraphic practice during the Early Empire, mention of these posts was not accompanied by any geographical precision. There is no possibility for us to say where he was proconsul and we do not even know if he held office in the reign of Tiberius or Gaius.

The praetorian imperial legation was held under Claudius, because Hister is called *legatus Ti. Claudii Caesaris*, and must of course be prior to March AD 43, when he entered his consulate. His term as governor under Claudius could have lasted a maximum of two years before he became consul, a term which is below the assumed average duration, but still possible. Or perhaps Hister had been appointed by Gaius without caring to use the title *legatus Caesarum* in the inscription.

Even if we have thus dated the legateship to around 41—43, we still cannot place it geographically. During the early 40s only the imperial legate in Lusitania is known to us, while we do not know any of the governors in Galatia, Numidia or in the three Gallic provinces Aquitania, Belgica and Lugdunensis.<sup>10</sup>

## “Dyarchie” in provincial administration?

Actually Palpellius Hister's career inscription as it is now read by us, is rather uncommon. Both during the Early Principate and later it was very unusual for a praetorian official to hold the two different governorships of *legatus Augusti pro pr.* and proconsul. Why was that?

An easy explanation is that there simply were not enough of these posts. Up to AD 37 there were only 11 provinces governed by ex-praetors, five held by legates (who stayed an average of three years in office, so it is

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<sup>10</sup> Now an overall view of the provincial governors can be had from B. Thomasson, *Laterculi praesidium I*, Göteborg 1984. For Lusitania more specifically G. Alföldy, *Fasti Hispanienses*, Wiesbaden 1969, *passim*.



calculated) and six by proconsuls (for the duration of one year). Only about half of the contingent could hope to get even one governorship of some kind, as the number of the praetors elected every year varied between 12 and 16 (under Claudius sometimes 18).

There is, however, a more important reason given for the unusualness of a praetorian holding both types of governorships during his career: there is thought to have existed a clear distinction between these two types of offices. The praetorians who held the legateships served the Emperor directly, and only the most promising and capable ex-praetors were chosen for this very important task. The office, properly handled, would give them advantageous merits, they could expect to become consuls soon and to make headway in the administration.

The proconsuls governed less important provinces that were formally ruled by the Senate, not by the Emperor. When an ex-praetor was assigned such a province it was a clear sign that he was out of favour, would not have much chance of gaining merits, could not hope to climb high, and would probably never be given the consulate by the Emperor. So no wonder these two types of governorships are seldom found in the *cursus* of a single individual, as they pointed to opposite fates.

The description just given is the common one today in prosopographical circles. The career of Palpellius Hister might give us an incentive to reconsider this “bureaucratic model”.

Making a sharp distinction between provinces and offices belonging to the Emperor, and those under the rule of the Senate actually resembles the old conception of the Roman Empire which Theodor Mommsen once put forward, the concept of “Dyarchie”. According to Mommsen the characteristic feature of the Roman Principate was the underlying fight for power and influence between the Emperor and the senatorial aristocracy. Today this view is superseded and no one any longer thinks the conflicts in the Roman world were purely that clear and simple.<sup>11</sup>

But the old concept of “Dyarchie” somehow still seems to be present in the view that many scholars hold of the provincial administration of the

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<sup>11</sup> See for instance L. Wickert, *Neue Forschungen zum römischen Prinzipat*, ANRW II, 1 (1974) 39ff.

Empire. There are, of course, certain facts to sustain such an opinion. During the 20s BC a division of the provinces was undertaken under the supervision of Augustus. The result was that the Caesar became responsible for the administration of the frontier provinces where the armies stood. He governed them by his own appointed senatorial officials called, accordingly, *legati Augusti pro praetore*. The senate was to rule the provinces close to the heart of the Empire. In traditional manner these governors appointed by the Senate were called *proconsules*.<sup>12</sup>

But does this separation in the provincial administration make it correct to talk of the governors as being “in the Emperor’s service” or in “the Senate’s service”? Perhaps not, as we shall see.

### The Emperor supervised proconsuls, too

The relations between the Emperor and both types of praetorian governors have recently been studied by Fergus Millar. He concludes that there are no essential differences between the ways the two types of office holders were connected to the centre of the Empire. The Emperor was concerned about the whole of the reign, and he could both follow and influence the proceedings everywhere.<sup>13</sup>

Actually this power of the Emperor over the senatorial provinces has long been noted, even if the proper conclusions have not been drawn. It is known, for instance, that the Emperor had his say when it came to nominating the proconsul (in the *sortitio* procedure), even if it is impossible exactly to define how the ruler influenced the designation.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This question is treated in a clear way by R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, Oxford 1939. 393ff and Vogel-Weideman, *Die Statthalter von Africa und Asia in den Jahren 14—68 n. Chr.*, Bonn 1982, 5—14.

<sup>13</sup> F. Millar, *The Emperor, the Senate and Provinces*, *JRS* 56 (1966) 156—66. The only point where Millar thought he could notice a difference was that he did not know of any *mandata* from the Emperor to the proconsuls, only to the legates. New epigraphical discoveries have shown that the Emperor sent *mandata* also to proconsuls, see G.P. Burton, *ZPE* 21 (1976) 63—68 and J.H. Oliver, *AJPh* 100 (1979) 551ff.

<sup>14</sup> On the *sortitio* see B. Thomasson, *die Statthalter der römischen Provinzen Nordafrikas I*, Lund 1960, 19ff and Vogel-Weidemann 12ff.

It might thus be more correct to regard the proconsuls too as being “in the Emperor’s service”. But it is, of course, clear that the two types of offices were not identical in every way. Nearly always a legate had troops under his command in the province, a proconsul only occasionally. Surely these differences were noted and commented upon by the contemporaries and the praetorians themselves. Some might have wished for martial glory, others less so, some might have had geographical preferences and so on.

It must have mattered to an individual governor-to-be which province he obtained. But the question is, whether such preferences were connected in a rational way to his ambitions and prospects of advancing in the administration.

“A praetorian governor in the Emperor’s service could usually expect a consulate as reward when he returned”, it is often said.<sup>15</sup> In a recent work Keith Hopkins doubts this assumption. Did the Romans really see the same causal chains and patterns of office-holdings as scholars do today, he asks.<sup>16</sup> To exemplify: when receiving the consulate, did they hold the reason to be their recent experience as governor, or their high moral qualities, or still something else? This question deserves serious treatment.

### Imperial “Karriereschemata”: the place of the proconsulate

Basically, what the question is about is to what extent the Roman administration can be described or analyzed in terms of meritocracy and rationality. This has traditionally been regarded as the best way to approach Roman bureaucracy, for instance, the question regarding governors of “imperial” or “senatorial” provinces.

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<sup>15</sup> Eck, ANRW II,1 (1974) 199 expresses this point of view clearly in this major work on the senatorial career structure (where, however, he restricts himself to the period AD 69—138).

<sup>16</sup> Hopkins 165, where he gives the question a much wider treatment than is possible here.

In a thorough study Werner Eck has considered the role of the praetorian proconsulates in senatorial careers. He thinks as a whole they are of less value than the imperial legateships, and tend to mark their holders as men with poor prospects. The few cases where a former praetorian proconsul eventually succeeds in his career, is explained by Eck by pointing to the accession of a new Emperor who for some reason favoured him.<sup>17</sup>

This explanation would, of course, fit the case of our Palpellius: when Claudius became Emperor he first appointed him legate and then gave him a consulate. It might be the correct explanation of the whole problem (and of Palpellius' surprising advancement, even if it does not tell us much; we would still want to know what linked him to Claudius), but it is also an easy one.

In the way mentioned every anomaly in the "Karriereschemata" can be given an explanation by pointing to the presumed wishes of the Emperor. In a way it is like having one's cake and eating it. This is how the problem has been handled by the traditional prosopographers. The recent critics can in a case like this be assumed to point to the influence of the Emperor and take it as a proof of their theory. Patronage, not "Beförderungskriterien" determines advancement.

But what if the third explanation were possible, what if the office of praetorian proconsul during the Early Empire (the period must be underlined, since the situation changes in many ways during the second half of the first century AD) ought to be reconsidered altogether, i.e. it was *not* as a rule a post of only minor importance held by less successful senators.

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<sup>17</sup> W. Eck, Über die prätorischen Prokonsulate in der Kaiserzeit. Eine quellenkritische Überlegung, *Zephyrus* 23—24 (1972—73) 233—60). On the possible changes under a new Emperor see p. 233. Most of the results (but referring to the period 69—138) are also found in Eck, *ANRW* II,1 (1974) 201—04.

In order not to give a false impression of the opinions of Eck it must be added that he concludes his careful work (p. 260) by noting that the proconsulate, however, cannot automatically be regarded as a stigma on the person in question, especially not under Augustus.

## Proconsuls 27 BC — AD 54: 14% known

In order to consider this supposition, we shall take a look at the evidence for praetorian proconsuls for 27 BC—AD 54:<sup>18</sup>

	Known number	<i>Cursus</i> inscript.	Also <i>leg.</i> <i>Aug. pr. pr.</i>	Reached consulate
Sicilia	10	2 (1)	2	2
Baetica	6	2	1	—
Narbonensis	5	4	2 + 1?	1
Achaia (not AD 14—41 [44?])	9	3 (2)	2	4
Cyprus	12	2	3	4
Pontus-Bithynia	10	1	1	1
Creta-Cyrene	22	1 (1)	2	4
	74 = 14%	15 (4)	13	16

We might sum up the results like this:

— We know 74 proconsuls by name over a period of 80 years. The one-year term of office means that there were 530 men in office in this period. 74 out of 530 means that 14% are known to us.

— We gain really valuable knowledge about the public career of these men only when we can study *cursus* inscriptions where a whole career is recorded. Unfortunately, we know only 15 such inscriptions. (And in four cases the last recorded office is the proconsulate; sometimes it is difficult to say if the career really ended there).<sup>19</sup> This gives us a total of 20% in our table (15 out of 74), but of the whole material it is a tiny 3% (15 out of 530).

<sup>18</sup> In checking the proconsuls I have used the lists by Eck, *Zephyrus* (who in part relies on E. Groag, *Die römischen Reichsbeamten von Achaia*, Wien 1939 and G. Alföldy, *Fasti Hispanienses*) and B. Thomasson, *Laterculi praesidium I*.

<sup>19</sup> In geographical and chronological order we have the following proconsuls with a *cursus* inscription: A. Didius Gallus, P. Plautius Pulcher (not beyond the proconsulate), C. Caetronius Miccio, [—] Proculus, Cn. Pullius Pollio, M'. Vibius Balbinus, Novellius Torquatus Atticus, T. Mussidius Pollianus, L. Aquillius Florus Turcianus Gallus (proconsulate), T. Helvius Basila, Martius Macer (proconsulate), P. Paquius Scaeva, C. Ummidius Durmius Quadratus, L. Licinius C[rassus?], Celer (proconsulate).

— Mainly thanks to *cursus* inscriptions we know that 13 of these 74 proconsuls have also been governors in so called imperial provinces (some of them only later, after the consulship).<sup>20</sup> Following Eck, we could then say that in a little less than 20% of all the known cases the Emperor has changed his mind about their usefulness, or the Emperor himself has changed. Is this a large or small percentage?

To this category further belongs a number of senators who have held both types of provincial commands during this period, but according to epigraphic habit the provinces they have governed are not given. Therefore they are not listed above. Among these is our Palpellius Hister. In this way we get six new cases of double-governors.<sup>21</sup>

We must, of course, remember that this group of 19 who were both proconsuls and legates still constitutes a very small minority of all the 530 proconsuls during this period.

— Finally, we should note that 16 of the 74 proconsuls were also consuls (=23%).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Q. Junius Blaesus, A. Didius Gallus (both as consulars), C. Caetronius Miccio, [—] Proculus, Cn. Pullius Pollio, M'. Vibius Balbinus, T. Helvius Basila, Martius Macer, L. Tarius Rufus and Paullus Fabius Maximus (both as consulars), L. Licinius C[rassus?], C. Ummidius Durmius Quadratus, P. Sulpicius Quirinius, P. Pomponius Secundus (as consular).

<sup>21</sup> Without pretending to list all the cases we have at least P. Catienus Sabinus (NSA 1928, 381 nr 4), Q. Articuleius Regulus (D 929), Q. Varius Geminus (D 932), Q. Caerellius Q.f.(D 943), Post. Mimisius Sardus (D 947) and perhaps L. Axius Naso (see Bruun, *Arctos* 19 [1985] 15f).

<sup>22</sup> The consuls are Q. Junius Blaesus (*cos.suff.* AD 10), A. Didius Gallus (*suff.* 39), T. Mussidius Pollianus (*suff.* Gaius/Claudius), Sex. Aelius Catus (*ord.* 4 BC), Sex. Pompeius (*ord.* 14), Sulpicius Galba (*ord.* 22), L. Junius Gallio Annaeanus (*suff.* 55), L. Tarius Rufus (*suff.* 16 BC), Paullus Fabius Maximus (*ord.* 11 BC), A. Plautius (*suff.* 1 BC), C. Ummidius Durmius Quadratus (*suff.* ca 40), P. Pasidienus Firmus (*suff.* 65), P. Sulpicius Quirinius (*ord.* 12 BC), C. Rubellius Blandus (*suff.* 18), Cornelius Lupus (*suff.* 42), P. Pomponius Secundus (*suff.* 44).

Furthermore, mention can be made of C. Vibius Postumus (*suff.* 5), who was praetorian proconsul of an unidentified province (CIL IX 730). As he later held a military command (Vell. 2,116,2) he can be added to the group in note 21.

## Praetorian legates twice as often consuls

It might be useful to make a comparison with what is known of praetorian “imperial” governors during the same period. As Eck and many others have stated, their careers look far more successful<sup>23</sup>:

	Known number of <i>leg. Aug. pr. pr.</i>	Known to have reached consulship
Lusitania	8	4
Aquitania	3	2
Belgica	1	—
Lugdunensis	1	?
Galatia	14	6
Numidia (AD 37—)	1	1
Lycia-Pamphylia (AD 43—)	3	2
	31	15

In this table we first notice how much better known to us these officials are. Because the term of office was not fixed, we cannot know exactly how many governors were in office during this period (three years is assumed to have been the average term), but it looks as if we know nearly all the governors except those in three Gallic provinces.

The more successful a person has been during his life-time, the greater the possibility that some trace of him will have survived.<sup>24</sup> According to this rule, the praetorian legates as a group certainly seem to have been of greater importance than the proconsuls. Still, the situation regarding the Gallic provinces is surprising. Here the praetorian legates seem to have been as obscure as the proconsuls.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> For the lists of governors B. Thomasson, *Laterculi praesidium* I.

<sup>24</sup> This general rule holds also for antiquity, cf. W. Eck, *Chiron* 3 (1973) 375—94.

<sup>25</sup> The various degrees of our knowledge may of course partly be explained by different epigraphic habits in different parts of the Empire, and are not necessarily dependent on the importance of the office. (We get five legates of Galatia in a row from a single inscription from Ankara, cf. R. Sherck, *ANRW* II, 7,2 [1980] 971ff). The methodological considerations that must be made in a case like this are well set out by Eck, *Zephyrus* 258ff.

As the consulate always remained of paramount importance in the senatorial career, it might be useful to total up the frequencies for attaining consulship from 27 BC—AD 54:

known proconsuls known to have been consuls	:	23%
known <i>leg. Aug. pro. pr.</i> known to have been consuls	:	ca 50%

We can see that the known imperial legates are twice as successful as the known proconsuls,<sup>26</sup> even if the latter probably belong to the most prominent men in their group.

There seems to be no point in continuing to argue for the importance of the praetorian proconsulate. Or perhaps new findings could change this picture?

### How many consuls had been proconsuls?

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<sup>26</sup> It might be useful to compare these figures with the *a priori* average probability for any praetor to reach the consulship during this period. This probability seems to vary between ca 20 and 45%, but fluctuates during this period.

It can be calculated in the following way: The number of praetors per year tended to increase, but varied between 12 and 18 (sources recently in R.J.A. Talbert, *The Senate of Imperial Rome*, Princeton 1984, 19f). It is perhaps also necessary to consider the death-rates for these imperial administrators before they reached the age when they were eligible for the consulate (cf. Hopkins 146ff), but one might say there were between 10 and 15 praetors competing for the consulship ten years after their praetura.

During 27 BC — AD 40 there were on average about three consulships per annum available — according to A. Degrassi, *Fasti consolari*, Roma 1952 there were altogether about 200 consuls in office in that period, not counting members of the Imperial family or iterated consulships. Then the situation changed remarkably, so that for AD 41—54 we have about 90 consuls, or seven per annum (P.A. Gallivan, LF 102 [1979] 1—3).

Hopkins performs the same calculation, but his results are 2.6 consulates per year during 30 BC — AD 17 and 6 consulships open AD 18—54.

Anyhow, the figures for attaining consulship seem to move within the range of 20 — 45% ;  $10:3 = 0.33$ ,  $15:3 = 0.20$ ,  $15:7 = 0.46$ .

Finally, we should note that Eck (*Zephyrus* 260), who considers a longer period, gives different numbers:

34% of all the known proconsuls during the whole Empire attained the consulate  
76% of the praetorian Imperial legates in 69—138 attained the consulate.



New findings might alter the situation in some ways, but let us first see in what regards new material cannot be expected. New epigraphical findings cannot reveal consulates for the approximately 60 identified proconsuls for whom we know of no such office. This is because we already know practically all the consuls by name up to the death of Claudius. (Even if some are not yet accurately dated). There is simply no place for any of these 60 praetorian proconsuls in the *Fasti consulares*.

But we can look at the question from another angle. During our period about 290 consuls were in office (not counting the members of the Imperial family and *consules II* and *III*). How much is known about the career of these senators? In fact, not much. To be able to say something conclusive about their careers we need to have complete *cursus* inscriptions. Such evidence we have, however, for only a fraction, clearly less than 10% of the consuls.<sup>27</sup> As it happens, among the known 14 consular careers we find 4 proconsulates, i.e. 28.5%. But clearly our material is neither large nor representative enough to make any conclusions possible.<sup>28</sup>

Instead we shall perform a calculation that is seldom done, perhaps wisely so, because of the scarcity of material. Above we noted that 23% of the known proconsuls advanced to the consulate. Perhaps this known group of proconsuls was exceptionally successful. We can be somewhat more careful and use an even 20% as starting point (which is considerably lower than the 34% which Eck gives for later times). This would mean that

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<sup>27</sup> Hopkins 159 gives the number of 10%, but he uses material selected from the whole Imperial period. G. Alföldy, *Gesellschaft* 141 states that we know 17% of the consular careers during the epigraphically fertile period of 138—80.

A search which has no claim to completeness has revealed only 14 consular *cursus* inscriptions from our period with useful information regarding the praetorian career (D 913. 940. 945.946. 963. 970. 972. 979. 986. 9483; CIL VI 1544; AE 1916,110. 1953,251. 1974,274), while we have 21 more which either are fragmentary or never did contain the complete praetorian career (D 196. 918. 920. 921. 923. 925. 938. 948. 954. 962. 971. 985. 8965; CIL V 7557. VI 1331 = 31631. IX 730; ILG 633. IRT 341. AE 1924,72. 1930,70. 1947,74).

<sup>28</sup> The percentage 28.5 would mean that 78 of the other 270 consuls had been proconsul, or that altogether 82 (4 + 78) of the 540 proconsuls had become consuls, i.e. some 15%. But this number strikes us as being too small, cf. note 26 and above, where we noted that 23% of the proconsuls reached the consulate.

in the whole group of 540 proconsuls we had 16 (the known consuls among our 74 identified consuls) + 92 (20% out of 460 unidentified) = 108 senators who became consuls.

If we now change the perspective and look at the group of 290 consuls, we see that, according to our approximate figures, 108 out of 290 = 37% had held praetorian proconsulate. This seems to be rather a large number, it would indeed look as though the proconsulate was not a sign of failure, if a third of all the consuls were former proconsuls.

Thus we might expect new epigraphic findings to give us notice of proconsuls whom we already know as consuls.

### Many or few offices for the favourites?

At first sight the preceding conclusion is perhaps not convincing. A common notion in Roman prosopography is that a conscious Imperial strategy existed with the objective of letting promising praetorians reach the consulate as soon as possible, after a short and purposeful period of administrative “training”. They nearly always commanded a legion and often held an Imperial province, but most other offices were of less value and were avoided because they only slowed down the advancement towards the consulate. Only after this point could the man proceed to hold the really important Imperial offices, the army commands in the frontier provinces.

We see that the common opinion adds up to the notion that the men chosen by the Emperor who usually became consuls had few praetorian posts. This makes it less probable that consuls for whom we do not know the complete career had been praetorian proconsuls.

Keith Hopkins has, however, recently shown that this picture is not quite correct. He agrees that the praetorian posts were indeed not distributed evenly to all praetorians, but he holds that the later more favoured and successful senators held the majority of offices while many praetorians held very few posts and later did not get very far in their career.<sup>29</sup> (But it must be remembered that a special group among the

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<sup>29</sup> Hopkins 159ff.

successful senators was constituted by certain patricians, who were promoted very rapidly to the consulship, after only three years in some cases, and thus held very few if any praetorian offices).<sup>30</sup>

### The importance of the proconsulate reconsidered

Speaking of Imperial policy and of the options to give many or few offices to a selected number of favoured praetorians, we might do well to consider to what extent governorships were available during the Early Empire. The situation is a rather different one from what we find during the second century or even during the Flavians.

In the second century AD there were 12 *legati Aug. pro praetore* of praetorian rank. Up to Claudius there were only five (the three Galliae, Lusitania and Galatia; Numidia had been separated as a special command by Gaius, the governor was still called *legatus legionis III Augustae*), under him Lycia-Pamphylia was added.

This means that praetorian commands “in the Emperor’s service” (which probably lasted an average of three years) were very hard to get. Before AD 37 for every year’s crop of praetors there was an average  $1\frac{2}{3}$  legateships to compete for. (But because some patricians went straight to the consulate not quite so many took part in the competition).

This being the situation, during the decade about 16 praetorians would be governors in the “Emperor’s service”, or in the language of traditional prosopography, acquire the experience of governing a military province, necessary for holding the important frontier commands in future.

Does this number of trained potential consular governors seem large enough to the traditionalists? Of course we must not forget that praetorians also held command of individual legions as *legati legionis*. These posts were available to a majority of the praetorians, and they could get military experience that way too.

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. the cases of Cn. Cornelius Lentulus Gaetulicus, *praet.* 23, *cos.ord.* 26; M. Licinius Crassus Frugi, *praet.* 24, *cos.ord.* 27; C. Cassius Longinus, *praet.* 27, *cos.suff.* 30.

But the point is that if a rational Imperial administration existed which saw to it that some favoured and promising praetorians acquired a proper training, then it was impossible to depend on appointments to *legatus Aug. pro praetore*, because there were so few of these posts.

Could not the post of proconsul have been an alternative in the Early Empire? After all, the tasks were rather similar, as has been pointed out above. Also, in the provinces where a legion was stationed, the tasks of the governor mostly consisted of civilian business. Likewise, both types of governors were under the Emperor's supervision.

Still, perhaps the legateship was the most important of the praetorian posts during the Early Principate, as it seems to have been later on. But looking at our figures and tables one notices surprising features.

We have already commented upon the fact that there were among the legates many more known to have been consuls than among the proconsuls (50% vs. 23%). But all the same this means that half of the known legates never reached the consulate! How is that? To get an appointment as *leg. Aug. pro. pr.* should be a sign that a praetorian belonged to the uppermost favoured group of 10%. One could surely suppose that once a senator had passed through his narrow gate, he would easily advance to the consulate (which was attained by at least 20%)!

Did death interfere? In some cases perhaps,<sup>31</sup> but still something does not seem right. The solution might be that the praetorian legateship was after all not that all-important in securing a way to the top.<sup>32</sup>

### Conclusion: something for everyone

Thus the role of the praetorian proconsulate during the Early Principate seems to be in need of reevaluation. This conclusion can be given two explanations.

In line with the traditional view of Roman administration, that it

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. note 26. According to the life expectancy calculations by Hopkins 146ff, 15 of the 18 praetors would still be alive ten years after the praetura.

<sup>32</sup> This is a conclusion already reached by Hopkins 164, but in his case perhaps through a somewhat different line of argument.

worked in a rational way along meritocratic principles, we might say that the greater importance of the proconsulate during this time was due to different “Beförderungskriterien”. In training praetorians the proconsulate could assume something of the role of the legateship.

Then again, if we do not accept the traditional view of the Roman world, we might explain what seems like a more prominent role played by former holders of the proconsulate as a new example of how recommendations and favour must have dictated the success of individuals, not fixed “Karriereschemata”.

Or perhaps it is even possible to work out a compromise between the two opinions. In any case the tendencies which we have been trying to show or outline above would seem to argue against the old notion of “Dyarchie” in Roman provincial administration.