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PROCURATORS IN ASIA AND DACIA UNDER MARCUS AURELIUS: A CASE STUDY OF
IMPERIAL INITIATIVE IN GOVERNMENT

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In 177 AD, a group of Christians living in Lyons and Vienne wrote a letter detailing the abominable treatment of their co-religionists during the course of that summer. Until recently the fact that the letter should be addressed to brethren "in Asia and Phrygia" has been adduced as a sign that the text had been altered in some way to reflect provincial divisions in the time of Diocletian. In the reign of Marcus Aurelius, Phrygia was not an independent province. In 1995, Glen Bowersock (*Martyrdom and Rome* [Cambridge 1995] 85-98) suggested that this need not have been the case. He argued that there is evidence from precisely this period to suggest that a number of new procuratorial divisions appear in the province of Asia, and that these divisions are reflected in the prescript of the letter concerning the unfortunates of Lyons.

Bowersock's argument gains considerable force from arrangements in another province, Dacia, where what had been three provinces retained their separate procuratorial divisions after they had been placed under the administration of a single governor. The developments in both areas occurred at roughly the same time, and may be associated with the need for more efficient fiscal administration during the wars that racked the empire between 161 and 180.

The evidence from the province of Asia appears in a number of places. An unpublished inscription from Claros that may be dated to 170/71 describes Aphrodisias as the "first Metropolis of Caria": Ἀφροδεικίων τῆς πρώτης μητροπόλεως τῆς Καρίας (Bowersock, *Martyrdom* 91). Another inscription, this one from Stratonicea, offers a decree of the boule and demos Στρατονικέων] τῆς αὐτόχθονος καὶ μητροπόλεως τῆς Καρίας that had previously been dated to the first century A.D. (*SEG* 4, 263; *Inscr. Strat.* 15); this has now been dated by its most recent editor to the second half of the second century. The significance of both texts lies in their suggestion that Caria had become a recognizably separate administrative district. An inscription discovered at Sardis in 1982 (P. Herrmann, *Chiron* 23 [1993] 249-252), and first published in 1993 opens with: [τῆς πρωτόχθονος καὶ ἱερᾶς] τῶν [θεῶν | καὶ μητροπόλεως τῆς Ἀσίας] καὶ Λ[υδίας | ἀπάσας καὶ πρώτης Ἑλλά]δος καὶ πολλιάκις [νεωκόρου τῶν] Σεβαστῶν. The document is datable on the basis of prosopographical indications in the text, and the phrase πολλιάκις [νεωκόρου τῶν] Σεβαστῶν, refers to the early years of Alexander Severus when the legitimacy of a neorate granted by Elagabalus was in question. The opening lines are restored with confidence on the basis of two other inscriptions, one of which may be dated as early as the 160s. Continuity of the claim to be metropolis of Lydia into the time of Gordian III is confirmed by coins.¹

The suspicion arises that something was happening to the administration of Asia as a result of which cities could begin to describe themselves as being "metropolis" of the traditional ethnic divisions of the province. This suspicion appears to receive confirmation from a series of careers connected with fiscal administration. These include Publius Aelius Zeuxidamus Aristus Zeno, Marcus Aurelius Crescens, Marcus Aurelius Marcio, Quintus Petronius Novatus, Marcus Ulpius Stephanus, Quintus Cosconius Fronto, and Tiberius Claudius Serenus.²

¹ Herrmann, *Chiron* 23 [1993], 240-241, discussing *Sardis* 7.1 n. 64 and 70. For the date of these texts see Bowersock, *Martyrdom*, 96.

² These careers are significant because they actually specify that a position was held in a region of the province of Asia. Commemorative habit in these cases, as in so many others, tended to be imprecise, and there are a number of other careers from the 160s through the Severan period where reference to the province of Asia may conceal a position that was actually limited to one of these new subdivisions. But they may also mean no more than that a position was held in the coastal region of the province rather than inland. A district *Hellespontiacae et Pergameniae* is also attested in these years, which may support the view that the coastal district was administered separately, though, possibly for prestige reasons, holders of that post

Zeno's career is known from an inscription erected in his native city of Hieropolis:

[ο]ἴ ἐπὶ [τῆ]ς [Ἰ]ακίνας Ἑλληνηνec καὶ ἡ βο[υ]λλῆ καὶ ὁ δῆμος Π. Αἴλιον Ζευ-
ξείδημιμον Ἄριτον | [Ζ]ήνωνα, υἱὸν | Π. Αἰλίου Ζευξείδημου Κα[κ]α[κ]α-
νοῦ ἀρχι[ερ]έως Ἀσίας, | συνήγορο[ν] | τ[ο]ῦ ἐν Φρυγί[α] | ταμείου | [κα]ὶ τοῦ
ἐν Ἀκ[ί]α.³

Zeno's father evidently received the franchise from Hadrian, and his son acquired a considerable reputation as a sophist under Severus, suggesting that Zeno's term as *advocatus fisci* for Phrygia fell under Marcus. The collocation of the "Hellenes in Asia" with a post that is specified as being in Phrygia shows that Zeno's service to the procurator of Phrygia fell under the overall administration of the governor of Asia.

Marcus Aurelius Crescens is known from an inscription on the base of a statue found near Stectorium in Phrygia:

ἡ βο[υ]λλῆ καὶ ὁ δ[ῆ]μο[ς] | ἐτείμησεν Μ. Αὐρ. | Σεβαστῶν ἀπελεύθειρον Κρή-
σκεντα, ἐπίτροπον Λυγδοῦνιου Γαλλίας καὶ ἐπίτροπον Φρυγίας καὶ ἐπίτρο-
πον κατρηῆσιν, ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ εὐεργετήσαντα | τὴν πόλιν ἡμῶν · τοῦ ἀνδρι-
άντος τὴν ἀνάστασιν | ποιησαμένου Αὐρ. Σεβαστῶν ἀπελευθέρου | Ζωκίμου
(*IGR* 4, 749 *ILS* 8856).

The most probable date for his activity in Asia is under Marcus.

Three inscriptions, all from Phrygia, commemorate either Marcus Aurelius Marcio, a freedman procurator, or his wife. The most significant for present purposes is *ILS* 1477:

M. Aur. Aug. liber. | Marcioni proximo | rationum, proc. | marmorum, proc. |
prov. Britanniae, | proc. summi chorag., | proc. prov. Fryg., | Senecianus collib.
| ex tabular. | h. c.

The two other inscriptions, reflecting on his activities as procurator "of the Augusti," are a decree in honor of his wife, Aelia Maximilla, at Pyrmenessus, and a decree of Synnada, honoring him for his benefactions to his "fatherland".⁴ Although certainty on this point is not possible, it is probable that the Augusti in question are Marcus and Commodus.

The service of Marcus Ulpius Stephanus is known from the bilingual funerary inscription that he erected for his wife on Cos:

D.M. Ulpiae Verecundae optimae lib. coniugi fecit M. | Ulpius Aug. lib. Ste-
phanus proc. XX her. regionis Kariaes | et insularum Cucladum memoriae cau-
sa |

Θεοῖς καταχθονίοις | Οὐλπίᾳ Οὐερηκούνδῃ ἀγαθῇ | ἀπελευθέρα καὶ συμβίω
[ἐ]ποίησεν | Μ. Ουῦλπιος Σεβαστοῦ ἀπελευθέρος | Στέφανος ἐπίτροπος κ'
κληρονομίων | περιόδου Καρίας καὶ νήσων Κυκλάδων | μνίας χάριν.

The reference to a district of the Cyclades attached to the province of Asia dates the text precisely to the reign of Marcus Aurelius (H.-G. Pflaum, *ZPE* 7 [1971] 64f.).

Quintus Petronius Novatus is known from an inscription that was discovered at Tiklat (*AE* 1967 n. 644):

might have preferred to refer to it as Asia. For *Hellespontiaca et Pergamenia* see H.G. Pflaum, "Subproc(urator) xx hereditatum regionis Hellespontiaca et Pergamenia", *ZPE* 18 (1975) 11-12.

³*IGR* 4.819 with H.-G. Pflaum, *Les carrières procuratoriennes équestres sous le haut-empire romain* (Paris 1960) 550-551 (number 205).

⁴*IGR* 4, 676: Αἰλ(ίαν) Μαξιμίλλαν | τὴν σεμνοτάτην | γυναικα Αὐρηλίου Μαρκίωνος, ἐπιτρόπου τῶν κυρίων αὐτοκρατόρων, | κτίστου τῆς πόλεως, | Αὐρ. Δημήτριος | ἀρχιερεὺς τῶν | Σεβαστῶν; 704: ...|ον ἀγαθὸν καὶ δίκαιον Αὐρ. Μαρκίωνα | ἐπίτροπον τῶν θειοτάτων αὐτοκρατόρων | διὰ τὰς εἰς τὴν πατρίδα εὐεργεσίας, | τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν τῆς | ἀναστάσεως ποιησαμένων παρ' ἑαυτῶν | Αὐρ. Χρυσαντίωνος | καὶ Μαρκιανοῦ Ζωτικῶ | Κάστορος καὶ Διονυσίου | Ἀδρέτου καὶ Ἐρμογέλους Θεμειώνος καὶ | Αὐξάνοντος Γαίου, | ἀρχόντων τῆς πόλεως.

...]Q. Pe[tr]onius C.f. Cor. | Novatus, praef. coh. [...] | Gallor., trib. leg. XIII Gelminae, praef. eq. I Hisp., | praef. eq. I Campagon., | proc. Aug. XX her. per Alsiam, Phrygiam, Lyciam, | Galatiam, patronus | coloniae, | d[d].

Although the text is not precisely datable, the best possibilities are either 169-176 or 180-198.

Two inscriptions from Cagliari on Sardinia reveal the career of Cosconius Fronto in virtually identical terms (both are dedications by members of his staff):

Q. Cosconio M.f. Poll. Frontoni | praef. fabr. a cos adlecto, praef. coh. I [An]ti., trib. mil. leg. I Ital., proc. August. | ad vectig. XX her. per Pontum et Bithynian et Pontum mediterraneum et | Paphlagoniam, proc. Augg. item ad vectig. XX her. per A[s]iam Lyciam | Phrygiam Galati[am] insulas Cyclades, subpraef. a[n]nonae urbis, | proc. Augg. ad vectig. ferr. Gallic., | proc. Augg. et praef. [pr]ov. Sard., | optimo sanctissimo praeposito, Lucretius [A]ugg. | tabul. prov. Sard.⁵

The culmination of Cosconius' career is dated by Pflaum to the reign of Severus, on the grounds that Sardinia only became an equestrian province under Commodus. Even though the foundation of Pflaum's argument (an evident reference to a praesidial procurator in Hippolytus' *Refutatio omnium haeresium*) is weak, the last known senatorial governor can be dated to the mid-170s. This would mean squeezing four major offices into the five years that Marcus and Commodus shared the throne (though it is not impossible), or assuming that there was an earlier switch to an equestrian governorship, to argue an earlier date for Cosconius' tenure on the island. It is easier to live without such assumptions, and, as we shall see, there is other evidence for the continuation of Marcus' procuratorial arrangements in Asia. The continuity of these arrangements that parallels the continuity of the claims to the title of metropolis that we have already seen in the case of Sardis.

The careers of Cosconius and Novatus suggest that Phrygia was still be treated as an independent administrative district in the reign of Severus, a point that appear to be confirmed by the career of Tiberius Claudius Serenus, who is known from an inscription that was discovered at Ephesus in the early years of this century:

Tib. Cl. Sere[nus] praefectus cohortis secundae | Hispanorum, tribunus sextae civium Romanorum, | [procurator] rationis p[r]ivatae pro]vinciae Asi[ae et | Phrygi]ae et Cariae.

Serenus' career is datable to the reign of Severus, or later, by the mention of the *ratio privata*, which appears to have been a creation of Severus. An earlier date, based upon the appearance of a Tiberius Claudius Serenus c.v. on mid-second century lead water-pipes from Capua, has been canvassed, but it does appear that the new description of the *patrimonium privatum* as the *ratio privata* belongs in the early third century (Pflaum [n. 3], 599).

The placement of Serenus and Cosconius in the reign of Severus gains further confirmation from an inscription honoring Gaius Titius Similis that was found at Emerita:

C. Titio C.f. Cl Simili Agrip[p]inensi proc. prov. | Lusintaniae et Vettoniae et curatori reipublicae Emerit., | proc. prov. Misiae inferioris, eiusdem provinciae ius gladii, | praeposito vexill. e[xp]editionis pe[r] Asiam, Liciam, | Pamphiliam et Phrygiam, primipilo leg. III Aug. Piae | Vindicis, principi peregrin., centurioni frumentar., | centurioni legion. X[---

Legio III Augusta received the title *Pia Vindex* in 193/4, and the attribution of the *ius gladii* to equestrian procurators appears to be a development of the reign of Elagabalus. The *expeditio per Asiam, Liciam, Pamphiliam et Phrygiam* may therefore be Caracalla's eastern peregrination of 214-17, and the treatment of Phrygia shows that it was still regarded as an administratively separate region (Pflaum [n.

⁵*ILS* 1359 with corrections in Pflaum, (n. 6), 706, see also *CIL* 10, 7583; 7860.

3] 857-58). The continuity is again important. When evidence for the creation of the province of Caria-Phrygia under Decius came to light in the early 1980s, the possibility was briefly explored that it reflected divisions already apparent in the procuratorial administration of the area in the early third century (C. Roueché, *JRS* 71 [1981] 117 n. 98). This is surely correct, and we can now see that these divisions do not date to the early third century, but rather to the reign of Marcus Aurelius.

The cases of Serenus and Marcus Aurelius Marcio are also interesting because both are patrimonial rather than fiscal procurators. Management of the *patrimonium* is plainly not to be confused with the tasks exercised by fiscal procurators, but it remains possible that the definition of their roles reflects a change in the organization of the *patrimonium* to create geographic coincidence between patrimonial and fiscal districts under Marcus Aurelius.⁶

Two further points need to be made. The first is that the use of the word *provincia* to describe the procurator's area of competence reflects the clear delineation of a separate administrative district, and thus that the claims of Aphrodisias and Sardis are a response to a new administrative reality. Secondly, it is equally important to note that these areas also remained under the overall control of the governors of Asia. Governors of Asia are commemorated throughout the former province after the creation of the new procuratorial districts.⁷ The actual duties of the procurators have recently been summarized with admirable clarity by Graham Burton (*Chiron* 23 [1993] 14), who has shown that "in the course of time the provincial procurator in the public provinces also acquired a co-ordinate role, with the proconsul, in the supervision of direct taxes and, secondly...on occasion and in practice, but not normatively, a role in other areas of public administration which were actually and conceptually quite separate from their original patrimonial duties. The extension of their role...is to be connected to the limited practical powers of proconsuls, limited in relation to the demands made on them." The appearance of a figure who acted like a governor, even if he was not, may have inspired the claims of the various cities that were surveyed at the beginning of this paper. I have argued elsewhere that Rome's subjects tended to react to Roman officials in terms of the functions that they observed them carrying out rather than in terms of the strict rankings of the imperial bureaucracy.⁸

It is also necessary to rethink some assumptions that have been made about the evolution of the structure of the province of Asia in the third century. There has been a tendency to argue backwards from arrangements in the time of Diocletian, seeking precedents for his dispositions in the actions of third century emperors, rather than to seek explanations for third century developments in terms of earlier dispositions. There has also been a tendency to seek local initiatives and explanations as providing the rationale for these third century actions. Thus Charlotte Roueché stressed local developments as the crucial factor in emergence of Caria-Phrygia in 250. It is somewhat disturbing to have to back-date "local developments" by about ninety years to explain an administrative development. Without denying the importance of the fact that these regions had become wealthy enough to invite closer imperial administration,⁹ the actual change was not decided upon in the province, but at Rome. This is where the evidence from Dacia becomes important, for it may suggest that the change in administration was in response to the demands of war on the frontiers is the key to this development.

After the fall of the Dacian kingdom, Trajan created a single province under a senatorial governor. In 118/9 Hadrian divided the Trajanic province of Dacia into two provinces, Dacia Inferior and Dacia Superior. Sometime before 123 he subdivided the region further, creating Dacia Porolissensis out of the

⁶ For the evolution of the *res privata* see A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford 1964), 411-12, drawing attention to the importance of Severus' reforms, though the evidence presented here might suggest that Severus' reforms were less revolutionary than Jones implied.

⁷ The evidence is tabulated in B. Thomasson, *Laterculi praesidium* 1 (Göteborg 1984), 229-236.

⁸ D. Potter, *Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire: a Historical Commentary on the Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle* (Oxford 1990), 380-94; idem, *ZPE* 113 (1996) 271-85.

⁹ The classic statement of this doctrine is Appian, *Praef.* 7.

portion of Dacia Superior north of the river Aries.¹⁰ Dacia Superior was governed by a senatorial legate, the other two provinces by procurators. The relationship between the senatorial governor and the two equestrian officials has long been a subject of some debate. Earlier scholars, and the most recent student of the problem, have argued that the two equestrian governors were dependent upon the legate of Dacia Superior, while H.-G. Pflaum has maintained that the relationship was similar to that between the equestrian governor of Judaea and the senatorial legate of Syria.¹¹ We have no document that can prove the former assertion, as Pflaum rightly observes, and his view is further supported by the fact that Marcus Aurelius saw fit to initiate a new system of administration, whereby the authority of a senatorial governor over all three provinces was clearly stated, in 168. In that year M. Claudius Fronto appears as *legatus pro praetore trium Daciarum*. Fronto had played a significant role in the war with Persia that ended in 165. His appointment to Dacia appears to be a response to the invasion of Dacia that took place in 167. The praesidial procurators of Dacia Porolissensis and Dacia Inferior (or Malvensis as it was also known) are joined by a third procurator for Dacia Superior (or Apulensis). The result is thus a large senatorial province whose administration is divided into three provinciae under separate procurators.¹²

What we have in Dacia appears, on the surface, to be the process that we have already seen in Asia in reverse. But the result is the same: the administration of a large province under a senatorial governor is subdivided into separate procuratorial districts. At the same time, at least in Asia, it is possible that the structure of patrimonial administration was brought into line with these new divisions. The reforms initiated under Marcus are preserved under his successors, suggesting that they made sense. The dates of these changes, in the 160s, should not be seen as pure coincidence, but rather as a response to the fiscal difficulties that are also reflected in Marcus' auction of palace treasures at the end of the same decade.¹³

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¹⁰ I. Piso, *Fasti Provinciae Daciae I: Die senatorischen Amtsträger* (Bonn 1993), 32-41.

¹¹ A. Stein, *Die Reichsbeamten von Dacia* (Budapest 1944); I. Piso, *op. cit.* (n. 10) I, 41 (with other bibliography); H.-G. Pflaum (n. 3) 148-149.

¹² For the praesidial procurators prior to 168 see W. Eck, *ZPE* 100 (1994) 581, 586-87.

¹³ *HA V. Marci* 17.4-5; 21.9, see also A.R. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius: a biography* (New Haven 1987), 159-60.