

IRREGULAR LEGIONARY COMMANDS

TACITUS¹ writes that, by insisting that legionary legates who had not so far held the praetorship should immediately proceed to that office, Asinius Gallus 'altius penetrare et arcana imperii temptari'. In *C.Q.* n.s. xvi (1966), 327, I suggested that this demand of Gallus' was probably probing dangerously deeply into and perhaps threatening to wreck the carefully worked-out imperial promotions system, the working of which has been examined by Birley.²

It is the purpose of this note to look at a number of examples of such irregularity, which, though not as early as the debate during the course of which Gallus made his suggestion, do at least illustrate the process later in the Julio-Claudian era.

I. TI. PLAUTIUS SILVANUS AELIANUS (*ILS* 986)³

The exact determination of the dates involved in the early part of Plautius Silvanus' career is not easy; but it is more than probable that the decision to reverse the order of tenure of the posts of Legatus Legionis and Praetor belongs to the later years of the reign of Tiberius.

We know that Plautius Silvanus was *consul suffectus* in A.D. 45,⁴ and that he had preceded this with the position of 'legatus et comes Claud. Caesaris in Britannia'. Birley (p. 203) has pointed out that men who in the Vigintivirate had served either as *IIIviri monetales* or as *IVviri viarum curandarum* might expect to reach the consulate whilst still in their thirties, giving them 'the opportunity for many years' service in consular commands when still in the prime of manhood'. If this can be applied to Silvanus, we may suppose that he, like Agricola, held the consulate at about the age of 37, and that in that case his service as one of the *IIIviri monetales* came c. A.D. 27, and his quaestorship (when he was 'q. Ti. Caesaris'⁵) in 32. The next post mentioned is that of 'legat. leg. V in Germania', no mention being made either of the tribunate of the plebs or of the curule aedileship. Again, the exact dating of Silvanus' legionary command and praetorship is difficult; but if a simple reversal is involved, he might then have been 'legatus legionis' c. 36 and praetor in 38 or 39.⁶

We need further to attempt to discover why this irregular promotion was made. Legio V Alaudae was stationed at Castra Vetera (Xanten) in Lower Germany, together with Legio XXI Rapax. Vetera was, as Parker says,⁷ considered important because of its position in relation to the Chatti and the Cherusci. The second significance of Vetera was that it was the nearest

¹ *Ann.* 2. 36. 1-2.

² E. Birley, 'Senators in the Emperors' Service', *PBA* xxxix (1953), 197 ff.

³ 'Ti. Plautio M. f. Ani. Silvano Aeliano, pontif., sodali Aug., IIIvir. a.a.a.f.f., q. Ti. Caesaris, legat. leg. V in Germania, pr. urb., legat. et comiti Claud. Caesaris in Britannia, consuli, procos. Asiae, legat. pro praet. Moesiae...'

⁴ *ILS* 6385.

⁵ For the significance of this see E. Birley, *op. cit.* 204.

⁶ For the difficulty see R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford, 1958), ii. 652; Syme shows that Vespasian had no interval between the aedileship (39) and the praetorship (40). A further disruptive element may have been that Caligula was not anxious to promote a man who was obviously valued by his predecessor. (Cf. Suetonius—*Nero* 15. 2—who says that Nero was similarly suspicious of those favoured by his predecessors.)

⁷ H. M. D. Parker, *Roman Legions* (Oxford, 1928), 122.

legionary camp to the Frisii, who had successfully revolted in 28 and from whom further trouble might perhaps have been expected. In case of an emergency from either of these sources, it was evidently deemed prudent to place in charge of one of the legions at Vetera an energetic and promising commander.

II. M. JULIUS ROMULUS AND C. RUTILIUS GALLICUS

Two inscriptions record extraordinary appointments to legionary commands in the reign of Claudius—those of Julius Romulus¹ and Rutilius Gallicus.² Significantly, perhaps, both men held their appointments with the same legion—Legio XV Apollinaris in Pannonia.³

Can a reason be found for this? Tacitus⁴ describes certain disturbances in the Danube region following the expulsion of Vannius from the kingdom of the Suebi in A.D. 50—disturbances involving troop movements under Palpellius Hister, the governor of Pannonia.⁵ Parker⁶ has shown that the removal of Legio VIII Augusta from Pannonia to Moesia, perhaps in connection with the setting up of the province of Thrace in 46, and that of Legio IX Hispana for service in Claudius' invasion of Britain left Pannonia garrisoned by only one legion—XV Apollinaris. The dangers inherent in this state of affairs were demonstrated by the Vannius episode, and resulted in a decision to transfer Legio XIII from Upper Germany to Pannonia, thus temporarily reducing to seven legions the German army which was normally kept up to a strength of eight.

Both men had distinctive careers; Gallicus held a consulship in 71 or 72, and went on to hold the *praefectura urbis* under Domitian. Romulus' career, as Pflaum⁷ has shown, has other indications of imperial favour—the dispensation in respect of the quaestorship, and, if Pflaum's suggestion is accepted, service as one of the *IVviri viarum curandarum*; both of these make Romulus' rapid promotion to 'legatus legionis' reasonable and understandable.

Thus, from the events of the time and from the men's careers, it is reasonable to suppose that both Romulus and Gallicus were promoted before their time to testing commands, because the government considered them to be men of exceptional quality.

III

In Nero's reign,⁸ both Suetonius and Tacitus refer to extraordinary appointments of 'surplus' candidates for the praetorship to legionary commands.

¹ E. M. Smallwood, *Documents illustrating the Principates of Gaius, Claudius and Nero* (Cambridge, 1967), no. 237.

² Ibid., no. 244.

³ See H. G. Pflaum, 'La Chronologie de la carrière de L. Caesennius Sospes', *Historia*, ii (1953-54), 448.

⁴ *Ann.* 12. 29-30.

⁵ The presence in Pannonia of Rutilius Gallicus at this stage is perhaps to be assumed from Statius, *Silv.* i. 4. 76-9:

Hunc Galatea vicens ausa est incessere bello—
me quoque—perque novem timuit Pamphy-
lia messes

Pannoniusque ferox arcuque horrenda fugaci Armenia et patiens Latii iam pontis Araxes.

⁶ H. M. D. Parker, *op. cit.* 131-2.

⁷ H. G. Pflaum, *op. cit.* 447-8. (It is worth noting Pflaum's conclusion that this Julius Romulus is not to be identified with the man mentioned in *ILS* 5947.)

⁸ Tac. *Ann.* 14. 28. 1: 'Comitia praetorum arbitrio senatus haberi solita, quod acriore ambitu exarserant, princeps composuit, tris qui supra numerum petebant legioni praeficiendo.' Suetonius, *Nero* 15. 2: 'Candidatos, qui supra numerum essent, in solatium dilationis ac morae legionibus praeposuit.' The date to which Tacitus refers is A.D. 60.

Suetonius gives the impression that this was a 'consolation prize' to those candidates, whilst Tacitus suggests that it was an attempt on Nero's part to avoid the bitterness of canvassing.

But before concluding that Nero acted so irresponsibly as to use legionary commands as consolation prizes, it would be as well to remember that these extraordinary appointments were made at a time when the legions were involved in difficult and stretching campaigns in Britain and in the East, where Suetonius Paulinus and Domitius Corbulo respectively were the spearheads of the expansionist policy undertaken by the government at the time. The situation thus called for young men of drive in legionary commands, and it may well be that these three candidates for the praetorship mentioned as receiving legionary commands did so not as consolation prizes, but because they were considered the most promising of the fifteen, whose services could be employed more profitably in the army than in Rome.

The reasons given by Tacitus and Suetonius may in fact reflect the government's desire not to make too obvious the workings of a system of promotions that, as I suggested in my earlier paper, depended upon confidential advice and thus required a certain amount of secrecy if it was to continue to function smoothly. It is perhaps worth noting in passing that the reasons apparently used by Nero on this occasion are not far removed from the 'personal' type of reason advanced by Tiberius when he rejected the probing proposal of Asinius Gallus.

The University of Lancaster

D. C. A. SHOTTER