

# PROCONSULS OF ASIA UNDER CARACALLA

T. D. BARNES

A RECENT DISCUSSION of the careers of C. Julius Avitus Alexianus and Sex. Varius Marcellus, both relatives by marriage of the emperor Septimius Severus, reconstitutes the proconsular fasti of Asia during the reign of Caracalla as follows:<sup>1</sup>

211/2 (or 212/3)	C. Gabinius Barbarus Pompeianus <sup>2</sup>
212/3 (or 211/2)	Ti. Manilius Fuscus <sup>3</sup>
213–215	L. Marius Maximus Perpetuus Aurelianus <sup>4</sup>
215/6	C. Julius Avitus Alexianus <sup>5</sup>
216/7	unknown
217/8	C. Julius Asper, replaced by Q. Anicius Faustus. <sup>6</sup>

On prevailing assumptions about the career of Marius Maximus, this reconstruction has the unwelcome corollary that Scapula, who was proconsul of Africa when an eclipse occurred on 14 August 212 (Tertullian *Scap.* 3.3),<sup>7</sup> must be assigned to the proconsular year 211/2, since the following proconsular year (212/3) must be assigned to Maximus, who was proconsul of Africa before going to Asia.<sup>8</sup> But Tertullian, writing shortly after August 212, clearly did not expect Scapula to cease being proconsul in the immediate future: on the contrary, he wrote as if Scapula still had many months left in office in which to persecute Christians (esp. *Scap.* 5.2–4). The difficulty has

<sup>1</sup>H. Halfmann, "Zwei syrische Verwandte des severischen Kaiserhauses," *Chiron* 12 (1982) 217–235 (cited below by author's name), at 234–235.

<sup>2</sup>L. Robert, *CRAI* 1952.592 f., whence *AE* 1953.90.

<sup>3</sup>W. M. Ramsay, *CRAI* 1935.131, revising *MAMA* 4.27.

<sup>4</sup>The two year tenure is attested by *CIL* 6.1452, cf. 31658 = *ILS* 2936; *CIL* 10.6764. For the full evidence for Maximus' career, P. John, *Arheoloski Vestnik* 28 (1977) 403–405 = *PIR*<sup>2</sup> M 308.

<sup>5</sup>R. Egger, *JÖAI* 19/20 (1919), Beib. 293 ff. = *AE* 1921.64, improved by H. G. Pflaum, *Bayerische Vorgeschichtsblätter* 27 (1962) 95 ff., whence *AE* 1963.42; cf. Dio 79 (78).30.4.

<sup>6</sup>Dio 79 (78).22.3/4.

<sup>7</sup>F. K. Ginzel, *Spezieller Kanon der Sonnen- und Mondfinsternisse* (Leipzig 1899) 206; F. Boll, *RE* 6 (1906) 2361 f. The astrological details which Tertullian gives fit the eclipse of 14 August 212 perfectly, cf. A. Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie grecque* (Paris 1899) 182 ff. The only other solar eclipse close to this date occurred in March 211: it cannot be the eclipse in question for both historical and astronomical reasons.

<sup>8</sup>Maximus was suffect consul in 198 or 199: it remains uncertain whether the proconsul of Africa was P. Julius Scapula Tertullus Priscus, *consul ordinarius* in 195 (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> J 557), or C. Julius Scapula Lepidus Tertullus, suffect consul in 195 or 196 (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> J 554).

been met by the hypothesis that Maximus replaced Scapula in late summer or autumn 212.<sup>9</sup> But that hypothesis is difficult to reconcile with the presuppositions which Tertullian makes in the *Ad Scapulam*, and it relies on the prior assumption that the proconsular year began on 1 July—which is itself problematical.

That the proconsular year began on 1 July is the opinion of the majority of scholars who have written about the matter: the view has the sanction of Mommsen's authority, and was reiterated by the present writer, partly at least on the basis of Tertullian's open letter to Scapula.<sup>10</sup> Yet direct proof is lacking, and other evidence indirectly indicates that proconsuls normally arrived in Africa in April: allusions in Cyprian suggest that a new proconsul arrived in Carthage in early April 250,<sup>11</sup> and the proconsular year appears to have run from April to April in the fourth century.<sup>12</sup>

It is impossible, therefore, to squeeze Marius Maximus' proconsulate of Africa into 212/3. But his proconsulate of Asia can only be moved one year in either direction: since Maximus was proconsul for two years, while Caracalla visited Thyatira during his proconsulate (*OGIS* 517 = *IGRR* 4.1287), he was proconsul either for the biennium 213–215 or the biennium 214–216.<sup>13</sup> If Scapula was proconsul of Africa in 212/3, then it seems that Maximus' African proconsulate must be lodged in 213/4—and his Asian proconsulate in 214–216. On the facts as presented so far, the only alternative appears to be the unwelcome hypothesis that Maximus' proconsulate of Africa came after his two years in Asia, i.e., in 216/7.<sup>14</sup>

Can any way be found out of the impasse? The date of Avitus' proconsulate of Asia perhaps deserves renewed scrutiny. It depends on a lacunose and perhaps carelessly written passage of Cassius Dio. In his narrative of the reign of Macrinus, Dio introduces Elagabalus by describing his relationship to Caracalla: the sister of the emperor's mother had two daughters, Soaemias

<sup>9</sup>Halfmann 235.

<sup>10</sup>T. Mommsen, *Römisches Staatsrecht* 2<sup>3</sup> (Leipzig 1887) 205, 255 f.; T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian. A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford 1971) 260 f.; Halfmann 235.

<sup>11</sup>G. W. Clarke, *Latomus* 31 (1972) 1053 ff.

<sup>12</sup>T. D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge, Mass. 1982) 168 ff.; *Phoenix* 37 (1983) 256 ff.; 39 (1985) 144 ff.

<sup>13</sup>W. Dittenberger, on *OGIS* 517. B. E. Thomasson, *Die Statthalter der römischen Provinzen Nordafrikas von Augustus bis Diocletianus* 2 (Lund 1960) 115 f., disallowed the inference, putting Maximus' three years as proconsul between 218 and 222. That is impossible, cf. H. G. Pflaum, *Bonner Historia - Augusta - Colloquium* 1970 (1972) 228–229. Subsequently, Thomasson followed Halfmann in putting Maximus' Asian proconsulate in 213–215 (*Laterculi Praesidum* 1 [Göteborg 1984] 234).

<sup>14</sup>So B. E. Thomasson, *Opuscula Romana* 15 (1985) 124 f. He discusses, and rightly excludes, the possibility that Maximus was proconsul in 211/2, i.e., before Scapula, who preceded him in the consulate by three or four years.

the mother of Elagabalus and Mamaea the mother of the future Severus Alexander. Her husband was Julius Avitus, an ex-consul recently deceased:

ὁ γὰρ Ἀσούτος [παρὰ] μὲν τοῦ Καρ[ακάλλου ἐς] Κύπρον ἐκ τῆς Μεσο-  
πο[ταμίας μετ[ὰ τὴν τῆς Ἀ]σίας ἀρχὴν [πεμφθεὶς κλη]ρωτῶ τινὶ σ[υνέδρ]ος  
ὑπὸ τε γήρως καὶ ὑπ' ἀρρωστίας ἔφθη [συναϊρούμενος]. (79 [78].30.4)<sup>15</sup>

What does Dio mean? It seems *prima facie* obvious that Dio says that Caracalla summoned Avitus to Mesopotamia and sent him thence to Cyprus.<sup>16</sup> From this it follows that Avitus must have left Asia in 216, whether his proconsular year ended in April or on 1 July, since he had reached Mesopotamia and departed again before the emperor was assassinated on 8 April 217. But neither text nor interpretation can be regarded as completely certain. The vital word “Mesopotamia” is largely restored (though no alternative restoration is readily apparent). If the proconsular year ran from April to April, and Avitus did go to Mesopotamia, then it is chronologically possible that he went to Asia in April 216, left before the end of his proconsular year, travelled to Caracalla in the winter of 216/7 and arrived in Cyprus in the spring of 217. But is Dio so careful a writer that he cannot have intended to say that Avitus received an appointment to Cyprus from Caracalla while the latter was in Mesopotamia? Alternatively, could Dio be mistaken on the precise movements of Avitus after he left Asia?

There seems to be a clear conflict of evidence, which must apparently be resolved at the expense of either Tertullian on Scapula or Dio on Avitus. If the choice lies between discarding Tertullian's strictly contemporary evidence for the year of Scapula's proconsulate in Africa and the hypothesis of careless writing by Dio, then it should (I submit) be resolved at the expense of Dio. If that choice is made, then the list of proconsuls of Asia between 213 and 217 should be revised as follows:

213/4	unknown
214–16	L. Marius Maximus Perpetuus Aurelianus
216/7	C. Julius Avitus Alexianus.

The unknown proconsul of 213/4 will presumably be the man whose name was erased on the dedication of a statue of Caracalla in the Asclepieum at

<sup>15</sup>I print Boissvain's text (vol. 3, p. 438), except that, following E. Cary (Loeb ed., vol. 9 [1927] 408), I have promoted Boissvain's hesitant conjecture ἔφθη for the MS ὠφθη from the apparatus to the text. The exact extent of the lacunae is clearer in I. Bekker's edition (vol. 2 [1849] 436).

<sup>16</sup>H. G. Pflaum, *REL* 57 (1979) 313; Halfmann 223. Both scholars reject the supplement σ[υνέδρ]ος, i.e., *assessor* (printed by Becker and Boissvain) as incompatible with Avitus' rank.

Pergamum in 214.<sup>17</sup> However, given the complexity of the problem, it would be optimistic to hope for a definitive solution on present evidence.<sup>18</sup>

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS,  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO,  
TORONTO M5S 1A1.

<sup>17</sup>C. Habicht, *Altertümer von Pergamon* 8.3: *Die Inschriften des Asklepieions* (Berlin 1969) no. 12. Habicht, followed by R. Syme, *Emperors and Biography* (Oxford 1971) 137, suggested that the proconsul whose name is erased was Avitus. But the inscription recording Avitus' career (above, n. 5), though incomplete, appears to render that hypothesis untenable, cf. H. G. Pflaum, *REL* 57 (1979) 298 ff.; Halfmann 217 ff.

<sup>18</sup>I am most grateful to Professor E. J. Champlin for assistance and advice.