

The *Vehiculatio* in Roman Imperial Regulation: Particular Solutions to a Systematic Problem

Russell Gentry
North Carolina State University

From the reign of Augustus to the end of the Principate, the imperial transport system, or *vehiculatio*, carried vital pieces of information across the Roman Empire and facilitated the critical transfer of logistical materials, especially for the military. The system demanded that communities along main road networks furnish vehicles and sometimes guides to officials holding up-to-date travel passes, called *diplomata*. These travel passes carried the traveler through a network of rest houses and obliged communities along the route to provide the means for short-distance transportation within their territories at officially prescribed rates that varied based on specific circumstances.¹ Confusion quickly arose regarding the obligations of those providing the service and the entitlements of the users—or abusers—of the *vehiculatio*. Therefore, the system frequently appeared in extant regulatory efforts (preserved in literary evidence, papyri, and inscriptions) which aimed to rectify unauthorized exactions by individuals who attempted to take advantage of the transport system.

These inscriptions and papyri, discussed below, reveal that the *vehiculatio* commanded considerable regulatory attention by administrative officials, from provincial governors and their various staff to the emperor himself throughout the *pax romana* and into the third century.² A selection of fifteen of the regulatory documents—twelve inscriptions and three papyri—provides a diachronic survey of the *vehiculatio*'s regulation through the Principate. Although many more documents attested imperial and gubernatorial petitions, edicts, and regulations, particularly those attempting to regulate unauthorized obligations imposed on provincials, the documents of the current selection deals directly with the topic of requisitioned transport. The provided selection likely represents an unknown fraction of a number of such edicts, as many surely have not survived, and the evidence comes from the eastern half of the empire, where scholars have located and published the relevant (but often fragmentary) documents.³ Nevertheless, the inscriptions and papyri below clearly belie two important trends. First, Roman authorities at all

¹ Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (London: George Allan and Unwin Ltd., 1974), 182-190.

² Christopher J. Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire: Soldiers, Administration, and Public Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). In this paper, the author will use the blanket term “governor” to refer to all the various top-level provincial administrators—including *praefecti Aegypti*, *legati*, and *consulares*. Fuhrmann treated this topic in more detail; see 173 for a discussion of Latin term, *praeses*, similar to “governor.” Also note: all dates AD unless otherwise indicated.

³ Unfortunately, the lack of comparative evidence from western half of the empire makes it difficult to speculate as to why these regulatory documents came from the east. Outside Egypt, papyri rarely survived, and the architectural reuse of inscribed stones may have altered the body of extant evidence. Additionally, population densities and distributions, variations in the level of *vehiculatio* activity, and even literacy rates potentially led to varying levels of regulatory evidence between the east and the west.

levels were aware of the problem of unauthorized *vehiculatio* exactions, and continually attempted to regulate these abuses. Second, these regulatory attempts continuously failed, and the system of requisitioned transport remained a thorn in the side of provincials and a major source of consternation for those obliged to provide onerous services to unauthorized users.

The *vehiculatio* (and the ineffectual regulatory efforts surrounding it) has attracted some limited attention from scholars, yet their studies have generally ignored the question of why attempts by petitioners, governors, and emperors from the first to third centuries failed to end abusive exactions. Unauthorized use of the *vehiculatio*—according to this analysis—continued throughout the early Roman Empire despite the appearance of ongoing regulatory efforts because the nature of Roman imperial government “without bureaucracy” left governors impractically equipped to deal with such abuses and obscured the flaws inherent in the system. Roman authorities could have examined the root causes of the problems with the transportation system; however, the issues lingered throughout the *pax romana* because administrators considered *vehiculatio* abuses to be isolated incidents of improper administrative behavior, rather than indications of a systematic problem requiring a reexamination of traditional practices. Imperial authorities failed to resolve the issue of *vehiculatio* abuses because they sought particular, case-by-case solutions to fix a fundamentally flawed system.

Therefore, after a brief historiographical overview, an outline and definition of the nature of Roman provincial government during the first two and a half centuries of the empire will constitute the first step of this analysis. This portion of the inquiry will rely on principles of Roman administration drawn from a secondary source as well as some illustrative examples from literary evidence, to establish general conclusions about provincial government related to the analysis of the transport system. First, the *vehiculatio*'s historical progression from Augustus to the third century will follow in a brief chronological presentation, relying on references to the system in the extant literature. These references, including information from Suetonius, Pliny the Younger, Aurelius Victor, and the *Historia Augusta*, will prepare for a more in-depth look at the nature of *vehiculatio* regulations throughout the first, second, and into the third centuries as attested by the fifteen selected documents.

After assessing each of the regulatory actions presented in the documents, a final synthesis of this evidence will conclude by briefly returning to the broader context of Roman imperial government. This shall illustrate that the continuation of ineffective regulatory attempts resulted from flaws in the Roman conceptualization of provincial government during the Principate. The authorities failed to acknowledge problems inherent in the system of government itself, and the imperial staff relied too heavily on the prosecution of individual offenders by governors who may not have possessed effective means to police their own forces.

A brief look at the historiography of this topic will situate the analysis alongside relevant scholarship on the *vehiculatio*. In 1976, R. Chevallier offered a useful discussion of the maintenance of the imperial transport system, and acknowledged the recurring issue of unauthorized transport exactions.⁴ In that same year, S. Mitchel published an important inscription from Pisidia in an article that both provided information about the tightening of requisitioning laws and connected transport obligations to billeting complaints by provincials.⁵ A. Kolb also highlighted some important aspects of the transport system, discussing its evolution as a service for official personnel and clearing up misconceptions about its function as a “postal”

⁴ Raymond Chevallier, *Roman Roads*, trans. N.H. Field (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 183.

⁵ Stephen Mitchell, “Requisitioned Transport in the Roman Empire: A New Inscription from Pisidia,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 66, (1976): 106-131. (see first inscription, below).

service.⁶ C.R. van Tilburg offered a valuable discussion of the *vehiculatio* during the third century in his assessment of public and private traffic levels of Roman road systems.⁷ C. Jones recently published an Edict of Hadrian regarding the public transit system, and he cautiously attributed Hadrian's concern for the provincials of Maroneia to the Emperor's philhellenism.⁸ Finally, C.J. Fuhrmann noted the frequent attempts by emperors to curb the rampant abuse of the public transport system and discussed the connection of the *vehiculatio* to provincial policing, particularly in the context of imperial intelligence and the *frumentarii*.⁹ Other authors touched on this topic as well, and the inscription collections of scholars like T. Hauken will be particularly useful for this analysis.¹⁰ Although many scholars acknowledged the ineffectiveness of Roman attempts to regulate the transport system throughout the Principate, they have not explored the reasons for this failure in detail, particularly as they related broader conceptualizations of Roman government.

Therefore, a brief discussion of Roman imperial provincial government must come first. Augustus's reforms, while creating a newly unified political body for imperial government, relied heavily on traditional provincial conceptualizations in order to encourage compliance in his divided provincial administration system.¹¹ The government of the Roman provinces, as it developed under the Republic, rooted itself in a violent system which viewed *provinciae* first as territories for military campaigns, and later as a base from which to conduct such activity.¹² These actions created confused ideas about the very nature of a "province," as the yearly assignments began to include peaceful territories governed by Rome without protest, perhaps providing the basis for more obviously rapacious behavior on the part of governors such as Verres.¹³ Verres' extensive abuses as governor of Sicily from 73 to 71 BC represented one of the most prominent cases in a series of high-profile trials against provincial governors for various offenses.¹⁴ Later prosecutions of Roman governors for misconduct and abuses, such as those included in the writings of Pliny the Younger, provided similar examples from the Principate.¹⁵

A case-by-case analysis of these instances of gubernatorial abuse is a topic for a different inquiry, but generally these trials reveal a continuous tendency to ignore the governmental system itself and instead place culpability on the actions of the individual provincial governor—and sometimes his staff.¹⁶ Tacitus's comments on Agricola's effective governorship of Britain from 78-84 sum up this governor-centric view, for he wrote that Agricola, "established an excellent tradition of peace," by stamping out abuses, "which, because of either the negligence

⁶ Anne Kolb, "Transportation and Communication in the Roman State: the *Cursus Publicus*," in Colin Adams and Ray Laurence, *Travel and Geography in the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 2001), 95-105.

⁷ Cornelis van Tilburg, *Traffic and Congestion in the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 2007), 56-63.

⁸ Christopher Jones, "An Edict of Hadrian from Maroneia," *Chiron* 41 (2011): 313-325.

⁹ Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, 159-161.

¹⁰ Tor Hauken, *Petition and Response: an Epigraphic Study of Petitions to Roman Emperors, 181-249* (Bergen: The Norwegian Institute at Athens, 1998).

¹¹ Fred Drogula, *Commanders and Command in the Roman and Early Empire Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 488.

¹² Drogula, *Commanders and Command in the Roman and Early Empire Republic*, 431.

¹³ Drogula, *Commanders and Command in the Roman and Early Empire Republic*, 431-433.

¹⁴ Cicero, *In Verrem*.

¹⁵ Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae*.

¹⁶ Once again, the various trials of provincial governors which Pliny and others provided are too extensive to list in this context. However, it may also be useful to examine the outline of an ideal governor's behavior, as presented in Ulpian's *De Officio Proconsularis*, which relied on compliance with proper, traditional practices.

or insolence of the previous [governors], had been dreaded no less than war.”¹⁷ The abuse of provincials was the fault of governors, in the Roman view, and noble, skilled administrators such as Agricola and Pliny could ideally rectify these exactions—without any need to question the traditional systems of government in place. This rule by custom, however, constituted an obstacle to rectification during Pliny the Younger’s governorship of Bithynia-Pontus in 110. Upon Pliny’s request to view the accounts of Apamea, the Roman colonists there noted that this action went against long-established traditions, and the governor wrote to Trajan to confirm the wisdom of his action.¹⁸ Pliny’s letter also constituted one of the most important references to the *vehiculatio* in imperial literary sources.

The literature of the empire regarding the transport system contained only a few references to the *vehiculatio* from the first through third centuries. The system saw some small modifications during the Principate, but it remained a burden for provincials from the dawn of the empire, largely because of continued exactions from soldiers. Augustus initially founded the *vehiculatio* as a series of men established in short relay positions along the military routes, but, by the end of his reign, he altered the system so that a single messenger travelled with each communication. The latter method allowed the messenger to answer content questions about the composition of messages, but required that the traveler exploit a relay of requisitioned transport carts and beasts. Using his officially-stamped travel documents, the messenger could commandeer local vehicles under imperial authority.¹⁹ The new system, referred to as the *vehiculatio* until the Dominate, replaced *ad hoc* methods of official communication and transport in the Late Republic which had consisted of a variety of soldiers, lictors, slaves (public and private), and even a relay system attested under Julius Caesar.²⁰ In the Principate, imperial or gubernatorial slaves and military officials carried messages and materiel through the provinces, utilizing locally maintained relay stations that often required provincials to provide horses for the service.²¹ Complaints regarding the burdens of this obligation surfaced by the turn of the second century and Emperor Trajan’s desire to enforce moderation in the use of the *vehiculatio* appeared strong in the letters of Pliny the Younger.

Pliny served as the governor of Bithynia-Pontus around 110, and wrote many letters to the emperor. The extant letters may faithfully represent the original exchange between the governor and Trajan, or these documents may have actually been manipulated by an editor attempting to create an ideal projection of a provincial governor, as some have argued.²² Regardless, the correspondence included an important reference to the *vehiculatio* which remains relevant whether the letters exhibit an original exchange or a selective corpus. This body of letters also leaves a more critical uncertainty: the degree to which Pliny’s contact with Trajan represented a typical governor-emperor relationship. The position of Pliny—as a legate of Trajan dispatched to correct previous gubernatorial failures in a typically senatorial province, while also wielding the powers of a proconsul—suggests that his position may have been unique.²³

¹⁷ Tacitus, *De Vita Iulii Agricolae*, 20.1-2. All translations by the author unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁸ Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae*, 10.47.1.

¹⁹ Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarem*, 49.3.

²⁰ Julius Caesar, *De Bello Civili*, 3.101.

²¹ Chevallier, *Roman Roads*, 1976: 182.

²² P. A. Stadter, “Pliny and the Ideology of Empire: the Correspondence with Trajan,” *Prometheus* 32, (2006): 75.

²³ John Richardson, *Roman Provincial Administration: 227 BC to AD 117* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1976), 75. Pliny’s unique position, and particular mission to correct previous governors’ failings, may have provided the pretext for him to behave in ways slightly irregular for a typical provincial governor, such as his audit of the

Nevertheless, the references to the *vehiculatio* in Pliny contained important pieces of information regulating requisitioned transport between the emperor and provincial governor. In one exchange, Pliny inquired as to the use of outdated travel passes. Trajan firmly forbade the use of such passes, adding that he took care to always send up-to-date passes on time.²⁴ Pliny's request implied either a potential need for more passes or a failure to receive new passes on time, but Trajan's terse response ignored either possibility, merely reinforcing the established policy. This *diplomata* issuance policy apparently represented an innovation from some first century practices, which suggests that the authority to issue travel passes came originally from the governor.²⁵ The preponderance of evidence for continued abuses suggests that this issuance policy was ineffective at assuaging provincials and Trajan's response represented a missed opportunity to consider underlying flaws in the *vehiculatio*.

The system appeared in two other direct references in the corpus of letters. In the first instance, Pliny justified his issuance of a pass to a courier bearing important (but unspecified) information for the emperor from the Bosporean Kingdom, but more information came from the second reference.²⁶ At the end of the letter selections, Pliny explained that, while he typically never bestowed diplomas to anyone, except for official business, a family emergency required him to issue one, and the nature of the problem dictated that he could not ask permission, so instead he offered his gratitude for knowing that the emperor would understand.²⁷ Trajan's response confirmed that Pliny had not overstepped his bounds, but the emperor's letter also briefly reiterated Trajan's authority over the *vehiculatio*, as well as its purpose, for he mentioned the *diplomata*, "which I furnished for official business."²⁸ This specific leniency contrasted Trajan's earlier strictness regarding out-of-date passes, though the circumstances differed, and complaints from provincials generally came from abuses by soldiers. The movement of one envoy, close in relation to the governor himself, would probably have caused little stir among provincials. Finally, the inclusion of Pliny's specific questions about the *vehiculatio* in his correspondence with Trajan suggested that his official *mandata* did not cover this topic in detail. Trajan probably expected that the established tradition of requisitioned transportation use needed no elaboration.²⁹ Therefore, imperial concern for official use of the *vehiculatio*—which neither totally denied personal use for high-ranking officials nor considered the possibility for flaws or innovation in the system—appeared in the letters of Pliny the Younger during his governorship of Bithynia-Pontus in 110.

Later literary evidence about Trajan reveals a change to the upper-level administration of the *vehiculatio*. Aurelius Victor's writing noted this emperor's addition of a kind of post-master, though his reference was unfortunately vague, specifying only that the emperor wished to receive information more rapidly.³⁰ This reason cited by Aurelius Victor led some scholars to speculate

Roman colony at Apamea.

²⁴ Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae*, 10.45-46.

²⁵ See discussion of the edicts of Legate Sextus Sotidius Strabo and Prefect Lucius Aemilius Rectus, below. Also the edict of Egyptian prefect Marcus Petronius Mamertinus illustrated that the authority to distribute travel passes at the provincial level remained for Egypt in the time of Hadrian, making a reconstruction of who issued passes in particular times and provinces speculative.

²⁶ Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae*, 10.64.

²⁷ Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae*, 10.120.1-2.

²⁸ Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae*, 10.121.

²⁹ Rules regarding the regulation of the *vehiculatio* likely appeared in the *mandata* issued under Augustus and Tiberius, as attested by ll. 4-7 in the Edict of Sextus Sotidius Strabo. Other regulatory inscriptions containing letters of Domitian and Pertinax also attested imperial *mandata* with particular attention to transport regulations.

³⁰ Aurelius Victor, *De Caesaribus*, 13.9.

that Trajan made more extensive use of the transport system than previous emperors.³¹ Trajan's ambitious, expansive foreign policy may lend credence to this view as well, but his regulatory action with the *vehiculatio* focused inward, on the office of the emperor, rather than outward to the provinces. Provincials may have benefitted from his regulation of *diplomata* issuances and his addition of a high-ranking transportation official in Italy likely helped him absorb more information, but this new officer probably did little to help governors prevent abuses along the roads themselves in the second and third centuries.³²

Literary evidence for later periods is more problematic, for it came from the notoriously controversial *Historia Augusta*.³³ The source's unknown author credited Trajan's successor, Hadrian, with transferring some of the burden of the *vehiculatio* to the state as part of a series of reforms to gain popularity. The source was somewhat vague about Hadrian's modification to the system.³⁴ Scholars have noted that whatever action formed the basis of this report, it was merely a token measure. In effect, the burden of maintaining the system still rested largely on provincials, who paid the salaries of whichever municipal road manager, referred to as a *manceps*, won both the auction for the management contract and the approval of the vehicular prefect.³⁵ Furthermore, the *Historia Augusta's* unknown authorship and relatively terse coverage of the actual reform made this a difficult action to interpret. Nevertheless, two edicts after Hadrian attested the use and enforcement of official way stations, though the corpus is too small to make secure assertions about changes that this action may have made, and complaints of exactions continued through the second and third century.³⁶

From the late second century, another important reference to the *vehiculatio* appeared in the *Historia Augusta*, this time for the Emperor Pertinax. His biography stated that, during the reign of Antoninus Pius, Pertinax served as a prefect of a cohort in Syria. To reach the province, according to the dubious *Historia Augusta*, the governor of Syria forced Pertinax to travel on foot as a punishment for using the *vehiculatio* without a proper pass.³⁷ If this occurred as described, it meant that the governor of Syria took initiative to punish *vehiculatio* exactions in a way that would have been inefficient for the allocation of ranking military personnel and made no restitution for those violated by Pertinax's exactions. Additionally, a single case may not represent actual trends of regulation by provincial governors, and violations prosecuted in this way constitute failures on the part of individual Romans, not flaws in the system. Finally, this episode, if true, appears ironic next to a *mandata* of Pertinax attested by a Lydian inscription, which reinforced the authority of governors to prosecute transportation violations. The *vehiculatio* continued to produce abusers (many of whom were perhaps lower ranking and less conspicuous than the prefect of a cohort) into the third century.

Around the turn of the third century, according to the *Historia Augusta*, Septimius Severus transferred the cost of the public transport service to the imperial treasury, but the source

³¹ Hans-Georg Pflaum, *Essai sur le Cursus Publicus sous le Haut Empire-Romain*, (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1940), 248.

³² Continued complaints through the second and third centuries suggest this was not an effective policy in the long term.

³³ Naphtali Lewis and Meyer Reinhold, *Roman Civilization: Selected Readings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 31-32.

³⁴ *Historia Augusta*, 7.5.

³⁵ Chevallier, *Roman Roads*, 183.

³⁶ See the petition response issued by Legate Julius Saturnius and the edict of the Proconsul Aemilius Iuncus, discussed below.

³⁷ *Historia Augusta*, 1.5.

reported no additional information.³⁸ The same source problems apply to Hadrian's, Pertinax's, and Septimius's biographies alike, and complaints against the *vehiculatio* continued through the Crisis of the Third Century. In this period, the paucity of literary evidence precludes any reference to the *vehiculatio*, though later documents may be helpful. The *Codex Theodosianus* related that by the early fifth century the system included a "fast" and a "slow" postal option.³⁹ Scholars assume that this division of speeds likely appeared under Septimius Severus. They have pointed out that the burden of the *vehiculatio* on provincials probably increased during the third century, as populations went into decline and unstable politics called for increased military activity.⁴⁰ Further burdens of the third century included taxation in kind, and, with the rise of the Dominate, Diocletian changed the name of the *vehiculatio* to the *cursus publicus* as well as the name of the intelligence officials which used this system from *frumentarii* to *agentes in rebus*.⁴¹ Named with ominous obscurity, these "agents in matters" seemed to function similarly to the earlier *frumentarii*, and both constituted sources of imperial intelligence closely tied to the transportation system, though their exact duties and connections to the *vehiculatio*, especially around their inception (probably in the late first century), remain obscure.⁴²

The few references to the *vehiculatio* in the extant literature for the first through third centuries outline the transport system in a way that fits with the issues defined above in the discussion of provincial government. Roman provincial administration focused on individuals and traditions, placing praise and blame on provincial governors rather than on the policies and traditional practices at work in the administrative offices. A reliance on the continued use of customs in the regulation of the *vehiculatio* at the provincial level seemed to be the only guidance for governors in dealing with this system. Requisitioned transport endured some changes at the hands of the emperors, but from Augustus, who founded the system, to Diocletian, who renamed it, these changes reflected attempts by the imperial office to centralize logistical management and control the collection of information, and offered generally little guidance for the governor in his province. Provincial-level regulatory actions appeared not in literary evidence (except briefly in Pliny's letters and Pertinax's biography), but in the various inscriptions and papyri which reveal attempts to manage the *vehiculatio* from imperial as well as gubernatorial authorities.

Turning now to provinces, the discussion of these sources will proceed chronologically, outlining some elements of content, then providing a brief interpretive discussion for each regulatory action, in the context of provincial administration. First, S. Mitchel published an important bilingual (Latin and Greek) inscription from Sagalassos in the province of Galatia, probably originating around the ascension of Tiberius.⁴³ In the inscription, a *legatus pro praetore* named Sextus Sotidius attempted to crack down on unspecified abuses of the *vehiculatio*. The legate began by explaining that, although it was shameful for him to have to reinforce the authority of the *Augusti* himself (who already prohibited such exactions), he had set up an official register in certain towns and villages dictating the exact use of the transport system. This he would enforce, not only through his own power, but also through imperial authorities who originally instructed him on the matter. Sextus Sotidius did not specifically identify the violators

³⁸ *Historia Augusta*, 14.2.

³⁹ *Codex Theodosianus*, 8.5.62

⁴⁰ Tilburg, *Traffic and Congestion*, 58-60.

⁴¹ Aurelius Victor, *De Caesaribus*, 39.30.

⁴² Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, 151-155.

⁴³ Mitchell, "Requisitioned Transport," 107-109.

exacting unauthorized burdens, though his official register outlined the exact *vehiculatio* obligations for Sagalassos by providing a requisitioning price list for users of the system. There were three tiers: 1.) The *procurator principis optimi* and his son, as well as military personnel (bearing official travel passes), and senators received ten wagons from the town; 2.) Imperial knights received three wagons; 3.) Centurions could requisition a single wagon.

Furthermore, the town could charge a prescribed rate for these means of transportation but had to furnish free lodging to the governor's staff, military personnel, and imperial servants—though the inscription also included a prohibition against private use of the prescribed *vehiculatio* provisions. Throughout the inscription, Sextus Sotidius referred to imperial authority, making it clear that he was acting under the *mandata* of both Augustus and Tiberius by enforcing the limited provisions of the *vehiculatio*. Both gubernatorial and imperial authorities benefitted from the system, though Sextus Sotidius was careful to outline the exact rules for official *vehiculatio* use, ostensibly to curb abuses of the system. The system itself remained unquestioned, and merely received an outline and definition of its proper operation rather than a serious inquiry into the flaws which led to provincial burdens. These excess obligations came from unspecified sources in the edict, but the perpetrators must have been connected to Roman administration, and were likely officials acting in some military capacity.⁴⁴ Various military forces aided Roman governors in the prosecution of bandits and general maintenance of order, but these forces looked outward, rather than inward, and were therefore generally not self-policing.⁴⁵ Introspective regulation of military personnel may have eventually become a partial duty of the *stationarii* (guard detachments) or *frumentarii* (more complicated intelligence-gathering personnel), but epigraphic evidence attests that these officials were often a source of abuse rather than internal policing.⁴⁶ Extra-military officials—such as transportation *mancipes*—could have monitored and reported *vehiculatio* requisitions, but no regulatory documents attest to their use.

In 19, Germanicus issued an edict regarding the *vehiculatio*, preserved on an extant papyrus, which may have offended the emperor Tiberius, because, as a senator, he should not have entered Egypt without imperial permission.⁴⁷ The papyrus indicated that none could requisition animals, boats, or hospitality without approval issued through his secretary, Baebius. The papyrus further stated that Baebius had authority to grant rights to the *vehiculatio* (perhaps by distributing diplomas, though the papyrus was not explicit on the means of regulation). This document contained no mention of the emperor, and prescribed that Baebius would review each case. Since *vehiculatio* abuses constituted a kind of theft, if the need arose, Germanicus himself would hear cases. On the one hand, this action might have appeared to step on imperial toes, and another proclamation of Germanicus, also preserved on papyrus, instructed the Egyptian provincials not to direct shouts of praise at him, as they were appropriate, “truly only for the savoir and benefactor, of all people,” his father and the imperial family.⁴⁸

Tiberius, on the other hand, was probably more concerned with limiting unauthorized exactions, especially in Egypt where such abuses by soldiers were particularly notorious, than

⁴⁴ See below, particularly the petition and imperial response from Skaptopara, Thrace.

⁴⁵ Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, 182-183.

⁴⁶ Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, 218. Also, for an inscription detailing abuses by *frumentarii*, see Hauken, *Petition and Response*, 38-41.

⁴⁷ Victor Ehrenberg and A.H.M. Jones, *Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 147.

⁴⁸ Ehrenberg and Jones, *Documents*, 148.

possible over-regulation by Germanicus.⁴⁹ The senatorial proconsul may have been in a better position to introduce such regulation, as a ranking outsider connected to the emperor, than the actual prefect in charge of Egypt, who would have had to prosecute (or threaten to prosecute) his own military subordinates. These officials, including at least one general, presented problems for other governors of Egypt, and in several cases these governors attempted to mitigate over-exaction through the issuance of various edicts of their own.

One such edict came in 42, when another papyrus from Egypt documented a regulatory action of the prefect Lucius Aemilius Rectus.⁵⁰ The document prohibited abuses by soldiers or armed men and promised the topmost penalty for violators. Anyone without the prefect-issued travel passes could not utilize the *vehiculatio*. The transport system suffered under abuse from soldiers. The prefect identified and attempted to rectify these issues, but only through an unspecified punishment. Distributing penalties may have been difficult as well, for there was no method of trial or identification outlined in the text, although the above edict of Germanicus at least presumed the possibility of such a trial. Furthermore, such a hearing could have placed the provincial governor at odds with his chief source of stability and control within the province (his military forces), and the next document suggests that the governor of Egypt attempted to delegate *vehiculatio* regulation to a general in the late first century.

Also in the reign of Claudius, another edict of an Egyptian prefect survived from an inscription on the great temple at Girga.⁵¹ The impetus for the edict came from specific complaints about unauthorized exactions by soldiers, and the prefect knew of these abuses but did not act until the provincials brought him a petition. Once again, an Egyptian prefect took initiative, albeit belated, to curb *vehiculatio* abuses, and this time the prefect even prescribed specific financial punishments for violators (as well as rewards for informants), and the general held responsibility over this process. The addition of the general to the process may have aimed to create a buffer between the governor and his troops, allowing him to remain less directly connected to the penalization of his military forces. Furthermore, the edict included a tenfold fine for those who benefitted unjustly from the *vehiculatio*, and a fourfold reward for any informants. Informants appeared as another minor innovation to the process, though the provision of a reward illustrated the difficult position of the prefect: He had to monitor and regulate his military force with no additional forces providing oversight, and troops may have been reluctant to turn each other in. Although the reward may have enticed some, evidence of continued abuses from Egypt shows that this kind of regulation was ineffective for this province.

In Achaëa, around 50, an edict of the emperor Claudius also attempted to regulate the *vehiculatio*. A heavily fragmentary inscription preserved the emperor's reason for this action in its first eleven lines (the only extant portion of the document).⁵² As the edict prepared to deliver its specific regulatory statement, it noted that the purpose of the document was to regulate the system not only for Italy, but for the colonies and provinces as well. The empire-wide legislation is unfortunately missing, though the quantity of evidence for subsequent abuses attests its failure. This failure is particularly striking, given that the issue of unauthorized *vehiculatio* use remained a topic of imperial concern, as this edict and further documents below illustrate.

⁴⁹ Frank Frost Abbott and Allan Chester Johnson, *Municipal Administration in the Roman Empire* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1968) 507.

⁵⁰ Abbott and Johnson, *Municipal Administration*, 507.

⁵¹ Abbott and Johnson, *Municipal Administration*, 508-509.

⁵² Abbott and Johnson, *Municipal Administration*, 354.

Complaints about the transport system were not solely a dialogue between provincials and Roman officials. In some cases provincial towns competed to transfer some of their burdens to other towns by appealing to provincial authorities. A procurator of Thrace under Vespasian wrote to the town of Thasos in order to address a *vehiculatio* dispute between that city and Philippi, and an inscription preserved the document.⁵³ The inscription contained an allegation by Thasos that Philippi had forced the town to take up more than its share of requisitioned transport obligations, and the procurator reassured the city that he would rectify this issue, by both an official concerned with boundaries, and by the procurator's own inspection. The means of settling this issue were straightforward because it constituted a dispute between two provincial entities rather than a complaint regarding exactions by Roman military officials, and required no self-policing on the part of the provincial administration. The governmental forces may have effectively dealt with this issue because the documents only recorded one dispute. However, accidents of preservation make such arguments from silence highly speculative and a document below attests that this kind of dispute recurred elsewhere. Nevertheless, the inscription reveals a proactive, specific action on the part of the procurator.

A procurator from Syria also took action to regulate the *vehiculatio*. Acting under direct orders from the Emperor Domitian, the emperor's charge survived on a stone stele established by the procurator.⁵⁴ The letter stated that the purpose of the instructions and regulations was to set a solid legal precedent for the protection of provincials from abuses of the *vehiculatio*.⁵⁵ Domitian's instructions also explained a reason for his protection from excessive burdens, which was to increase overall agricultural productivity. Additionally, the inscription reiterated that the authority to requisition *vehiculatio* transport came solely from the emperor himself, and Domitian noted that the procurator was to ensure all users of the system carried an imperially issued diploma. This suggests that, by the late first century, the authority for issuance of *diplomata* had transferred from the office of the governor to the emperor in this province.⁵⁶ Domitian also commanded the procurator, "to make it your thought, that nobody requisition a beast" without the proper documentation. The *diplomata* and procurator's vigilance—in theory—sufficed to regulate the transportation system in Syria, once combined with the power of the imperial endorsement and established as precedent. The precedent was the solution, and problems with the *vehiculatio* were the result of a failure to conform to correct traditional practice, rather than inefficient governmental regulation on the ground, according to the distant Emperor Domitian.

Hadrian had the advantage of observing the situation first-hand around 130 when he issued two edicts regarding the *vehiculatio* during his tour of the provinces. An inscription from the province of Asia produced the first edict, and it noted that the emperor found out about soldiers requisitioning transportation rights beyond what the rules prescribed.⁵⁷ In this edict, the emperor laid out the rules for regulation of the system through diplomas, and ended by asserting

⁵³ M. McCrum, and A.G. Woodhead, *Selected Documents of the Principates of the Flavian Emperors: Including the Year of Revolution, A.D. 68-96* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 134-135.

⁵⁴ Robert K. Sherk, *The Roman Empire: Augustus to Hadrian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 136-137.

⁵⁵ Sherk, *The Roman Empire*, 137. See specifically Sherk's explanation of the legal force in ll. 15-17.

⁵⁶ Cf. the letters of Pliny the Younger (above), as well as the evidence for mixed rules of gubernatorial or imperial *diplomata* issuance throughout the Principate.

⁵⁷ T. Hauken and H. Malay, "A New Edict of Hadrian from the Province of Asia Setting Regulations for Requisitioned Transport," in Rudolph Haensch, ed., *Selbstdarstellung und Kommunikation: Die Veröffentlichung staatlicher Urkunden auf Stein und Bronze in der römischen Welt* (Munich: Beck, 2009), 329-332.

that the provincial governor and the procurator, as well as Hadrian himself if necessary, would receive the names of offenders. Hadrian's physical proximity and willingness to insert himself much more directly into the prosecution processes surely empowered the force of the edict.

Nevertheless, the edict failed to specify who held responsibility for identifying offenders and transmitting their names to the authorities. The governors likely received complaints and petitions from provincials themselves, though prosecution probably remained difficult, as the nature of the abuse allowed an individual abuser to quickly move away from his offense. This process constituted micro-level prosecution similar to the trials of provincial governors for larger offenses from the Republic through the Principate. Furthermore, a single exaction, while a serious offense according to the force of this edict, was not a considerable burden for the villages. Rather, the recurrence of these offenses by many unauthorized users drained rural resources far more seriously, and blame for this recurrent practice did not rest with a single individual. Culpability generally rested with the conceptual flaws of Roman administration, which resulted in these continually ineffective edicts.

The second edict of Hadrian regarding the *vehiculatio*, also preserved on an inscription, came from Maroneia in the province of Macedonia.⁵⁸ Here too, Hadrian perceived abuses of the travel system and attempted to regulate them by preventing the improper use of *diplomata*, which provided unauthorized transportation to a pilgrim site on the island of Samothrace. Though the document did not mention any office of provincial government, the bottom of the inscription is missing. This significant lacuna limited the Maroneia edict's usefulness to regulatory analysis, for the bottom of the previous inscription contained the information regarding the provincial governor and procurator's roles in transport regulation. Nevertheless, the second inscription reinforced the imperial initiative of Hadrian in attempting to regulate the use of the *vehiculatio* through a definition and endorsement of proper behavior rather than considering the issue of unauthorized exactions as a systematic, recurring problem, from the reign of Augustus to the second century.

Later in Hadrian's reign, a papyrus revealed another proclamation of an Egyptian prefect.⁵⁹ Marcus Petronius Mamertinus mandated a stop to unlawful exactions of boats, animals, and guides for the *vehiculatio*. As in the previous examples, this document omitted an identification of the individual responsible for the prefect's knowledge of the issue, as the edict simply began with the statement, "I recognized [the offenses]." Additionally, the prefect implicated a general and his staff as complicit in the abuses of the transport system (by issuing unwarranted travel passes), and the governor threatened harsh punishment for anyone involved with unauthorized use of the *vehiculatio*. The vagueness of the prescribed penalty and absence of an immediate punishment may suggest that the prefect was either unwilling or unable to actually impose the *vehiculatio* rules on his own troops and senior provincial staff members.⁶⁰ The informants in the edicts from the reign of Hadrian remained anonymous. However, envoys from provincial villages were a likely source of information for the governor and emperor regarding exactions, and their initiative appeared in various petitions from the Principate.

⁵⁸ Jones, "An Edict of Hadrian," 319.

⁵⁹ Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, 234-235. The texts and translation provided by Fuhrmann do not feature line numbers, though the document is also available in the Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri: psi.5.446.

⁶⁰ If the above anecdote in the *Historia Augusta* was true, then the governor of Syria in the late second century was not shy about enforcing the *vehiculatio* policy on ranking military officials (see above).

Under Commodus, an inscription from Syria recorded a partially successful appeal to the provincial governor for protection from abuses related to billeting and the *vehiculatio*.⁶¹ The document, addressed from the governor Julius Saturninus to the civic leader of Phaenae, instructed the village to establish the inscription so that those utilizing the *vehiculatio* would know that they were to stay at a designated way-station rather than demand accommodations from villagers. The use of state-sponsored rest houses likely began under Hadrian, attested both vaguely by the *Historia Augusta*, and more securely by the rise of purpose-built way-stations throughout the provinces during his reign.⁶² The creation of these rest stops took some pressure off provincials, but the expectation that troops and other officials utilizing the system would automatically stick to these stations proved unfounded. The edict of the governor reinforced proper behavior but provided no immediate, concrete means of insuring that military officials kept to the rules outlined in the inscription.

A similar late second century inscription, this time from Lydia, featured imperial and gubernatorial letters aimed at the reduction of *vehiculatio* abuses through the enforcement of proper routes.⁶³ In the inscription, an extract of an imperial letter from Pertinax provided a short statement defining the correct use of the system and affirming the authority of the governor to punish unlawful use of the *vehiculatio* in order to ward off abuses by soldiers wandering from prescribed routes for requisitioned transport. If his biography in the *Historia Augusta* was truthful, then Pertinax surely remembered the governor's right to prosecute *vehiculatio* offenses from his long walk to Syria.⁶⁴ In this inscription, Pertinax's letter ended by stating that the provincial governor, "will rectify [*vehiculatio* offenses] by the soldiers." A letter from the proconsul Aemilius Iuncus followed, confirming his intention to curb abuses by enforcing the policy that officials could only utilize approved requisition routes. The provincials had to prove before the governor that a soldier had deviated from the prescribed path, though the document contained no other information about this process. Once again, the Roman authorities assumed the threat of prosecution of violators would prevent further abuses, and in this case the provincials themselves held responsibility for the identification and prosecution of offenses in governor's court. Provincial villagers, however, surely wielded little power of coercion over traveling soldiers that would have allowed them to bring these individuals to trial. Furthermore, the economic investment involved in traveling to prosecute an individual offense may have outweighed the cost of the original burden imposed by the *vehiculatio* abuser, even with the stipulation about restitutions.

A series of documents preserved on an inscription from Phrygia in the Province Asia recorded regulatory actions of the *vehiculatio* at three levels of government: from the Emperor Caracalla, the proconsul, and the procurator.⁶⁵ While the monument originally contained six documents, only the first three remained legible. In the first document, Caracalla instructed his procurator and freedmen to ensure that villages received their established payments for providing requisitioned carts and animals. The second document came from the procurator and seemed to reveal the set prices fixed in response to the emperor's order, though its poor state of preservation precludes further analysis. The third and final preserved document of the inscription

⁶¹ E.W. Black, *Cursus Publicus: the Infrastructure of Government in Roman Britain* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1995), 9.

⁶² Black, *Cursus Publicus*, 9.

⁶³ Hauken, *Petition and Response*, 204-206.

⁶⁴ See above for a discussion of this dubious anecdote.

⁶⁵ Hauken, *Petition and Response*, 220-224.

constituted a copy of a letter by the proconsul. He acknowledged the problem of unauthorized exactions as well as the verdicts of the emperor and procurator, and unhappy to find out about the exactions described, he urged the construction of this public monument to remind everyone, including the villainously characterized violators, of the proper use of the *vehiculatio*. The loss of the final three documents in this collection limited the extent to which one may point out conspicuously missing content. Nevertheless, an omission of specific, effective procedures to correct systematic issues with requisitioned transport fits with the other regulatory documents, and the propensity to view this as a problem of individuals appeared prominent in the text, particularly in the governor's extensive characterization of violators and reinforcement of the emperor and procurator's actions.

Procurators of Asia also presided over a *vehiculatio*-related dispute between two Phrygian villages, and the process that spanned from 213 to 237 appeared in an inscription which preserved the results of three separate rulings.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, the inscription only survived in a very poor state of preservation. A large portion of its left side is missing, and some of its language, especially in the first ruling, remains difficult to interpret.⁶⁷ Despite this considerable lacuna, the document provides some important information about the administration of the requisitioned transport system, as two towns vied to saddle each other with larger requisitioning obligations to free themselves from burdens.⁶⁸ The first procurator's ruling is the most problematic, but the provision of the second case suggested that, in this instance, one town was victorious over the other in the appeal. The second verdict consisted of an order to one of the towns to comply with the earlier ruling. In this case, the procurator (at the request of the winning city) apparently dispatched a guard to ensure the system's proper regulation. In the inscription's third and final case, almost twenty-five years later, the final procurator reinforced the original decision and once again dispatched a subordinate to ensure compliance. These cases bore a resemblance to the Thasos inscription, in which a Thracian procurator decided a case between two provincial villages relating to the *vehiculatio*. In the instances of transport-related feuds between provincials, the procurators and their attendant staff sufficed to hear and regulate the disputes, though the need for recurring reinforcement of the original verdict in this inscription belied a failure to successfully regulate this specific dispute, at least from around the turn of the third century to 237.

The final inscription of the corpus came in 238. In this document, the village of Skaptopara in Thrace recorded a petition to Emperor Gordian III and a brief imperial response.⁶⁹ The beginning of the inscription noted that a praetorian soldier and fellow-villager brought the petition before the emperor. The village petitioners explained the abuses which involved soldiers having business elsewhere leaving their prescribed routes. The document also noted that they had already appealed many times to the provincial governors of Thrace whose prohibitions against the extortions eventually lost their effectiveness. The villagers therefore sought imperial reinforcement of the relevant policies, noting that they merely wanted enforced regulation of the required accommodations rather than complete liberation from obligations. The fourteen lines that followed recorded a brief speech from Skaptopara's praetorian patron to the provincial

⁶⁶ W.H.C. Frend, "A Third-Century Inscription Relating to *Angareia* in Phrygia," *Journal of Roman Studies* 46 (1956): 46-47.

⁶⁷ Frend, "A Third-Century Inscription," 52.

⁶⁸ Cf. the inscription from Thasos during the reign of Vespasian, above.

⁶⁹ Hauken, *Petition and Response*, 85-97.

governor reminding him of the emperor's response (given in Latin at the bottom of the inscription), which exhorted the governor to solve the issue himself.

Despite receiving imperial attention, the particular response of Gordianus III appeared to be a somewhat anticlimactic redirection of Skaptopara's petition. Nevertheless, the villagers monumentalized the petition and response, which as they noted quite conspicuously came to fruition through their praetorian advocate. This figure's praetorian prominence probably secured the attention of the emperor, but more importantly, it illustrated to potential abusers of the *vehiculatio* that Skaptopara possessed a powerful ally: a ranking military official who would have been in a unique position to police potential extortions at that particular village. The dearth of follow-up evidence may suggest that this was effective, though once again arguments from silence remain tenuous with a selection at the mercy of the whims of preservation, discovery, and publication. Regardless, this inscription provided evidence of a rare example of potential self-policing on the part of the Roman military officials, who were the chief users and abusers of the transport system.

Abuses of the *vehiculatio* during the Principate generally manifested as either requisitions of unauthorized transportation vehicles or forced billeting. These burdens exerted pressure on provincials who, in turn, appealed to the authorities, from procurators to governors and even emperors. Although the Roman administrators issued various edicts and made a few modifications to the system, the fifteen documents which dealt specifically with the *vehiculatio* attested that Roman emperors and administrators generally addressed this issue on a case-by-case basis. Each approach was continually ineffective at preventing wide-spread abuse of the system, from Augustus to the third century. The Principate's literary references to the *vehiculatio* showed that the emperor's primary concern in dealing with requisitioned transport was to utilize the system as a tool of imperial administration and intelligence-gathering, though the documentary and literary evidence belied some attempts to mitigate provincial burdens and enforce correct use. These attempts at consistent regulation failed to achieve significant relief for provincials experiencing over-exactions because the edicts reinforced the system and criticized specific users, when the authorities should have searched for flaws in the *vehiculatio* itself. The imperial transport system could not avoid the recurring corrupt exhortations that it imposed on provincials, for the only assets generally available for the regulation of the system were the very military forces who abused the *vehiculatio*. Furthermore, transportation officials remained an untapped source of micro-level monitoring of systematic corruptions, yet the emperors never sought to use these officials for aid in *vehiculatio* regulation. The excessive exactions, like the systematic abuses of corrupt provincial governors, appeared before Roman administrators as isolated incidents of improper behavior, rather than as indications of a flaw in the system requiring the modification of traditional practices.