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aus / from

Chiron

Ausgabe / Issue **23 • 1993**

Seite / Page **101–120**

<https://publications.dainst.org/journals/chiron/1082/5449> • urn:nbn:de:0048-chiron-1993-23-p101-120-v5449.7

Verantwortliche Redaktion / Publishing editor

Redaktion Chiron | Kommission für Alte Geschichte und Epigraphik des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Amalienstr. 73 b, 80799 München

Weitere Informationen unter / For further information see <https://publications.dainst.org/journals/chiron>

ISSN der Online-Ausgabe / ISSN of the online edition **2510-5396**

Verlag / Publisher **Verlag C. H. Beck, München**

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PAUL M. M. LEUNISSEN

Conventions of Patronage in Senatorial Careers under the Principate

1. Introduction

In an almost endless series of studies, prosopographers have not only explored the technicalities of senatorial careers under the Roman Empire, but they have also tried to trace the criteria which underlay the selection and promotion of senators. In recent years a lively international debate has been provoked by publications in which patronage was stressed as a key element. The impetus was given by F. G. B. MILLAR, as part of his impressive analysis of the role of the Roman emperor (1977).¹ Taking up and elaborating on MILLAR's views, R. P. SALLER examined the role of patronage in the careers of the Roman elite (1982).² One of the main assets of his work is that he laid bare the system of patronage-brokers, i. e. 'third parties' securing *beneficia* from the emperor.³ In SALLER's view, patronage is the essential factor in imperial appointments, which are thus considered to have been determined by subjective or even arbitrary criteria. Hence the principate was seen as primarily a patrimonial government. The importance of comparatively universalistic and objective criteria, characteristic of rational-legal bureaucracies, was correspondingly minimized.⁴

Patronage had indeed already been recognised as an important factor in imperial appointments, as SALLER acknowledges.⁵ Subsequently, he has been criticized for at-

¹ The Emperor in the Roman World (31 BC – AD 337), 1977, 275 ff.

² Personal Patronage under the Early Empire, 1982.

³ See esp. *ibid.* 75 ff.

⁴ *Ibid.* 79 ff., for the description of these two ideal types referring (79 n.2) to M. WEBER, Theory of Social and Economic Organization, 1947, 334. See also his concluding remark on p. 110: 'There is no strong evidence that any attempt was made in the Principate to transcend the particularistic criterion of patronage by the introduction of universalistic and rational criteria of seniority and merit (in the modern sense).' See also *ibid.* 33 and esp. 34. For similar views see K. HOPKINS, Death and Renewal. Sociological Studies in Roman History Vol. 2, 1983, 153 f., and, further, B. CAMPBELL, The Emperor and the Roman Army 31 BC – AD 235, 1984, 325 ff. (see also *id.*, JRS 65, 1975, 23).

⁵ Personal Patronage 32 ff., referring to works by R. SYME and A. VON PREMERSTEIN. For a more recent standpoint he could have pointed to the general statement by W. ECK, Beförderungskriterien innerhalb der senatorischen Laufbahn, dargestellt an der Zeit von 69 bis 138 n. Chr., ANRW II 1, 1974, 227.

taching too much weight to coincidence and arbitrariness.⁶ Although SALLER is aware that he runs the risk of overemphasizing the role of patronage,⁷ he seems to realize too little that patronage need not in itself be incompatible with the working of relatively bureaucratic criteria. Examples of completely personal, arbitrary and corrupt appointments can easily be adduced; but they surely do not represent the normal practice.⁸ The indications rather point to patronage taking place within the boundaries of the system of promotions which had gradually taken a more definite shape during the first century of the Empire. SALLER is left with a problem on which he touches just in passing, but which is crucial to our understanding of the practice of patronage. At the end of his discussion on petitioning for senatorial magistracies and offices he observes: 'It was in the emperor's interest not to be forced to create ill will by refusals, but how the number of requests was restricted in practice is a question which cannot be answered with confidence.'⁹ It is the aim of this article to contribute to answering this question. To this end, strong emphasis will be laid on patronage by senators themselves, as we may assume that it was by them that a large (if not the largest) amount of requests was made.¹⁰ I shall also suggest some general principles which guided the whole practice of petitioning for public functions. All in all, the views expressed here are meant to bring about a better understanding, not only of the working of patronage in senatorial careers, but also of the nature of the imperial system of promotion at its highest level.

2. Patronage and the importance of success

A major check was put on the number of requests by a principle which was as effective as it was simple: one's own prestige, reputation, and even position were at stake. Considerations of *dignitas* and status in connection with patronage for offices

⁶ G. ALFÖLDY, Review Saller, HZ 238, 1984, 674 ff.; id., Review Campbell, Gnomon 57, 1985, 442 f. esp. 444 = Römische Heeresgeschichte. Beiträge 1962–1985, 1987, 19 ff. esp. 23; id., Die Laufbahn der Konsuln und die Erbllichkeit des Konsulates unter den Antoninen: Ein Diskussionsbeitrag, in: Die römische Gesellschaft. Ausgewählte Beiträge, 1986, 139 ff. esp. 149 ff.; W. ECK, Einfluß korrupter Praktiken auf das senatorisch-ritterliche Beförderungswesen in der Hohen Kaiserzeit?, in: W. SCHULLER (ed.), Korruption im Altertum, 1982, 149; id., Roms Statthalter am Rhein – Repräsentanten römischer Macht, 1984, 25 f.; id., Die staatliche Administration des Römischen Reiches in der Hohen Kaiserzeit – ihre strukturellen Komponenten, in: 100 Jahre Neues Gymnasium Nürnberg 1889–1989 – Festschrift, 1989, 221 f. (cf. *ibid.* n. 45); P. M. M. LEUNISSEN, Konsuln und Konsulare in der Zeit von Commodus bis Severus Alexander (180–235 n. Chr.). Prosopographische Untersuchungen zur senatorischen Elite im römischen Kaiserreich, 1989, 102 n. 2; id., Herrscher und senatorische Elite. Regierungsstil und Beförderungspraxis im Zeitraum von 180–235 n. Chr., in: Acti of the IXth FIAEC-Congress, Pisa 1989 (forthcoming).

⁷ Personal Patronage 6 and 206 f.

⁸ See ECK, Korrupte Praktiken, 135 ff. esp. 151, and id., Roms Statthalter am Rhein, l. c.; see also LEUNISSEN, Herrscher und senatorische Elite (forthcoming, see n. 6 above).

⁹ Personal Patronage 46.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 75.

have not been transmitted abundantly. Indeed, the deliberations underlying appointments and promotions as a whole were regarded as trivial, hardly worth recording.¹¹ Even for the most terse indications we are confined almost exclusively to a few letters by one author, Pliny the Younger. But these letters, which he himself published, entered the public domain; they could be checked, for they were directed to equestrians, to senatorial colleagues or to the emperor himself. Hence they possess a very high degree of reliability, even, at least within the limits of the principate, evidential value transcending the period of Pliny's own career. Here it should be remarked that, while SALLER recognizes *dignitas* and reputation-building as factors operative within patronage,¹² he does not fully exploit their functional implications. Two relevant instances are simply arranged under 'tokens of esteem', 'as contributions to his own public prestige' or 'as public proof that Pliny, being in the emperor's favor, was a man of some importance.' These are the cases considered: 1) a petition for senatorial rank for Voconius Romanus, which Pliny concluded thus: 'therefore, I ask, Sir, that you make me a participant in my most hoped-for joy and fulfil my worthy desires, so that I am able to be proud of your recognition not only of me, but of my friend';¹³ 2) and, indeed 'more to the point', the end of a request on behalf of Rosianus Geminus: 'I ask, Sir, that you delight me by increasing the *dignitas* of my former quaestor – that is to say my *dignitas* through him – as soon as is convenient.'¹⁴ Here we see the effect of successful patronage on the petitioner.¹⁵

¹¹ Cf. *ibid.* 69.

¹² *Ibid.* 76 and 127.

¹³ Ep. 10,4,6. SALLER's rendering of this passage does not seem quite right. I prefer B. RADICE's translation (Loeb II p. 173): 'I pray you then, Sir, to enable me to congratulate Romanus as I so much wish to do, and to gratify what I hope is a worthy affection. I can then be proud to think that your recognition of myself extends to my friend.'

¹⁴ Ep. 10,26,3. Cf. in an equestrian context Plinius, ep. 10,87,3: 'For these reasons I count his connections as my own, and above all his son, Nymphidius Lupus, a young man of integrity and energy, most worthy of his excellent father, who will show himself deserving of your *indulgentia*, as you can discern from the earliest trials of him, when as prefect of a cohort he earned the strongest testimonials from Julius Ferox and Fuscus Salinator [both evidently former consular legates], *clarissimi viri*. You will complete my pleasure and satisfaction, Lord, by honouring him.' See E. BIRLEY, *Durham University Journal* 1949 = *Roman Britain and the Roman Army*, 1953, 141 f. = *The Roman Army. Papers 1929–1986*, 1988, 153 and MILLAR, *Emperor 285 f.*, who plausibly assume that the request was aiming at the next stage of Nymphidius' career, presumably a military tribunate; the Loeb-translation of *honore filii* by 'any promotion which you confer on my friend's son' is far too loose in my opinion; cf. SALLER, *Personal Patronage* 47.

¹⁵ A remark of a more general nature can be found in a *commendatio* of Fronto to Avidius Cassius (SALLER, *Personal Patronage* 127). The letter was written after the news of Avidius' victory in the East (ca. 165) had been proudly reported in Rome by his tribune, Iunius Maximus. Fronto's concluding advice to Cassius was: 'he is worthy to enjoy your esteem and to be enhanced by your patronage. You will add to your own glory in the measure that you build up the *dignitas* of your eulogist.' (ad amic. 1,6).

One might even state that a heightening of *dignitas* through successful patronage could extend to the emperor himself, or so it seemed to Pliny in the Panegyricus: ‘Anyone who looks up to the men the Senate admires can be sure of finding favour with a prince who believes that his own status is increased as others advance, and who feels no distinction in standing supreme, unless those beneath him stand as high as possible.’¹⁶

To complete the picture for the more mundane petitioner, however, it is of importance to look at the consequences of an opposite result. MILLAR comments in passing that ‘Pliny’s letters illustrate very clearly (. . .) the real anxiety which he felt about the electoral prospects of his own protégés, both for their sake and because of the consequences for his own *dignitas* if they were unsuccessful.’¹⁷ Two eloquent passages need to be examined in detail. In one letter Pliny calls on a friend for help in canvassing for the election of his protégé, Iulius Naso: ‘If ever I wished you were in Rome, it is now. Please come, for I need someone to share my prayers, efforts and anxiety. Julius Naso is a candidate for office, along with several other likely young men, so victory over his rivals will be difficult though it will be a real triumph if he succeeds. I am on tenterhooks, torn between hope and fear, and I don’t feel as if I’ve already passed beyond the consulate – it is as if I were once again standing for all the offices I have ever held. . . . Break off whatever is keeping you – my situation, honour, and official position all demand this. Everyone knows I have backed a candidate, and it is I who am canvassing and running the risks; in fact, if Naso wins his election the credit is his, but if he fails the defeat is mine.’¹⁸ In another letter, Pliny tries to win support for the election of Sex. Erucius Clarus to a tribunate. He opens with: ‘My friend Sextus Erucius is standing for office, and this is worrying me very much; in fact I feel far more anxious and apprehensive for my ‘second self’ than I ever did on my own account. Besides, my own honour, my reputation and my position are all at stake, for it was I who persuaded the Emperor to raise Sextus to senatorial rank and grant him a quaestorship, and it is on my nomination that he is now standing for the office of tribune. If he is not elected by the Senate, I am afraid it will look as though I have deceived the Emperor; and so it is essential for me to see that everyone shares the high opinion which I led the Emperor to form.’¹⁹

The conclusion is obvious: a petitioner, who was acting as a broker of patronage, saw his own prestige increased through success, whereas he risked a painful setback in the case of failure. It can be objected that two different types of patronage are involved: in the first pair we have requests made directly to the emperor; the second pair deals with support given at elections in the senate. The case of Sextus Erucius

¹⁶ Pan. 62,7–8.

¹⁷ Emperor 303 and n. 18, for this part of his remark referring to a few examples of ‘Pliny supporting candidatures: e. g. IV,15; VI,6; VIII,23.’

¹⁸ Ep. 6,6.

¹⁹ Ep. 2,9,1–3.

Clarus, however, illustrates clearly how closely related these – at first glance distinct – instances of personal patronage could be in practice.²⁰ It is only natural that in the address to the emperor the negative effects of refusal on the person in question were not even touched upon, whereas in letters to fellow-senators they were discussed at length and with frankness. When one turned to the emperor, one only stressed how positive a reflection successful patronage would have. That does not alter the fact that precisely in the event of a negative result from a direct approach of the emperor, the petitioner himself would incur damage.

3. The importance of success and targeted patronage

Thus, patronage for posts and magistracies was not just a question of the gratification of scoring a success or of the reciprocal exchange of *beneficia*, or of the *auctoritas* which depended upon the petitioner's ability to secure *beneficia* for himself and for his protégés:²¹ its results had immediate repercussions on the petitioner himself. For that reason it was of the greatest importance to lend support only to a candidature that stood a very good chance. This basic attitude will only have been reinforced by the somewhat insecure position of senators under the principate.²² In general, therefore, one of the most important principles must have been: not to ask for too much. First of all, petitions normally had to conform with the actual ranking (i. e. according to the magisterial ‹Rangstufen›) of the candidate in question.

As far as magistracies are concerned, there is surely no doubt that the fixed hierarchy of the Republican *cursus honorum* had to be observed; that is why, when occasion arises, specific magistracies are applied for. Once again, the case of Erucius Clarus may serve as an illustration.²³ Further inferences of direct relevance to the subject of this paper can be drawn from Pliny's letter to Trajan, in which he is insisting on, rather

²⁰ On the emperor's exercise of binding *suffragatio* or *commendatio* to candidates for magistracies, and of some form of pre-selection of candidates (*nominatio*, after a non-ancient, technical term) see MILLAR, Emperor 300 ff. with references to earlier literature and to relevant cases; *ibid.* 303 f.: ‹What Pliny says about the career of Sextus Erucius also illustrates how the exercise of influence and the *suffragia* of leading senators had their place not merely in the senate-house, but in relation to the decisions and favours of the emperor himself.› See also SALLER, Personal patronage 44 and n.22 below.

²¹ Most fully illustrated by Pliny, ep. 3,8; See SALLER, Personal Patronage 75; MILLAR, Emperor 286.

²² On this see MILLAR, Emperor 110 ff.; HOPKINS, *op. cit.* (n. 4) 121 ff. A most illuminating picture of the pressures of ‹a friend of Caesar› is given by Epictetus, *diss.* 4,1,46–50; see also *diss.* 4,1,60: ‹No one fears Caesar himself, but death, exile, confiscation of property, imprisonment or loss of rights. Nor does anyone love Caesar, unless he is of especial merit, but we love wealth, a tribunate, a praetorship or a consulate.› and MILLAR's striking comment (l. c. 300): ‹No one portrayed more vividly than he the fear and servility engendered by the role of the emperor as judge and benefactor.›

²³ In the case of Iulius Naso, clearly, a specific, although not an expressly named magistracy is also concerned, possibly the quaestorship. See PIR² IV 437.

than petitioning for, a praetorship on behalf of Accius Sura. This senator's career is otherwise unknown, but apparently he had been passed over as a candidate for this magistracy. Pliny's opening words are: 'I know, Lord, that our requests lodge in your *memoria*, which is most tenacious in giving benefits. Because moreover you have indulged me in this area before, I remind you and urgently ask you to honour Accius Sura with a praetorship.'²⁴ From the tone of the letter it may be inferred that Pliny almost counted on a positive reaction of the emperor to his petition, which can be seen as being in line with the idea that only those requests were launched which had very good prospects of success.²⁵ But, apart from this, a passing reference – *quia tamen in hoc quoque indulxisti* – must be given its proper weight. By touching upon previous *beneficia* by the emperor in this regard, Pliny aims at paving the way for further grants, starting with the present one. In his own subtle way he is hinting at the idea that precedents of successful patronage may increase the chances of positive results in cases to come. There are more instances where Pliny is referring to the emperor's *indulgentia* with quite a similar purport.²⁶ A comparable case, concerning patronage for equestrian posts, is transmitted by a letter of Fronto to Antoninus Pius. The first part is lost, but from what remains it becomes clear that preceding *beneficia* from the emperor obtained for Fronto's protégés were being recapitulated, forming preliminaries to the actual request.²⁷ Thus, positive results were thought to contribute to the reputation, or rather to the effectiveness, of the petitioner as a petitioner: a principle for all times and of universal application.

That patronage for magistracies was undertaken according to their hierarchy within the senatorial *cursus honorum* must be seen as only logical. As far as the in-

²⁴ Ep. 10,12.

²⁵ SALLER's interpretation (Personal Patronage 46) looks most suggestive but is next to meaningless: 'The tone of the letter suggests that such requests for imperial *indulgentia* were sufficiently commonplace to arouse Pliny's expectation that they would be acted upon.' It is after this observation that SALLER asks the question how the number of requests was restricted (see above p. 101).

²⁶ Ep. 10,4,1 – the opening words of a request for the *latus clavus* on behalf of Voconius Romanus: *Indulgentia tua . . . quam plenissimam experior . . . hortatur me ut audeam tibi etiam pro amicis obligari*; 10,13: – request for a priesthood on his own behalf: *rogo dignitati, ad quam me provexit indulgentia tua, vel auguratum vel septenviratum . . . adicere digneris*; 10,94 – request for the *ius trium liberorum* for Suetonius: *Scio, domine, quantum beneficium petam, sed peto a te cuius in omnibus desideris meis indulgentiam experior* (see also below); cf. also two requests for citizenship: 10,11 – *si precibus meis ex consuetudine bonitatis tuae induleris*; and 10,104: *indulgentiam tuam, qua debeo tanto modestius uti, quanto plenior experior*. For a concise study on imperial *indulgentia* see HANNAH COTTON, Chiron 14, 1984, 245 ff.; for an exhaustive enumeration of *indulgentia* in connection with senatorial offices: *ibid.* 248 and 252f. Cf. her comment on ep. 10,94: 'The most a man could do was to rely on the emperor's former favours as precedents for subsequent requests' (*ibid.* 265 f.).

²⁷ Ad Pium 9. For earlier examples of formulations of a precedent-principle see HANNAH COTTON, Documentary Letters of Recommendation in Latin from the Roman Empire, 1981, 19.

dividual civil and military posts are concerned, we may of course suppose at least a general respect toward the rank of the office asked for – to give an example: exercising patronage in order to have an ex-quaestor or an ex-praetor made governor of the consular province of Britain, would, naturally, have been doomed to failure in advance.²⁸ As has been indicated above, the importance of successful patronage for one's own position can be seen as forming a regulating principle toward petitions to the emperor. Against this background it can be considered significant that our evidence indicates that requests were not made for unspecified posts, leaving the decision on the actual function completely to the emperor. Rather – as with the magistracies – a specific task in the administration of the Empire was petitioned for. Admittedly, we have only very few explicit examples of this in a senatorial context, and these are direct requests on behalf of the petitioner himself: of Didius Gallus, for instance, it has been remarked that he had petitioned most urgently for a province.²⁹ The most explicit example of a request for a public function, though not connected with a task in the administration, is Pliny's petition for a priesthood among the *quattuor amplissima collegia*.³⁰ Otherwise, we have only relatively indirect statements about senators, obtaining particular posts through petitioners; it will not go too far to infer that, at least in some of these instances, the office mentioned was indeed specifically asked for (although, of course, this cannot be postulated for each individual case). Examples for offices at various stages of a career can be adduced. In the relatively reliable vita of Didius Iulianus, Marcus' mother, Domitia Lucilla, is said to have secured a post in the vigintivirate for Iulianus, whom she raised in her house.³¹ Narcissus, the freedman *ab epistulis* of Claudius, gained an appointment for Vespasian (praetor in 39) as *legatus legionis II Augustae* in Germany,

²⁸ At least from the time of the Flavians onwards, the structure of a senatorial career had become highly fixed. See the fundamental study by Eck, ANRW II 1, 1974, 158ff., mainly based on the results of prosopographical investigations. Of course, literary evidence also testifies to the fact that functions were performed at a certain rank: cf. e.g. Dio 52,21,8 differentiating praetorian from consular governorships; 54,8,4 with regard to the praetorian rank of *curatores viarum*; Suet. Claud. 24,2; Tac. ann. 13,28–29; Dio. 60,24,1–3; cf. Pliny, pan. 91–92 as to the praetorian rank of *praefecti aerarii Saturni* (from A. D. 56 onward).

²⁹ Quint. Inst. 6,3,68; the rest of this passage – <and then, when he gained one, complained as if he had been compelled> (*qui provinciam ambitiosissime petierat, deinde impetrata ea, tamquam coactus querebatur*) is irrelevant in this context. See A. R. BIRLEY, *The Fasti of Roman Britain*, 1981, 44. Cf. Philostr., VA 7,31, where Apollonius of Tyana is said to have witnessed on old man cringing before Domitian in order to obtain an appointment (a governorship according to MILLAR, *Emperor 311*); the remark is too obscure to support the view expressed here. Cf. also Plut. mor. 814D.

³⁰ Ep. 10,13: <Since I know, Lord, that it stands as a witness and credit of my character to be adorned by the judgement of so good a Princeps, I beseech you to add to the *dignitas* to which your *indulgentia* has elevated me an augurate or septemvirate, since there are vacancies in both, so that I may pray to the gods for your safety in my public capacity as priest, as I do now with private piety.> He was to become an augur: ep. 4,8.

³¹ HA, v. DI 1,3–4; for reliability, see R. SYME, *Emperors and Biography*, 1971, 42.

which was about to take part in the invasion of Britain in 43.³² Suetonius reports that Vitellius (consul in 48) was appointed legate of Lower Germany by Galba through the patronage of T. Vinus, a senator and friend of the emperor.³³ And according to the *vita* of Septimius Severus (consul in ?190), which in this respect is generally considered to be trustworthy,³⁴ the future emperor in 191 received his consular legateship (of Pannonia superior) by *suffragium* of Laetus, praetorian prefect under Commodus.³⁵ In my opinion – to resume the argument – such instances *may* be seen as reflections of the practice of patronage for specific functions (which were appropriate to the rank of the protégé in question). Apart from the expressly formulated requests for senatorial membership,³⁶ for senatorial magistracies³⁷ and for senatorial

³² Suet. Vesp. 4,1; Jos. bell. 3,4; and Suet. Vesp. 2,3.

³³ Suet. Vit. 7,1; as to T. Vinus: see PIR III 450.

³⁴ See T. D. BARNES, *Historia* 16, 1967, 87 ff.; id., *The Sources of the Historia Augusta*, 1978, 39 and 42; A. R. BIRLEY, *BHAC* 1968/69, 1970, 59 ff.; id., *The African Emperor: Septimius Severus*, 1988, 38 ff. (with further references).

³⁵ HA v. S 4,4; cf. HA v. PN 1,5, Pescennius Niger (*consul suffectus* ?180/183) who in ?191 was appointed to the governorship of Syria, <chiefly on the recommendation of the athlete [Narcissus, cf. HA v. Comm. 17,2; v. S 14,1], who afterward strangled Commodus; for so, at that time, were all appointments made.> See BARNES, *The Sources of the Historia Augusta* 51, who classes this passage among those <which may also retail valid information. (. . .) Nothing surprising or untoward in that (cf. Suetonius, Vesp. 2,3).> Cf. MAGIE ad HA v. PN 1,5 (n.3) and WHITTAKER ad Herod. 1,17,11.

³⁶ Apart from Pliny's request on behalf of Voconius Romanus (ep. 10,4), see also HA v. S 1,5: a consular relative helping Septimius Severus, aged seventeen, in petitioning for the *latus clavus* from Marcus Aurelius.

³⁷ Here, it should be remarked that from Pliny, ep. 1,14,7 and Apuleius, Flor. 9,40 it has been rightly inferred that at some point before the end of the first century the consulship came to be completely in the gift of the emperor: see MILLAR, *Emperor* 301 (with further references to the emperor's granting of consulships, *ibid.* 307 ff. esp. n. 46); see also R. SYME, *JRS* 48, 1958, 1; SALLER, *Personal Patronage* 43; R. J. A. TALBERT, *The Senate of Imperial Rome*, 1984, 54 f. To the passages mentioned with regard to the exercise of patronage for magistracies before the emperor, there can be added some indirect statements (comparable to those concerned with senatorial functions, above) in connection with the consulship: Tac. ann. 4,68; cf. Iuvenal. sat. 10,90–2: Sejanus under Tiberius, on behalf of three senators, *praetura functi . . . cupidine consulatus*; Dio 67,4,2: Iulia, Domitian's niece, on behalf of Iulius Ursus; HA v. Hadr. 4: Plotina, Trajan's wife, on behalf of Hadrian (a second consulship). Further, Fronto's helping hand is presumed in securing consulates for several Cirtan fellow-townsmen, cf., for instance, *Marcianus noster* in ad M. Caes. 3,4, who most probably is identical with P. Iulius Geminus Marcianus, *consul suffectus* in 167; see E. CHAMPLIN, *Fronto and Antonine Rome*, 1980, 13 ff.; SALLER, *Personal Patronage* 181; see also G. ALFÖLDY, *Konsulat und Senatorenstand unter den Antoninen. Prosopographische Untersuchungen zur senatorischen Führungsschicht*, 1977, 82 f. (who also points to the fact that it was due to the immense influence of Marcus' educator that so many men from Cirta were recruited into the senate; cf. ad amic. 2,11,2: *Plurimi sunt in senatu Cirtenses clarissimi viri*). Suet. Claud. 5 is the only evidence of a direct request for a consulship.

posts (albeit only a few), one can refer to the fact that patronage for specifically named functions was also undertaken with regard to equestrian careers. Moreover, we have evidence that subordinate posts in the military and civilian staff, some of which obviously could be bestowed by senatorial officials themselves, were also mentioned by name in petitions among senators.³⁸ It is hard to see why a completely analogous procedure of petitioning for specific functions should not have been followed in all these contexts and at all levels, including that of requests for senatorial functions to the emperor.

It can be mentioned in passing that in the cited cases of patronage for senatorial posts a remarkably large number of petitioners of non-senatorial status appear. This, of course, is a good reminder of the fact that proximity to the emperor was the

³⁸ Patronage for specific functions of the equestrian career (cf. already E. BIRLEY, *Durham University Journal* 1949, 8 ff. = *Roman Britain and the Roman Army*, 1953, 133 ff. esp. 141 f. = *The Roman Army. Papers 1929–1986*, 1988, 147 ff. esp. 153): e.g. Fronto, ad Pium 9: procuratorships for Sextus Calpurnius and Appian; Pliny, ep. 10,87: most probably, although not explicitly named, a second *militia* for Nymphidius Lupus (i.e. a military tribunate, see E. BIRLEY, ll. cc. and MILLAR, *Emperor 285 f.*); on epigraphic record: ILS 4929 (= CIL VI, 2131) – a second *militia*, and ILS 1191 (= CIL VI, 1532); ILS 2941 (= CIL VI, 1418); ILS 4928 (= CIL VI, 2132) – procuratorships through patrons. Petitions for specific subordinate functions among senatorial officials, e.g. Pliny, ep. 4,15: the position of consul's quaestor for Asinius Bassus, requested from Minicius Fundanus, who was expected (evidently mistakenly) to become consul shortly afterwards; Fronto, ad amic. 1,5: an equestrian *militia* for Faustianus from Claudius Iulianus; Pliny, ep. 3,8: a military tribunate for Suetonius, from Neratius Marcellus; Pliny, ep. 4,4: a six-months' tribunate for Varisidius Nepos, from the imperial legate Sosius Senecio; ep. 7,22: a tribunate for Cornelius Minicianus from Pompeius Falco; ep. 2,13,2 – a petition to (L. Iavolenus) Priscus on behalf of Voconius Romanus – has been taken as a request for an equestrian tribunate, but it may also have aimed at a position in the governor's *cohors*; see most recently HANNAH COTTON, *Chiron* 11, 1981, 229 n. 3 and esp. 237 ff., who gives a plausible explanation, «for the fact that contrary to his [i.e. Pliny's] practice in other requests he here deliberately refrains from spelling it out to the governor» (her article, *ibid.* 229 ff., is a thorough investigation of the right of imperial legates to grant military tribunates); Pliny, ep. 3,2 – a request to Vibius Maximus on behalf of Maturus Arrianus – «might also be a request for this post, but it is fraught with problems» (depending on the identification and position of the addressee): COTTON, l.c. 229 n. 3; to these subordinate functions clearly also belonged the assistantships to the proconsul (*legati proconsulis*); for a proconsul's capacity to choose his *cohors*, see Fronto, ad Pium 8. See MILLAR, *Emperor 284 ff.*; SALLER, *Personal Patronage* 46 ff., 64, 130 ff. I cannot see why H. COTTON, *op. cit.* (n. 27), esp. 5 f. postulates as belonging to the *decorum* of the genre that: «a letter of recommendation very rarely specifies the purpose for which it was written» (the same observation in JRS 69, 1979, 41), the more so since she had just pointed to Pliny's and Fronto's letters, «which show these persons . . . exercising their personal influence with the Emperor in order to secure favours, privileges, statuses, promotions and appointments for their friends and protégés» (p. 4, with an enumeration of particular requests in n. 19; cf. n. 22; cf. also her remark in *Chiron* 11, quoted above). COTTON's remark may be true of Cicero's letters of recommendation and of a few documentary examples, but it was definitely and demonstrably not a general characteristic of the genre.

key to imperial *beneficia*.³⁹ That, on the other hand, the activity of the elite in this respect was taken for granted, can be inferred from the well-known remark by Plutarch in his *praecepta gerendae reipublicae*, in which he implies that most provincials were expected to turn to the great houses of Rome to secure not only (equestrian) procuratorships but also (senatorial) governorships.⁴⁰ The same author tells us that Otho, having fallen out of favour with Nero, was saved by the intervention of Seneca, who managed to have him appointed as governor of Lusitania. Now Otho was merely an *ex-quaestor* at the time and the fact that he was entrusted with an imperial province in that rank of course had everything to do with his being promoted to get him out of the way, since Nero had fallen in love with Otho's wife Poppaea Sabina.⁴¹ From the specific statement by Suetonius that Otho governed his province *as quaestorius*, it can be inferred that to Suetonius the tenure of such a legateship at this stage of a career seemed unusual. The wording of Seneca's intervention could imply that it was already contrary to normal practice under Nero.

Perhaps the point can be carried a little further. By way of hypothesis it might be suggested that in order to be as successful as possible, patronage for posts was not only exercised according to the rank of the candidate, but also according to the hierarchy of posts.⁴² If prosopography and the detailed analysis of hundreds of careers have made one thing clear, it is that to a certain degree a hierarchy of posts did exist, even if this observation has to be followed up immediately by the remark that no fixed rules or permanent laws must be supposed.⁴³ If we concentrate on the praetorian part of a career, we can undeniably discern posts of relatively junior status, for instance legionary legateships and some of the *curae viarum*; on the other hand it can be seen that the curatorships of other *viae*, the prefectures of the treasuries, as well as the governorships in the so-called imperial provinces, were given to more senior praetorians. Further, relatively new offices, like the *iuridicates* in Italy instituted by Marcus Aurelius, received quite a stable position among the praetorian posts: it has been established not only that they belonged to the offices which were junior in status, but also that they normally were followed by a legionary command.⁴⁴ Obviously,

³⁹ See SALLER, *Personal Patronage* passim, esp. 58 ff.

⁴⁰ 814D. See also Martial, *epigr.* 12,24,1–6.

⁴¹ Plut. *Galba* 20,1; cf. *Suet. Otho* 3,2 and *Tac. ann.* 13,46,3.

⁴² SALLER, *Personal Patronage* 84, distinguishes between seniority of a post which *is defined by where it stands in a hierarchy of offices*, and seniority of officials which *depends on how long he has served in office*. From this it does not seem logical to conclude: *‘Promotion according to a principle of seniority means that the level of an administrator's next appointment is based on the number of years he has already served.’* This only affects the definition of seniority of officials. If one, indeed, is to speak of seniority of offices rather than of their place within a hierarchy, as I would prefer, promotion according to a principle of seniority would mean that the official's next appointment is simply in line with the hierarchy of posts.

⁴³ See, for instance, ECK, *ANRW* II 1, 1974, 161.

⁴⁴ For a balanced and concise survey of senatorial careers see A. R. BIRLEY, *op. cit.* (n.29) 4 ff. As to the sequence *‘iuridicate in Italy-legendary legate’*, see M. CHRISTOL, *Essai sur l'évo-*

observable hierarchies of offices and the undeniable exercise of personal influence in securing these posts went together. The additional factor of the importance of success in petitioning for posts would then lend further support as well as deeper meaning to what I would prefer to call a practice of targeted patronage.⁴⁵ Of course, this can only stand as a hypothesis, based on logical deduction; our evidence does not seem to be specific enough to corroborate this view explicitly.

It seems justifiable to sum up as follows: requests for advancement normally had to be in accordance with what the candidate could lay claim to – although we cannot fully grasp how far and to how specifically differentiated an extent this was actually pushed. That petitioners were aware that they should not ask for too much can be demonstrated by a letter of Fronto to Antoninus Pius. Fronto declares that he will make no unworthy requests for his friends, though attributing his reticence to their *modestia*.⁴⁶ Equally, as to his own honours, he firmly states that none of these were pursued *improbis rationibus*, for immoderate or inappropriate reasons (rather than ‘by unworthy means’, as the Loeb-translation has it).⁴⁷ In a different context, ‘recommending the Cirtan Licinius Montanus to the asylum, aid and advice of the proconsul of Africa, L. Hediud Rufus Lollianus Avitus’,⁴⁸ Fronto gives a scrupulous formulation of what may be considered a guiding principle of patronage: Montanus ‘in accordance with his modesty has asked nothing except what is right and honourable both for you to give and for him to ask’.⁴⁹ Would it be too far fetched to see

lution des carrières senatoriales dans la deuxième moitié du III^e s. ap. J.–C., 1986, 67ff. with lists (for the [so-called] consular judges for all Italy appointed by Hadrian [HA v. Hadr. 22,13; v. Pii 2,11; v. MA 11,6], see now ECK, HA Colloquium 1990, 1991, 183–195). Of course, a clear hierarchy of posts can also be established for the consular career, but this stage will be omitted here. Although some instances of patronage for posts in consular rank could be mentioned, the importance of personal influence at this stage is generally assumed to be relatively small. See, for instance, ECK, ANRW II 1, 1974, 227, who clearly makes room for the working of patronage, following up this remark with the restriction: ‘Aber auch solch persönliche Einflußnahmen wirkten sich in der Hauptsache auf den unteren Stufen der Laufbahn aus; des weiteren mußte der Kandidat dann selbst seine Befähigung unter Beweis stellen.’ For a similar view, ALFÖLDY, op. cit. 1986 (n. 6) 149f. At any rate, relatively few posts were concerned here, for which an ever decreasing number of men were taken into consideration; apart from the question, which candidates appeared to have answered certain – even if minimal – demands of ability, or which senators for some reason or another happened to be preferred by the emperor, one has to recall that loss of ambition, illness or death were certainly at this stage factors of importance. It must be noticed that such factors were completely neglected by SALLER, when he stated (Personal Patronage 83), ‘that even those in the select group of praetorian *legati pro praetore* could not be sure of promotion to consular governorships.’

⁴⁵ With regard to Pliny, ep. 10,26, see below.

⁴⁶ *Amicorum meorum fecit modestia ne quid improbe peterem*: Fronto, ad Pium 9, in the context of petitions for procuratorships.

⁴⁷ De nep. am. 2,9.

⁴⁸ CHAMPLIN, op. cit. (n. 37) 31.

⁴⁹ Ad amic. 1,3.

in this phrase the μηδὲν ἄγαν of patronage? At any rate, it seems to be obvious that by balancing a petition in this way, the expectation of a positive result could be justified.

4. *A few marginal notes*

Some other observations can be added. Especially with regard to brokers of patronage, it must be assumed that they will not have recommended those candidates who might well turn out to be complete failures. It is readily intelligible that we do not have elaborate confessions where such a mistake actually occurred. Some rudimentary tokens of a patron's awareness in this regard can be deduced from affirmations that the protégé would come up to expectations, which might be supported by a reference to his earlier accomplishments.⁵⁰ And we have Horace: <What sort of person you introduce, consider again and again, lest by and by the other's failings strike you with shame.>⁵¹ As far as this is concerned, one might also apply to the Roman context what has been stated for pre-industrial societies in general: that patronage under the circumstances was the most efficient mode of recruitment for administrative elites.⁵² This seems to me to be an illuminating observation.

It seems to be obvious to assume the working of another general principle, which would entail a further restriction of the number of requests to the emperor, viz. that, whenever senatorial advancement was sought through senatorial brokers of patronage, these petitioners came from the number of senior (in a broad sense) senators. This may be regarded as only natural: patrons had to be, above all, in a position to exercise their influence on imperial grants. However, we do not have explicit statements on the existence of such a principle, and Republican circumstances, when it had been inappropriate for a praetor to propose a candidate for praetorship or con-

⁵⁰ See e.g. Pliny, ep. 10,26 and 10,87, and, in another context of patronage, Pliny, ep. 6,23 (further below).

⁵¹ Ep. 1,18,76–78; the verses up to 85 are relevant in this context.

⁵² See, for instance, LINDA LEVY PECK, *Court Patronage and Government Policy: The Jacobean Dilemma*, in: G. FITCH LYTLE and ST. ORGEL (eds.), *Patronage in the Renaissance*, 1981, 27–46 (passim); R. HARDING, *Corruption and the Moral Boundaries of Patronage in the Renaissance*, *ibid.* 48: <Patronage was the best available system for assessing merit.>; SHARON KETTERING, *Patrons, Brokers and Clients in Seventeenth Century France*, 1986, 203. As to avoiding the recommendation of <utter fools>, nice parallels are given by PATRICIA CRONE, *Pre-Industrial Societies*, 1989, 32f.: <Patronage could not usually make up for utter ineptitude: in a tenth-century Muslim story a high-ranking bureaucrat regretfully finds the only son of a deceased friend to be so stupid that he cannot make him a judge (<the lad is such a fool that he would utterly disgrace my recommendation>, as Macaulay said of a cousin in 1833). But though a patron would disgrace himself by supporting a complete ignoramus for a skilled job, there was nothing shameful about patronage as such: it benefited employer and employee alike. Wherever trust mattered as much as or more than skills, nepotism was a virtue, not a sign of corruption.>

sulship, certainly lay far in the past.⁵³ Four our period there are some slight indications. A remark by Fronto to Lucius Verus with regard to a senatorial protégé is of an almost generalising tenor: 'From an early age Gavius Clarus has attended me in a friendly fashion, not only with those *officia* by which a senator lesser in age and station properly cultivates a senator *senior* in rank and years, earning his goodwill.'⁵⁴ From a different context of patronage, a petition for the *ius trium liberorum* on behalf of Pliny, we know of the remarkable fact that Pliny, although he had held the praetorship himself, did not feel himself to be in a position to ask Trajan for this privilege directly; instead, he turned to Iulius Servianus, a consular commander, to mediate the request.⁵⁵ Something of a general idea of an appropriate seniority of the petitioner in relation to the *beneficium* can be detected in one of Pliny's letters on behalf of Voconius Romanus, addressed to a fellow-senator: 'Ever since our youth together I have been anxious to do as much for him as my age permitted.'⁵⁶ It is with pride that Pliny, by then an advocate of several protégés, recalls the protection he once enjoyed through leading senators of the previous generation, Verginius Rufus and Corellius Rufus;⁵⁷ and in his support of Iulius Naso he indicates that he is of consular rank himself.⁵⁸ Seneca indicates a significant sequence: 'Have we ceased to labour as candidates? We begin to canvass for others.'⁵⁹ As far as we can see, there is no evidence of any 'junior' senator exercising patronage on behalf of a more 'senior' member of the *ordo* (for instance, an ex-quaestor of old patrician stock on behalf of a praetorian *homo novus*); but this is only an *argumentum e silentio*, and we have to take into account that our evidence is biased in some imperceptible way.⁶⁰ Still, the idea that the exercise of patronage on behalf of other senators was, at the very least, concentrated within the group of senior members of the *ordo*, can hardly be dismissed. One could imagine that senatorial patrons at the highest level, i. e. in direct contact with the emperor, were operating in line with the

⁵³ Cf. Gell., NA 13,15, citing M. Messala (consul 53 B. C., who besides admitted that in his own time praetors had nominated praetors). That patronage was undertaken by senior or leading senators is so commonly taken for granted in modern literature that I rather refrain from giving references.

⁵⁴ Ad Verum 2,7; see SALLER, Personal Patronage 9 (the first part of the Latin text is missing *ibid.* n. 8) and *id.*, Patronage and Friendship in Early Imperial Rome: Drawing the Distinction, in: A. WALLACE-HADRILL, Patronage in Ancient Society, 1989, 59.

⁵⁵ Ep. 10,2.

⁵⁶ Ep. 2,13,8.

⁵⁷ Ep. 2,1,8 and 4,17,6.

⁵⁸ Ep. 6,6.

⁵⁹ De brev. vitae 17,5.

⁶⁰ As far as I can see, there exists a certain tension between the idea that proximity to the emperor was the key to imperial *beneficia* and the presupposition that a patron-protégé-relationship, when both parties were senators, should exclusively have been of a 'senior-junior'-type. In SALLER's latest contribution on patronage (*op. cit.* [n. 54] 49 ff.), this tension remains unnoticed, and the presupposition mentioned is maintained (*esp.* 60f.).

pecking order. This would mean that petitioning was undertaken in full awareness of one's own position on the scale, and that one constantly had to be on the *qui vive* with regard to the positions and promotions of others. Then, through the concerted alertness of many individuals, a filter of selection of candidates and requests would be brought about.

The extremely limited nature of our evidence for patronage has been touched upon already; a fine explanation by SALLER deserves to be mentioned because of its implications for the present context. Again from one of Pliny's letters from Bithynia it may be inferred that more important petitions on behalf of others were made in person before the emperor rather than by a written *commendatio*: 'I know, Sir, what a great favour I am asking (viz. the grant of the *ius trium liberorum* to Suetonius), but remember from experience your kindness hitherto in granting my wishes (*sed peto a te cuius in omnibus desideriis meis indulgentiam experior*, cf. above and n. 26); and you may judge how much this means to me by the fact that I should not make such a request during my absence did I not have it much at heart.'⁶¹ If it is right to infer that direct petitioning before the emperor was normal for a privilege like this, it may safely be held applicable to most requests for senatorial functions, too. As SALLER further observes: 'We may suspect that a request made in person was less easy to refuse; it was certainly more difficult to defer.'⁶² In line with the thoughts expressed above, it might be added that the request had to be a very good one, and the chances of it being awarded had to be as high as possible. A rebuff in a direct confrontation with the emperor would be immediate and most painful to the petitioner himself.

5. Nuances and subtleties and the case of Rosianus Geminus

In the preceding section, stress has been laid on the importance of success in petitioning for public functions, and its interaction with a practice of targeted patronage. But we should not lose sight of the subtleties of historical reality. We can hardly overlook what the effects on the petitioner must have been if he were unsuccessful. Negative results were naturally not widely publicized – it is remarkable enough that we can get as close as Pliny's expressions of anxiety in case his protégé should fail. In not a few cases we do not hear anything regarding the outcome of his efforts; it may have been negative on several occasions.⁶³ Still, this did not keep Pliny from

⁶¹ Pliny, ep. 10,94. SALLER, *Personal Patronage* 60f. and 110. Cf. also, with regard to the time of Charles I, G. E. AYLMER, *The King's Servants. The Civil Service of Charles I 1625–1642*, 1961, 1974², 76: 'Since the connexions between applicant, patron, and Crown were quite informal, there is little written evidence concerning what we can infer to have been the commonest mode of entry.'

⁶² *Personal patronage* 60.

⁶³ For instance, this was maintained by R. SYME, *Historia* 9, 1960, 365 with regard to Pliny's request for the *latus clavus* on behalf of Voconius Romanus, on the assumption that ep. 2,13

publishing such documents in his selection; clearly the patron wanted to demonstrate his willingness to make the effort of asking the emperor on behalf of his protégé (or even merely that he was in a position to correspond with the emperor on such a matter).⁶⁴ It also has to be admitted that we are not adequately informed about the way in which petitions made directly to the emperor were dealt with: to what extent did the monarch make immediate decisions, or how far did he, at least, give expression to his approval or disapproval towards things asked; or did he only listen to petitions, to discuss them afterwards with his *consilium*?⁶⁵ (It should be remarked that here, as well as in many other contexts, we may be starting too easily from a fixed but historically untenable idea of *the* emperor.) Subtleties in practice, however, do not detract from the general idea expressed here, viz. that petitioning for advancement was normally not a matter of just having a shot at it, but a careful weighing of what would be appropriate to ask for under the – not inconsiderably regulated – circumstances. Hence, patronage and arbitrariness should not be treated as aspects of the same process: they were, if anything, at opposite poles.

There is one case which requires further attention here: it is, as far as I can see, the only request to the emperor in which no specific senatorial office is asked for – Pliny's letter on behalf of Rosianus Geminus.⁶⁶ The crucial sentence is: *cui et si quid mihi credis indulgentiam tuam dabis; dabit ipse operam ut in iis quae ei mandaveris maiora mereatur*. Indeed, as A. N. SHERWIN-WHITE observed: 'This is a rather obscurely worded recommendation of Rosianus for any post in the emperor's service to which his present rank qualifies him.'⁶⁷ This senator, whose full name was T. P. P. Paetus Rosianus Geminus, had been Pliny's quaestor during the latter's con-

was later than ep. 10,4. Against this see A. N. SHERWIN-WHITE, *The Letters of Pliny: A Historical and Social Commentary*, 1966, 173 ff.; and against the latter, again: C. P. JONES, *Phoenix* 22, 1968, 120 and 131. A case for which there is more reason to believe that Pliny's petition had no (immediate) success is that of Rosianus Geminus (ep. 10,26; see below).

⁶⁴ In ep. 6,8 Pliny, invoking the help of a fellow-senator in a financial affair of one of his protégés, alludes to his making the attempt, among other things, to prevent his friend from feeling that he is doing nothing for him.

⁶⁵ We only have a few loose remarks; for instance, of Marcus Aurelius it is transmitted: *Suffragatoribus non cito credit* (HA v. MA 29,8); with regard to Severus Alexander Herodian wants us to believe that: 'No statement was made or action taken without their considered approval' (i.e. of the newly installed *consilium* of sixteen senators, 6,2); see also HA v. SA 19,2: 'He never appointed anyone to the senate without consulting all the senators present; for it was his policy that a senator should be chosen only in accordance with the opinions of all, that men of the highest rank should give their testimony . . . Moreover, he never appointed senators except on the vote of the men of highest rank in the Palace, asserting that he who created a senator should himself be a great man.' Cf. Dio/Maecenas' advice (52,15,2): 'that the choice of the officials should rest with you and your advisers', which is of course referring to a council that existed only as part of his blueprint. See C. R. WHITTAKER ad Herod. 6,1,2 (Loeb Vol. II, 79 n. 3).

⁶⁶ Ep. 10,26.

⁶⁷ Letters 596.

sulship in the year 100. His *honores* (i. e. magistracies), mentioned a little later, may have gone as far as the praetorship at the most; his *commilitium* with Trajan, which seems to lie further in the past, might only, as R. SYME was inclined to prefer, mean a military tribunate, either in Germania superior under the governorship of Trajan in 97 or in the Dacian Wars.⁶⁸ Apart from this, we cannot clearly identify any other posts of Rosianus Geminus up to the date of Pliny's letter, i. e. shortly after his arrival in Bithynia, in 110 or 111. Obviously, Pliny's recommendation did not lead to a rapid advancement for Geminus: his next official functions, as far as we know, were a proconsulship of Achaia ca. 123, and a consulship ca. 125, no less than some 25 years after his quaestorship. It will not be too bold to assume that his career was already considerably retarded by the time of Pliny's letter. We have no certainty about the reason for his slow advancement; perhaps the long illness to which Pliny referred in an earlier letter can be held responsible.⁶⁹

Rosianus' case is interesting in that it provides us with a career which was not smoothly-running, thus being contrary to what might too readily be assumed for Roman senators in general. SHERWIN-WHITE's suggestion that, 'the length of Pliny's commendation may suggest that he was pleading for an unpopular man', does not seem to be plausible. In that case Pliny would have refrained from advocating his career at all. One would rather suspect that he felt uncomfortable about Rosianus' chances of being furthered by the emperor and about what could be expected of the man if he were to be entrusted with some commission. From Pliny's language it may be inferred that he did not necessarily have a promotion to a particular, though unspecified, post in mind;⁷⁰ against this speaks the use of the plural in the formulation concerned (*in iis, quae*), which in itself is so vague that one might even wonder whether Pliny was not referring to official posts at all, but rather to any task whatsoever. Another possibility is that Pliny just wanted to call Trajan's attention to this senator who was ready (again?) for a career in the administration of the Empire.

This interpretation admittedly is somewhat impressionistic, based upon the combined information of Pliny and further prosopographical data; if acceptable, it is a fine demonstration of the subtle way in which a patron had to operate. Pliny felt an

⁶⁸ *Historia* 9, 1960, 369; SHERWIN-WHITE l. c. (n. 63) comments: 'His military career seems to be more remote than his magistracies (*honores*). Still, he does not wish to exclude a legionary command in the Dacian Wars, which Geminus might have undertaken before his praetorship (which could have fallen ca. 105), or, more normally, after it. Against the possibility of a legionary legateship see SYME l. c. [n. 63]]. See both authors ll. cc. against the further suggestion of a governorship in Lugdunensis (because of his presence in Lugdunum about 108, see ep. 9,11). SYME l. c. 368 also thought a priesthood conceivable, seeing similarities with ep. 10,13. A very uncritical account of Rosianus' career is given by R. HANSLIK, *RE* 22, 1954, 1968f. For further references see LEUNISSEN, *ZPE* 89, 1991, 240 n. 76.

⁶⁹ Ep. 7,1; possibly referred to also in 7,26; see SHERWIN-WHITE, op. cit. (n. 63) 402 and 435.

⁷⁰ Cf. in this respect the attempts by SYME and SHERWIN-WHITE ll. cc.

obligation towards Rosianus Geminus who, after all, had been his quaestor. Yet the man's performance hitherto (or his weak health, or both) made him anxious about his future accomplishments. Therefore Pliny chose not to recommend his protégé for a specific post. Instead, he gave an unusually vague description of what he would like to obtain for him from the emperor. Thus, on the one hand, he tried to avoid damage to himself if his candidate was rejected right away or failed afterwards and, on the other, he wanted to satisfy his protégé by demonstrating his sincere willingness to further his cause. In this way, Pliny's letter on behalf of Rosianus Geminus, which at first glance seems to be quite contrary to a practice of targeted patronage, can be taken as broadening our view of nuances of 'the rules of the game', and even, indirectly, as an implicit corroboration of the views expressed above.⁷¹

Conclusion and epilogue

Patronage was part of the system. Both elements of this remark must have their full meaning. As far as patronage is concerned, a fine statement was made by Pliny when helping his friend Cremutius Ruso on his way to become an advocate in the Centumviral Courts: 'This is my usual way of treating young men of distinction, for I take a special pleasure in introducing promising young people to the courts and setting them on the path to fame. My friend Ruso should have my help before anyone, for he comes of a good family and has a marked regard for me, etc. . . . The case is important and you will be anxious, but I promise you he will come up to expectations. He is a highly talented young man and will soon be bringing others forward if in the meantime he has his introduction from us. No one can make a start, however outstanding his abilities, if he lacks scope and opportunity and a patron to support him.'⁷² In my opinion, it can hardly be doubted that highly comparable

⁷¹ H. COTTON, *op. cit.* (n.27) 30f., starting from the idea that vagueness of purport was a characteristic of the genre of letters of recommendation (against this see n.38 above), mentions this request as one out of three illuminating instances among Pliny's letters. The other two letters are ep. 10,87, which probably is a not expressly formulated request for a second *militia* for Nymphidius Rufus (see nn.14 and 38), and ep. 3,2, where possibly the same promotion is petitioned for, but which, indeed, is a problematic and unspecified request (see n.38 above). Especially in a case like this, a suggestion by COTTON herself might be very well applicable (*ibid.* 30 n.154 a): 'Technical reasons may also account for the lack of specification e.g.: there was no specific item of request and the letter was meant merely as an introduction . . .; or, given the proper introduction, the recommended person, who usually delivered the letter by his own hand, could go into further detail.' Of course, here, as well as in the case of Rosianus Geminus it is perfectly conceivable that such 'deliberate absence of specification' (*ibid.* 30; see also *id.*, JRS 69, 1979, 41) is still at work, and the considerations behind it may not have been much different from those suggested on the basis of the interpretation given here (cf. the general remarks *ibid.* 30); I only want to emphasize that unspecified requests are highly unusual among Pliny's (and Fronto's) letters of recommendation.

⁷² Ep. 6,23 (cf. also ep. 2,14,3 and Tac. dial. 34). Also with regard to patronage in the context of the court of justice: Fronto, *ad amic.* 1,1 (see G.E.M. DE STE CROIX, *British Journal of*

circumstances applied to senators who were heading for a career in the administration of the Empire. Patronage, it should be stressed, was not an operation at random but was undertaken from a delicate weighing of positions and prospects.

With regard to the ‹system› part, one can point, firstly, to the senatorial *cursus*, regulated by magisterial rank and by a certain hierarchy of functions. Naturally, it was in the interest of the senators themselves to foster a general observance of the unwritten rules of promotion which had come into existence in the course of the first century. And by these rules, or rather conventions, the influence, even of the emperor himself, in the personnel policy was kept within certain limits. A rather illuminating example of this is given by Dio, referring to an episode under Caracalla. A military tribune of the equestrian order had drawn the emperor's attention ‹for the agility with which he had leaped upon his horse›. When the emperor, whose admiration for Alexander is well-known, heard that the young man came from Macedonia, that he was called Antigonus and his father Philippus, he promoted him to further equestrian posts and soon adlected him into the senate with praetorian rank. Epigraphic evidence shows that Antigonus as a senator occupied a series of praetorian posts before he reached the consulship and at least one consular office under Severus Alexander.⁷³ The inference to be drawn from Antigonus' case seems clear enough: the emperor could – for whatever extraordinary motives – mould a career, but even then the normal rules of promotion did not cease to be operative. Another observation may be added, which I have made elsewhere with regard to that most turbulent era of imperial history, the years 180–235. Not only were clearly deviating advancements explicitly proclaimed as abnormalities by contemporary sources; such creations also came to a bad end, together with the emperor responsible for them.⁷⁴ These are clear signs that the rules of promotion basically possessed a large measure of continuity, and that even imperial protection overstepped the bounds of the established system only by way of exception.

Patronage, to come back to our starting point, was a function *within* this fairly regulated system and thus it can be supposed that the number of requests for promotions to the imperial government could be kept somewhat within limits and controlled.⁷⁵ Perhaps it even may be assumed that the number of protégés being

Sociology 5, 1954, 43). It might also be noted that the style of recommendation for public office and for highly private matters are quite similar, cf. e.g. Pliny, ep. 1,14 and 6,26.

⁷³ Dio 77,8,1 f. and AE 1966,262; IG XIV 888 = IGRR I 407; CIL III 14429; AE 1964, 180. See on this case LEUNISSEN, op. cit. (n.6) esp. 32, 183, 385 and my forthcoming article (n.6).

⁷⁴ See my forthcoming article (n.6).

⁷⁵ In my view, T. JOHNSON and CHR. DANDEKER, Patronage: Relation and System, in: WALLACE-HADRILL, Patronage in Ancient Society, 1989, 236, go one step too far when they maintain: ‹State offices – senator, provincial governor or the emperor – were enmeshed in patronage relationships to a degree that it becomes entirely misconceived to maintain a distinction between the ‹formal power structures› of the state and the private bonds of patronage;›

submitted for consideration was only relatively little higher than there were vacancies to be filled.

Of course, patronage was not a barren mechanism, operative within a system of promotions according to a hierarchy of ranks and, to a certain degree, of functions. Among the many definitions which have been tried for patronage, there is one, offered in the context of the Renaissance, which I think can be very well applied to the phenomenon under the Principate. «Patronage was a method and set of criteria for appointment to public offices.»⁷⁶ Certainly, the writings of ancient authors (including the letters of recommendation) provide us with many references to the importance of criteria such as birth, wealth, ambition, diligence, good character, capacities and achievement (or, if one prefers, merit⁷⁷), experience, education, loyalty and integrity. Apart from the findings of prosopographical analysis, only a careful and elaborate inventarisation of these indications can complete – within the limits of the evidence – our notion of the factors and variables which governed a senator's advancement in imperial Rome – at least of the things that the members of the elite perceived to result in promotion. One might assume, though, that there was some sound relation between perception and reality, or, to put it another way, that in a large measure things actually did work as the aristocrats thought they worked. At any rate, the letters of recommendation of the principate clearly show that not just anybody was accepted as a protégé, but that such criteria (albeit in an ever varying mix) were applied to them in advance; thus, as it were, a pre-selection through preconditions was carried out. The result of studies inventarizing the criteria concerned will surely be that the principate, with regard to appointments and promotions of government officials, cannot be styled a strictly patrimonial nor a strictly rational-legal bureaucracy, but rather that it combined characteristics of both.⁷⁸ Thereby, the Roman Empire answers per-

they resist the idea «to conceive of the state as something other than patronage», or «the tendency . . . to assume that the state, «the official system», «the formal power structures», must, almost by definition, be constituted by something other than patronage.»

⁷⁶ HARDING, *op. cit.* (n.52) 50.

⁷⁷ An observation with regard to merit in – again – the Renaissance period might be most instructive for our context: some treatises «advocated a criterion for appointments and awards that resembles the modern conception of merit, except that it was conceived much more in terms of innate talents rather than talents acquired by training and education». See HARDING, *op.cit.* 53.

⁷⁸ Even in relatively modern contexts the persistence of personal alongside impersonal criteria can be observed. «As DANDEKER has shown in relation to the navy (Patronage and bureaucratic control – The case of the naval officer in English society 1780–1850, *British Journal of Sociology* 29, 1978, 300–320) bureaucratic criteria of «seniority», «searime», and «technical merit» were all mobilised in promotion decisions, yet all these operated within the constraints of patronage obligation. Seniority was accepted by the Lords of Admiralty as vocationally relevant, yet they also accepted that their duty was to look after the interests of family, followers and friends, and would have responded with moral repugnance to any attempts to prioritise merit, so disrupting the conventional balance between the generalised exercise of patronage

fectly to what by definition applies to ideal types, viz. that they are merely meant as standards to which we can relate the measure of agreement or disagreement of a social phenomenon, but that they never existed as such.⁷⁹

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and the local use of merit in the determination of career progress.>; see JOHNSON and DANDEKER, op. cit. (n.75) 237.

⁷⁹ My research on this topic was made possible by a fellowship of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. I would like to thank the members of the <doctorandi-colloquium> on Ancient History in Nijmegen, with special reference to Professor L. DE BLOIS, Dr. A. J. L. VAN HOOFF and L. H. VERBERNE. For further stimulating comments and corrections I am much indebted to Professor A. R. BIRLEY, Professor F. G. B. MILLAR and Professor M. PEACHIN as well as to Ms. M. J. A. B. LENSEN. An abbreviated version of this article was presented to the <Ancient Civilizations Group> at New York University, on 29 April 1992.