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ERIC BIRLEY

The Aftermath of an Incident in A. D. 69

There is a curiously unexplained episode recorded by Tacitus as occurring in the early days of January 69 (Histories 1, 20): *exauctorati per eos dies tribuni, e praetorio Antonius Taurus et Antonius Naso, ex urbanis cohortibus Aemilius Pacensis, e vigilibus Iulius Fronto. nec remedium in ceteros fuit, sed metus initium, tamquam per artem et formidine singuli pellerentur, omnibus suspectis*. No clue is given as to the reason why Galba decided to dismiss those four *primipilares*, though it must be evident that for one reason or another he had no further use for them.

When Otho became emperor, Aemilius Pacensis returned to favour. He was one of the officers put in charge of the fleet which was given the task of operating against the Vitellian forces on the coast of Narbonensis, though the troops turned against him: he was *per licentiam militum vincitus* (so Histories 2, 12), his colleague Antonius Novellus was a cipher, and the command was left to the forceful Suedius Clemens; finally, Pacensis lost his life on the Capitol, when he and other *viri milites* were attempting to maintain the Flavian cause against the Vitellians (Histories 3, 73). His *cognomen* seems to be unparalleled (KAJANTO has no other instances of it to register),¹ and we have no clue as to his origin. Nor is the case of Julius Fronto of any help; he too was evidently reinstated by Otho, only to be put in chains because it was feared that he would go over to the other side, with which his brother Julius Gratus was serving, likewise in custody for fear of his joining the Othonians (Histories 2, 26). Their names are too colourless to afford us any guide to their origin, except perhaps that as Julii they are hardly likely to have come from Italy rather than from Narbonensis (like Julius Agricola) or from one of the colonies in some other province.²

The case of Antonius Naso, fortunately, is very different. His career is on record in welcome detail on an inscription from Heliopolis (Baalbek) in Syria, which was evidently his home (ILS 9199): he was re-employed by the victorious Flavians, and rose to be procurator of Pontus and Bithynia where an inscription and coins attest his presence in A. D. 77 or 78; the evidence is collected most conveniently in PIR²

¹ I. KAJANTO, *The Latin Cognomina*, Helsinki 1965, 199.

² For what it may be worth, note that two Iulii Grati are on record in Narbonensis (CIL XII 288 at Forum Iulii and 1522, somewhere in the territory of the Vocontii), and there is a *praefectus equitum*, L. Iulius Fronto, at Aoste (CIL XII 2393 = ILS 7003).

A 854, while it is set out in detail and discussed by H.-G. PFLAUM in his monumental survey of equestrian procuratorial careers.³ There is no comparable evidence for his fellow tribune in the praetorian guard, Antonius Taurus, but there is at least a strong indication that he, too, came from Heliopolis. In 1937 HENRI SEYRIG published an inscription recently found at Baalbek,⁴ and it was reproduced in AE 1939, 55, as follows: –

divo / Vespasian(o) / Aug(usto) / Antonia / Ti(beri) f(ilia) Pacata et / Priscilla / ex testamento Antoni Tauri pp. p. a.

For the closing letters, AE noted the expansion which M. SEYRIG had put forward, *p(osuerunt) p(io) a(nimo)*.

It was after my return from military service, at the end of the war, that my attention was drawn to this text. I found difficulty in supposing that it had been read and interpreted correctly, for two reasons. First, since two ladies are mentioned, one ought to have *Antoniae*, not *Antonia*; second, and even more important, Tiberius seems to be unmatched as the praenomen of an Antonius.⁵ On this last point, it will be worth while to emphasise that some *gentes* showed a marked unwillingness to use this or that otherwise widely accepted *praenomen*: thus Aulus, attested for the Pergamene senator A. Claudius Charax (*cos. suff.* 147), was not found acceptable by the Claudii, so much so that we might wonder whether he was not really polyonymous, like so many eastern senators, perhaps known in full as A. Iulius Ti. Claudius Charax.⁶ It may be noted that his grandson, attested by another inscription from Pergamum (AE 1961, 321), was A. Iulius Charax.

But there was a further reason why the reading of the inscription from Baalbek seemed less than satisfactory, for the mention of a man called Antonius Taurus, followed by *p. p.*, made one think (inevitably perhaps) of the man of those names whom Galba dismissed from the tribunate of a praetorian cohort, not least because his colleague Antonius Naso, too, came from the same colony. If Taurus, unlike Naso, was never given further employment, he would naturally retain the title *primipilaris*, regularly abbreviated *p. p.* In view of these doubts as to the reading of the inscription, I wrote to M. SEYRIG, and he kindly arranged for the stone to be photographed, and a print of it to be sent to me.

The result was to confirm my suspicions, and incidentally to show that the lineation of the text, as given in AE, was incorrect; I read it as follows: –

³ Les carrières procuratoriennes équestres sous le haut-empire romain I, 1960, 85 ff.

⁴ Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth 1, 1937, 78.

⁵ The only apparent example is in CIL X 2080, from either Puteoli or Misenum: *d(is) m(anibus) Ti. Ant. Urbanu(s) qui vix(it) anno I m(ensibus) VII d(iebus) XII, Urbicus et Faustina filio dulcissimo b(ene) m(erenti) f(ecerunt)*. But in this case it seems probable that the abbreviated *nomen* should be expanded as *Ant(istius)*, for Antistii with the *praenomen* Tiberius are on record – for example, Ti. Antistius Marcianus (CIL XIII 1680 = ILS 1390).

⁶ His entry in PIR² C 831 now needs considerable supplementation: the date of his consulate has been given by the Ostia Fasti, and his career by the Greek inscription reproduced as AE 1961, 320.

divo / Vespasian[o] / Aug(usto) / Antoniae T(iti) f(iliae) Pacata et / Priscilla / ex testamento Antoni Tauri p(rimi)p(ilaris) pa[tris].

That is to say, Antonia Pacata and Antonia Priscilla dedicated their inscription in accordance with the will of their father, T. Antonius Taurus – whose *praenomen* Titus was one which the *gens Antonia* made use of not infrequently. The fact that Vespasian was dead when the inscription was cut (for he is referred to as *divus*) would seem to indicate that Taurus survived for a good many years after his enforced retirement, for it cannot be supposed that his daughters would delay unduly long before complying with the terms of his will. But we cannot say why he should have remained unemployed, while Antonius Naso was able to enjoy a resumption of his career and promotion to a procuratorship – and while Suedius Clemens, too, received advancement under Vespasian and Titus.⁷

In view of what we have learnt about Taurus and Naso, and what we might perhaps be justified in suspecting in the case of Julius Fronto and his brother Julius Gratus, it may be that we have a clue to the reasons for Galba's dismissal of those four *primipilares*. The two Antonii came from a *colonia* in Syria, Julius Fronto (even if he was not a Narbonensian) was the brother of an officer on the Rhine. Was Galba already suspicious of the loyalty of the armies in the East and in the North-West, which were so soon to fight it out for the Empire?⁸

⁷ Cf. PIR¹ S 687: by November 79 he was *praefectus castrorum*, in command of the troops in Egypt (CIL III 33).

⁸ For what it might be worth, I note that KAJANTO (op. cit. 289) points out that 65 out of 101 instances of the *cognomen* Novellus/Novella in CIL come from Africa. It might be wondered whether Antonius Novellus came from Carthage, for example, or from one of the other *coloniae* in the province of Africa.

