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SPECIALIZATION – THE HIDDEN FEATURE OF THE ROMAN PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION

Specialization seems to be one of the main features of the modern bureaucratic systems. Persons, who begin the professional activity in the given area (e.g., army, economy, justiciary, finance, etc.), usually spend all their life in this area. The great complexity of modern social reality usually unables to requalify during the professional career. So, the social promotion (and sometimes the social degradation), is connected with reaching the next steps in the social ladder (or pyramid), rather than with changing the sort of life activity. Each new post in the bureaucratic hierarchy is much more important and more powerful than the previous one; simultaneously it imposes many more obligations. Gradually, each official becomes the specialist in his field of professional activity. The group of highly educated, loyal and trained specialists is the base for every efficient system of administration. The great German sociologist and historian Max Weber (1864-1920), who created the sociological concept of bureaucracy, named the Roman Empire as one of the finest examples of the bureaucratic systems of government.

The interest of historians for the Roman civil service began in the late 19th century with the so-called prosopographical works. Initially, they presented only chronological lists of the provincial governors (*legati Augusti pro praetore provinciae*) or lists of the army commanders (*legati legionis*). Gradually, each Roman province gained the monograph, with the list of governors or with the analysis of their official careers (*cursus honorum*). The publication of these works, which gradually covered the whole Roman Empire, enabled writing the books, which analyse the functioning of the Roman civil service. However, the strict pattern of taking the offices dates back to the Roman republic (*lex Villia annalis* 180 B.C.), it was Augustus who rationalized the administration of the growing Roman Empire. The Roman provincial administration in the time of Principate was governed by the members of highest circles of the Roman society („Führungsschicht“ in Géza Alföldy's terminology).¹ Senators, who for the long time (up to the reforms of Gallienus), formed the base of Roman civil service, had to pass through the long system of education, promotion and social selection. Before they could obtain the high positions in the Roman provincial administration (usually in their forties), senators could see practically all kinds of the professional activity:

- military (*tribunus militum legionis laticlavus*, *legatus legionis*);
- financial (*quaestor*, *praefectus aerarii*);
- juridical (*X vir stlitibus iudicandis*, *praetor*).

Additionally, the members of *ordo senatorius* had to know the Latin or even Greek literature and they had to be good orators. So, the senators had very different and wide preparation for the participation in the imperial government. However, this preparation was rather wide than deep. For instance, the military service of the future senators (they formally entered the *ordo senatorius* with the post of *quaestor*), usually lasted one year only. Moreover, the office of military tribune (*tribunus militum legionis laticlavus*), although theoretically the second in importance in the Roman legion, was mainly civil and administrative in character. Even as the commander of the legion (*legatus legionis*), which was not obligatory, the Roman senator very seldom had an opportunity to see any war at all. So, Keith Hopkins described Roman senators as the high-status amateurs.² This lack of serious military training was especially dangerous during long wars in the middle of the second century (mainly the Marcomannic wars of Marcus Aurelius) and in the late third century. This was, as it seems, one of the reasons of the exclusion of senators from the military service, beginning with the time of Gallienus.

¹ G. ALFÖLDY, *Römische Sozialgeschichte*, Wiesbaden 1975.

² K. HOPKINS, *Conquerors and slaves*, Cambridge 1978.

These inscriptions with completely or partly preserved *cursus honorum* form the main source for the history of the Roman provincial administration. The great number of provinces listed in many of these inscriptions inclined many scholars to believe that the emperors preferred the permanent rotation of their subordinates. „Because of the organizational structure of the Principate it was inevitable that the officers responsible for the efficiency of the Roman armed forces and the various government bureaux would rotate from one post to another“.³ Undoubtedly, the principle of constant rotation of officials had many advantages, especially in the case of preindustrial societies. In the situation when troops or news had to travel even almost a month from the capital of Rome to the distant provinces – the governors had to receive the great amount of independence. Sometimes, the consultation with the capital would be too late. So, the provincial governor was at the same time the supreme commander of all the troops stationed in the given province. There were four one-legion praetorian imperial provinces (*Arabia, Dacia, Numidia, Pannonia Inferior* up to 214 A.D.), where provincial governor served simultaneously as the *legatus legionis*.

Certainly, the great power and independence of provincial governors could be dangerous for the imperial power. The great internal crises of 69 or 193 A.D. showed that this way was not only the theoretical possibility. The long staying of high officials in the one province could provoke the tendency of separatism or even elimination of the imperial power. So, the emperors quite often rotated their officials from one province to another, before they could take root in the local society or provincial cliques. However, my hypothesis is, that in the case of vital, frontier provinces of the Roman Empire (*Germania, Moesia, Pannonia, Syria, Britannia*), the emperors had to abandon the policy of constant rotation of the highest provincial officials. I think, that the rulers preferred (in the case of above-mentioned provinces), to employ the senators, who were already familiar with these regions of the state – even if it could threaten the imperial power. I will try to prove that in some cases the Emperors preferred to use the principle of specialization rather than rotation.

The principle of specialization means that in the Roman Empire many governors and high officials took offices in the provinces, which they already knew from their previous active service. Such the hypothesis had been positively verified in the case of some Roman provinces: *Germania*,⁴ *Moesia*,⁵ *Pannonia*.⁶

However, the question of specialization in Roman administration is almost absent from the modern historiography. Moreover, the most scholars deny the existence of specialization in the Roman imperial army and administration. „There was no policy of specialization worthy of the name, as far as the military provinces were concerned“.⁷ Richard Saller, who examined the question of promotion and patronage in equestrian careers, wrote that „clearly there was no general attempt at regional specialization“.⁸ Afterwards he pointed that „emperors made no attempt to give their officials specialized experience“.⁹ However, „certain men were appointed by the emperor for their special expertise in certain regions or tasks“.¹⁰ Moreover, in J. B. Campbell's opinion, „the careers and promotion of *equites* [...] do not admit of patterns or schemes of promotion, and tell against specialization in Roman imperial administration“.¹¹ In opinion of Robert Sherck and Arthur R. Birley, specialization existed rather in case of the whole provincial complexes, than in a single province. „Specialization within

³ R. K. SHERK, *Specialization in the provinces of Germany*, *Historia* 20, 1971, p. 110.

⁴ SHERK, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-121.

⁵ M. ŻYROMSKI, *Specialization in the Roman provinces of Moesia in the time of Principate*, *Athen.* 79, 1991, pp. 59-102.

⁶ J. FITZ, *Legati legionum Pannoniae Superior*, *AAntHung* 9, 1961, pp. 159-207; ID., *Legati Augusti pro praetore Pannoniae Inferior*, *AAntHung* 11, 1963, pp. 245-324; M. ŻYROMSKI, *Specialization in the Roman provinces of Pannonia in the time of Principate* (forthcoming).

⁷ A. R. BIRLEY, *The Fasti of Roman Britain*, Oxford 1981, pp. 29-30.

⁸ R. P. SALLER, *Promotion and patronage in the equestrian careers*, *JRS* 70, 1980, note 68.

⁹ ID., *Personal patronage under the early Empire*, Cambridge 1982, p. 99.

¹⁰ SALLER, *Promotion*, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

¹¹ J. B. CAMPBELL, *The emperor and the Roman army 31 B.C.-A.D. 235*, Oxford 1984, p. 331.

single province like that of Agricola in Britain must have been rather rare during the Principate¹²

Over twenty years ago Sherk touched upon the problem of specialization. He investigated the careers of such the senators, who served in at least two positions in the 'high command' of Germany. He observed the three patterns of promotion of senators connected with the Germany in at least two positions of their *cursus honorum*:

- ⇒ Group 1 – legionary commanders and later governors – 4 persons,
- ⇒ Group 2 – military tribunes and later governors – 5 persons,
- ⇒ Group 3 – military tribunes and later legionary commanders – 8 persons.

However during the Principate we know just over a hundred governors of one of the German provinces. So, Sherk pointed that the question of representativeness of the historical material have to be introduced. He noticed that we know the complete *cursus honorum* of only eight *legati Augusti pro praetore provinciae Germaniae superioris* (out of 50) and eleven *legati Augusti pro praetore provinciae Germaniae inferioris* (out of 52). „The percentage of men in such a category is not 9 out of 102, but rather 9 out of 19 [...] We may assume, then, that a reasonably high number of governors of Germany had been either military tribune or legionary commander“.¹³ Besides, from the overall number of 19 governors of *Gallia Belgica* as many as 5 served also on the post of *legatus legionis* in Germany.¹⁴

Simultaneously, „a considerable number of governors of Britain previously governed *Germania Inferior*. There was also some kind of specialization in the eastern provinces, in that governors of *Syria* had often governed another eastern province“.¹⁵ Moreover, Birley presented the list of 14 senators, who governed the province, where they previously took office of *legatus legionis* and 9 governors who served in the same province previously on the post of *tribunus militum legionis laticlavii*. So, the first kind of specialization was the multiple service in the same province. However, the other kind of specialization in the Roman imperial administration can be specified. Some scholars noticed the relation between the place of origin and the place of the civil service. Saller noticed, that equestrians who descended from the eastern part of the Roman Empire were employed mainly in the eastern provinces and equestrians from the West served rather in the western provinces. The similar tendency observed Bernard Remy in the case of senators, who served in the eastern provinces – only 15 originated from the West as against 64 from the East (Italy 96, Africa 10).¹⁶

However, it seems that the most visible examples of the specialization principle are the Lower Danube provinces of Moesia and Pannonia. In each of these two regions, 19 senators served twice in the provincial 'high command'. Four types of relations had been specified in the case of Moesia:

- 1) legionary commanders and later governors – 8 persons –
 - L. Pomponius Flaccus (*consul ordinarius* 17 A.D.),
 - Sex. Vettulenus Cerialis (*consul suffectus* 73 [?] A.D.),
 - Tettius Iulianus (*consul suffectus* 83 A.D.),
 - Q. Pomponius Rufus (*consul suffectus* 95 A.D.),
 - Q. Roscius Coelius [...] Pompeius Falco (*consul suffectus* 108 A.D.),
 - Q. Fuficius Cornutus (*consul suffectus* 147 A.D.),
 - M. Claudius Fronto (*consul suffectus* 165 A.D.),
 - P. Septimius Geta (*consul suffectus* ca. 191 A.D.);
- 2) military tribunes and later governors – 4 persons –
 - L. Minicius Natalis Quadronius Verus (*consul suffectus* 139 A.D.),
 - P. Cluvius Maximus Paulinus (*consul suffectus anno incerto*),
 - P. Mummius Sisenna Rutilianus (*consul suffectus* 146 A.D.),
 - L. Fabius Cilo (*consul suffectus* 193 A.D., *consul II ordinarius* 204 A.D.);

¹² SHERK, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁵ BIRLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁶ B. REMY, *La place des sénateurs originaires des provinces d'Afrique dans l'administration des provinces romaines d'Anatolie au Haut-Empire* /in:/ *L'Africa romana*, vol. 4, Sassari 1986, p. 587.

- 3) military tribunes and later legionary legates – 2 persons –
T. Iulius Maximus Manlianus (*consul suffectus* 112 A.D.),
M. Fabius Magnus Valerianus (*consul suffectus a. inc.*);
- 4) governors, in sequence, of the both Moesian provinces – 5 persons –
M. Cornelius Nigrinus Curvatus Maternus (*cos. suff.* 83 A.D.),
M. Servilius Fabianus Maximus (*consul suffectus* 158 A.D.),
M. Macrinus Avitus Catonius Vindex (*cos. suff. a. inc.*),
P. Helvius Pertinax (*consul suffectus* 175 A.D.),
C. Messius Q. Decius Valerinus (*cos. a. inc.*).

„They usually descended from the provincial local aristocracy of the western Roman provinces and many of them began *cursus honorum* even in the equestrian order [...] They commanded very often in sequence, the two Roman legions, which can be regarded as the *signum specificum* of ‘Moesian specialists’ [...]. Many of them, probably as a reward for their loyal and successful service, obtained the highest posts in the Roman imperial administration“.¹⁷

During the Principate, the offices regarded as the peak of the senatorial *cursus honorum* (*consul iterum, praefectus urbi, proconsul Africae, Asiae*), were practically reserved for the loyal and efficient imperial officials. Characteristically, that the ‘Moesian specialists’ were the military specialists, too. They received very often the military decorations (*dona militaria*), they commanded the special missions or the Task Forces (*vexillationes*), and they accompanied the emperors during the military expeditions (*comites Augusti*).

In the case of so-called ‘Moesian specialists’ the question of representativeness of the historical material has been examined, too.¹⁸ We have some information about 15 consular governors of undivided Moesia and we do not know only two legates of this province. Afterwards, „in the second century A.D. – precisely from 86 (the division of Moesia) to 193 (the imperial proclamation of Septimius Severus) – we know 35 governors of *Moesia Inferior*, i.e. 83% of the probably existed number (42)“.¹⁹ The *cursus honorum* is attested in full for 17 and in part for 7 governors.

Simultaneously, we know fewer second century ‘*legati Augusti pro praetore provinciae Moesiae superioris*’ (22 out of possible number 38, i.e., 58%). Unfortunately, during the third century A.D., the majority of governors left only the name. „In sum we have the sufficient information [...]. So it can be assumed that the conclusions will be valid for all the probably existing members of ‘high command’ in Moesia“.²⁰

Undoubtedly, the hypothesis of existing the ‘Moesian specialists’ had been positively verified. The high percentage of Moesian governors, who left their traces in the historical sources, confirms the validity of the category of ‘Moesian specialists’ and the principle of specialization. Moreover, so-called intergenerational aspect of specialization had been included: four families had two representatives each in the ‘high command’ of Moesia.

Jenö Fitz introduced, over thirty years ago, the strict pattern of promotion for the senators employed in the administration of the two Pannonian provinces. „Pannonisches Karrierschema“, as he called it, contained the command over one of the legions stationed in *Pannonia Superior*, then the governorship of *Pannonia Inferior*, and afterwards the governorship of *Pannonia Superior* – after the consulate, of course. „Von den sechs Statthaltern, die nacheinander die beiden Pannonien verwaltet haben, drei von Donau-Legionen kamen, während in den Fällen der anderen drei die Namen der von ihnen früher kommandierten Legionen nicht bekannt sind“.²¹ Afterwards, Fitz presented his theory on the base of *legati Augusti pro praetore provinciae Pannoniae Inferioris*. However, after the presentation of several governors of Lower Pannonia (30 praetorian and 18 consular), author took his „Pannonisches Karrierschema“ very sharply. „Therefore those cases, when the legate of *Pannonia*

¹⁷ ŻYROMSKI, *Specialization in [...] Moesia*, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-65.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

²¹ FITZ, *Legati legionum*, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

Inferior did not continue his career in *Pannonia Superior*, can be regarded as definitely exceptional²² Moreover, he tried to supply the missing parts in the provincial *fasti* of *Pannonia Superior* with the persons of *Pannonia Inferior* and *vice versa*. „We can suppose that of the legates of *Pannonia Inferior* not only those previously mentioned commanded legions in *Pannonia Superior*, but also the majority of those, whose earlier career is not known to us²³ However, the procedure in type of *argumentum ex silentio* is very hazardous, indeed.

Undoubtedly, the senators employed in the ‘high command’ of Pannonia can be analysed in the similar way as the Moesian ones.²⁴ The following types of relations had been established:

- 1) legionary commanders and governors of both Pannonian provinces – 3 cases –
 Claudius Maximus (*consul suffectus* ca. 143 A.D.),
 M. Nonius Macrinus (*consul suffectus* 154 A.D.),
 C. Vettius Sabinianus Iulius Hospes (*cos. suff.* ca. 175-176 A.D.);
- 2) governors, in sequence, of the two Pannonian provinces – 3 cases –
 M. Pontius Laelianus Larcus Sabinus (*cos. suff.* 144 A.D.),
 M. Iulius Bassus Fabius Valerianus (*cos. suff.* ca. 160 A.D.),
 Ti. Claudius Claudianus (*consul suffectus* 199 or 200 A.D.);
- 3) legionary commanders and later governors of one of Pannonian provinces – 3 cases –
 T. Iulius Maximus Manlianus (*consul suffectus* 112 A.D.),
 L. Attius Macro (*consul suffectus* 134 A.D.),
 C. Iulius Commodus Orfitianus (*consul suffectus* 160 A.D.);
- 4) military tribunes and later governors – 4 cases –
 P. Aelius Hadrianus (*consul suffectus* 108 A.D.),
 C. Iulius Septimius Castinus (*consul suffectus* ca. 212 A.D.),
 L. Cassius Marcellinus (*consul suffectus* 214 A.D.),
 Pontius Pontianus (*consul suffectus* before 218 A.D.);
- 5) military tribunes and later legionary legates – 5 cases –
 M. Fabius Fabullus (*legatus legionis V Alaudae* 69 A.D.),
 Q. Iulius Cordinus C. Rutilius Gallicus (*cos. suff.* 71 A.D.),
 Cn. Minicius Faustinus Sex. Iulius Severus (*cos. suff.* 127 A.D.),
 M. Stadius Priscus Licinius Italicus (*consul ordinarius* 159 A.D.),
 L. Iulius Apronius Maenius Pius Salamallianus (*consul designatus* ca. 226 A.D.);
- 6) commanders of the two Pannonian legions – 1 case –
 M. Valerius Maximianus (*consul suffectus* ca. 185 A.D.).

Similar to Moesia, four families placed two members each in the Pannonian ‘high command’. Additionally four persons served in the Pannonian provinces in the different stages of their official career – even as simple soldiers or *centuriones*.

The comparative analysis of Moesian and Pannonian ‘specialists’, according to the hierarchy of the *cursus honorum* and their geographical and social origin – permits regarding them as the distinct group of high Roman officials. First, they formed the highly provincialized group within *ordo senatorius*. Moreover, many of them began the *cursus honorum* not only as the *homines novi*, but even in the equestrian order (Moesia 3-4 persons, Pannonia 5-6). During the praetorian stage of career, the predominance of functions exercised directly in the imperial service is evident. Many senators took iterated legionary commands (Moesia 5, Pannonia 5). On the contrary, only few senators took the priestly offices, even in the so-called *amplissima collegia*. Many of them exercised some military functions, certainly much more important than the religious ones. They acted as *praeposites*, *duces*, they commanded *vexillationes*. Their high military abilities were confirmed by the *dona militaria*, which they obtained very frequently.

The members of *ordo equester* were analysed in terms of the specialization principle only exceptionally. However, the very good example of specialization is the Italian fleet command during the

²² ID., *Legati Augustip. cit.*, p. 310.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

²⁴ ŻYROMSKI, *Specialization in [...] Pannonia*.

Principate – *praefectus classis praetoriae Ravennatis, praefectus classis praetoriae Misenensis*.²⁵ However, for Richard Saller, the position of *praefectus classis* is the negative example of specialization – „out of 13 prefects of Italian fleets whose careers are known only Iulianus (L. Iulius Vehilius Gratus Iulianus) and Q. Baienus Blassianus had previously commanded provincial fleet“.²⁶ Nevertheless, we know as many as eleven equestrians, who served twice in the post of *praefectus classis*:

- P. Aelius Marcianus – *classis Syriaca, Moesica*,
- Q. Baienus Blassianus – *classis Britannica, Ravennatis*,
- M. Calpurnius Seneca Fabius Turpio Sentinatianus – *classis Ravennatis, Misenensis*,
- Claudius Diognetus – *classis Ravennatis, Misenensis*,
- P. Cominius Clemens – *classis Ravennatis, Misenensis*,
- T. Furius Victorinus – *classis Ravennatis, Misenensis*,
- M. Gavius Maximus – *classis Ravennatis, Misenensis*,
- L. Iulius Vehilius Gratus Iulianus – *classis Pontica, Ravennatis, Misenensis*,
- Sex. Lucilius Bassus – *classis Ravennatis, Misenensis*,
- Cn. Marcius Rustius Rufinus – *classis Ravennatis, Misenensis*,
- Tuticanus Capito – *classis Ravennatis, Misenensis*.

Most of them (nine) commanded, in succession, both Italian fleets. Undoubtedly, the post of *praefectus classis praetoriae Ravennatis* was considered as preliminary, leading to the command of Misene fleet. We know only *praefectus classis praetoriae Misenensis* (C. Plinius Secundus), who did not previously commanded the Ravennate fleet (analysing the persons of known whole *cursus honorum* only). Moreover, „zwischen der Spätzeit Hadrians und dem Ende der Regierungszeit des Septimius Severus ist nur ein bekannter Präfekt der Flotte von Ravenna später nachweislich nicht auch Präfekt der Flotte von Misenum geworden, nämlich Q. Baienus Blassianus, da sein *Cursus* vollständig erhalten ist“.²⁷

Undoubtedly, the existence of specialization principle in the Roman imperial administration had been confirmed. Characteristically, that the functioning of this principle was discovered in the case of some frontier Roman provinces (*Germania, Moesia, Pannonia*) – with the strong legionary garrisons. Undoubtedly, the service in the key positions in such the important provinces of the Roman Empire was entrusted to specially selected men – mainly thanks to their courage and military abilities. Moreover, the army can be regarded as the main channel of the social mobility. The successful military service enabled men of the lower social origin the advance to the peak of senatorial career. Unfortunately, the specialization principle is absent from the Roman social theory. So, this principle was described in my article as the hidden feature of the Roman provincial administration. The whole library can be formed with the books, which analyse the question of decline of the Roman Empire (in the West). However, we can ask the opposite question – why the Roman Empire lasted for such a long time? The part of the answer is certainly the perfect working of the Roman administrative system, whose one of the main features was the specialization principle.

²⁵ ID., *The Italian fleet prefects as the example of specialization principle in the Roman civil service during the Principate* (in Polish); ID., *Praefectus classis. The commanders of Roman imperial navy during the Principate*, ch. 8: *the question of specialization* (in print).

²⁶ SALLER, *Promotion*, *op. cit.*, p. 63, note 9.

²⁷ W. ECK, H. LIEB, *Ein Diplom für die classis Ravennas vom 22. November 206*, *ZPE* 96, 1993, p. 88.