The Origin, Context and Function of Consular Diptychs

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In memory of Tally Kampen

ABSTRACT

Members of the late Roman élite commemorated the holding of certain offices by the distribution of ivory diptychs. This paper attempts to show how diptychs came to play this rôle; that they were not originally distributed by consuls but by any official who provided games; that they had nothing to do with the ecclesiastical diptychs that are first heard of at about the same time; that the custom spread from east to west, not from west to east; and that the earliest western consular diptychs are not illustrated with scenes from games because there were no multi-day consular games at Rome before the fifth century.

Keywords: diptychs; ivory; consuls; consular games; praetorian games; *mappa*; *sportulae*; Late Antiquity

I THE QUESTIONS

Beginning in the last quarter of the fourth century, members of the Roman élite commemorated the holding of certain offices and a variety of other occasions by the distribution of ivory diptychs, two often elaborately carved panels joined with a hinge or clasp so that they could be closed like a codex. The earliest securely dated example we have is that of Anicius Probus, consul in 406, though several others have been assigned with varying degrees of plausibility to late fourth-century Rome on historical and stylistic grounds. The most famous is the diptych that commemorates members of two of the great fourth-century pagan families, the Symmachi and Nicomachi. On this basis it has been generally assumed that the custom originated in late fourth-century Rome. Most of those that survive commemorate consuls of the late fifth and sixth centuries, whence the informal but (as we shall see) misleading categorization of the entire genre as 'consular diptychs'.[1]

This paper attempts to explain (1) how and why diptychs made of ivory came to play this rôle; to show (2) that they were not originally distributed by consuls but by any official who provided games; (3) that they had nothing to do with the ecclesiastical diptychs that, coincidentally, are first heard of at about the same time; (4) that the custom spread from east to west, not as hitherto assumed, from west to east; and (5) that the earliest western consular diptychs are not illustrated with scenes from games because there were no multi-day consular games at Rome before the fifth century.

[1] So the standard corpus, R. Delbrück, *Die Consulardiptychen und verwandte Denkmäler* (1929). Tony Cutler and I plan to produce a new corpus in the near future.

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II ORIGINS

Although there is no direct evidence on the origin of the practice, there can be little doubt why what I would prefer to call presentation diptychs took the form they did. From as early as the first century A.D., formal letters of appointment to office were known as *codicilli*, 'little books', or in (literary) Greek δελτοί, evidently because the imperial letter was despatched or presented in the form of a writing-tablet, two or more flat, rectangular pieces of (usually) wood joined by cord or metal clasps, coated with wax on the inside surface of both leaves for writing.[2] None survive in their original form, but we do have one contemporary copy of the letter of appointment they carried. Marcus Aurelius' letter appointing Domitius Marsianus *procurator patrimonii* of Narbonensis, publicly inscribed in Bulla Regia in North Africa under the heading 'copy of the codicils' (*exemplum codicillorum*), is brief and informative enough to be cited in full:[3]

> Exemplum codicillorum: Caesar Antoninus Aug(ustus) Domitio Marsiano suo salut(em). ad ducenariae procurationis splendorem iamdudum te provehere studens utor opportunitate quae nunc [o]btegit. succede igitur Mario Pudenti tanta cum spe perpetui favoris mei, quantam conscientiam retinueris innocentiae diligentiae experientiae. Vale, mi Marsiane, karissime mihi.
>
> Copy of his codicils: Caesar Antoninus Augustus to his own Domitius Marsianus, greetings. Having long been eager to promote you to the splendour of a procuratorship at 200,000 sesterces, I seize the opportunity which now offers. Succeed therefore to Marius Pudens with every hope of my continued favour, so long as you know yourself to retain your integrity, diligence and experience. Farewell, my Marsianus, dearest to me.

Epictetus represents a proconsul of Achaea saying that 'Caesar wrote me a codicil' (Καῖσάρ μοι κωδίκελλον ἔγραψε),[4] and according to Suetonius, Claudius' codicils granting offices were 'substituted or even openly altered' by his freedmen.[5] Whoever made the actual decision, codicils of office were evidently presented in the form of a personal letter from the emperor. As late as the tenth century, the *Book of Ceremonies* shows officials receiving codicils of office directly from the emperor's hand. The formulas for the various offices preserved among Cassiodorus' *Variae* give some idea what the text of late antique codicils looked like, though earlier examples were obviously much shorter and less verbose.

Nothing suggests that early imperial codicils of office were made from precious materials. One of a series of epigrams by Martial on writing-tablets of various materials and sizes describes one of five leaves that confers high office on a man ('quinquiplici cera cum datur altus honos', 14.4). Since the preceding epigram describes tablets (*pugillares*) of citrus-wood and the following the advantage of ivory tablets (black letters on white ivory), the presumption is that the five-fold office-conferring tablet was not of ivory. But a number of passages in Themistius refer to writing-tablets (δέλτοι) as symbols of high office made from gold or ivory.[6]

In earlier times the actual letter of appointment must have been written on the inside surface of a (probably wooden) diptych, running onto a third or more leaves if more space was required (Martial's appointive diptych ran to five leaves). But once diptychs

[2] Briefly, C. H. Roberts and T. C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex* (1987), chs 3–4.
[3] *AE* 1962, 183: H.-G. Pflaum, 'Une lettre de promotion de l'empereur Marc Aurèle…', *Bonner Jahrb.* 171 (1971), 349–66; translation adapted from F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (1977), 288.
[4] *Diss.* 3.7.30. Two inscriptions from Ancyra refer to a man holding office 'by a letter and tablets of the divine Hadrian' (ἐξ ἐπιστολῆς καὶ κωδικίλλων θεοῦ Ἀδριανοῦ, *IGR* III.174–5).
[5] *V. Claud.* 29.1, 'suppositos aut etiam palam immutatos datorum officiorum codicillos'.
[6] *Or.* 18, 224b; *Or.* 23, 293b (cf. 292b).

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began being made of ivory, that would no longer have been feasible. According to the *Kletorologion* of Philotheos (datable to 899), patricians were presented with the insignia of their office by the emperor in the form of 'decorated ivory plaques' (πλάκες ἐλεφάντιναι κεκοσμημέναι)[7] together with 'codicils inscribed in the form of the law' (σὺν κωδικέλλοις ἐγγεγραμμένοις εἰς τύπον τοῦ νόμου).[8] Since a number of passages in the tenth-century *De Caerimoniis* refer to the presentation either of codicils alone (*Caer.* 238, 239, 240, 241, 254, 255) or of ivory plaques alone (*Caer.* 248, 249, 251, 260), the implication is that the codicil was something different from the diptych, not just the document inscribed on its interior writing surface. In *Caer.* 1.56 the candidate for promotion receives codicils from the emperor's hand, in 1.57 plaques (πλάκες); 1.59 describes 'plaques *with* codicils' (τὰς πλάκας μετὰ τῶν κωδικέλλων); 1.60 'plaques *without* codicils'.[9] Since we find plaques both with and without codicils, the codicils were not (it seems) written directly on the plaques. Reiske long ago suggested that the actual letter was written on a strip of papyrus enclosed between the two leaves of the diptych, treated as a sort of envelope.[10] This may already have been fourth-century practice.

Our best source for the physical appearance of codicils of office is the miniatures of the early fifth-century *Notitia Dignitatum*. Unlike the miniatures of the Vienna Dioscorides, we do not have them in their original form, but in Renaissance copies. Thus the illustrators had no first-hand understanding of what they were copying and we cannot press details with any confidence. Among the insignia of the various offices depicted in successive illustrations, we regularly find a rectangular object represented by a series of lines on the right-hand side as a book with a number of pages, set up on a blue cloth-covered table with a candelabra on each side (Fig. 1). These rectangles are normally white (in the light of Themistius 224b suggesting ivory)[11] and decorated with various geometrical patterns, usually with some sort of gold trim, exactly like the codex held by Anicia Juliana.[12]

Many are also inscribed with names and offices: those of *spectabilis* grade with *Fl(avius) Intall(ius) com(es) ord(inis) pr(imi)*; those of *illustris* grade with representations of a head or heads (presumably imperial); and those of lower rank with *Fl. Val.* and a variety of different continuations (Fig. 2).[13] It seems that the front leaf of the diptych bore either the emperor's portrait or the name and new office of the official (in the *Notitia* miniatures misread beyond recovery by successive copyists), while the writing surface inside carried the actual letter of appointment.[14] This is borne out by a law of Constantine that refers to a man's office being attested by either the 'outer imprint' or 'inner writing' of his codicils ('superna codicillorum inpressio vel scribtura … interior').[15] The obvious parallel here is the

[7] Though not all plaques were ivory. The *insigne* of the proconsul (ἀνθύπατος) consisted of 'purple inscribed codicils' (κωδίκελλοι ἁλουργοειδεῖς γεγραμμένοι, Philoth. 95.11), evidently the ἀνθυπατικόν described in *Caer.* 256 as a 'purple quaternion' (πορφυροῦν τετράδιον), implying a diptych, but presumably not ivory.

[8] N. Oikonomidès, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IX^e et X^e siècles* (1972), p. 93. 23; see too below.

[9] See the commentary in A. Vogt, *Constantin Porphyrogénète: le livre des cérémonies* I–II (1935–1939).

[10] 'quae medio suo continebant diploma honoris in membrana exaratum', J. J. Reiske, *Constantini Porphyrogeniti de Caerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae* ii (1830), 277. Given the verbosity of Byzantine chancellery prose (exemplified by Cassiodorus' *Variae*), it is unlikely that there was room on the panels themselves for the full text of the codicils.

[11] Hardly papyrus or parchment, especially in view of the gold trim, though conceivably painted wood.

[12] For a meticulous analysis of the various types, R. Grigg, 'Portrait-bearing codicils in the illustrations of the *Notitia Dignitatum*', *JRS* 69 (1979), 107–24; on *codicilli* see too P. C. Berger, *The Insignia of the Notitia Dignitatum* (1981), 175–83 and 275–81 and R. Lizzi, 'Codicilli imperiali e insignia episcopali: un'affinità significativa', *Rendiconti … Lombardo* 122 (1988), 3–13.

[13] See *PLRE* ii. s.v. 'Fl. Intall.' and 'Fl. Val.'.

[14] V. Marotta, *Mandata Principum* (1991), 12, 38, surely mistakenly, argues that codicils contained the official's *mandata*, instructions on his duties (on which see Millar, op. cit. (n. 3), 314–16).

[15] *Cod. Theod.* 6.22.1. Berger, op. cit. (n. 12), 177 identified *impressio* as the carved or painted image shown on the exterior surface of the *Notitia* illustrations and *scriptura* as the 'written part' inside, but I suspect that both terms mean no more than 'writing'.

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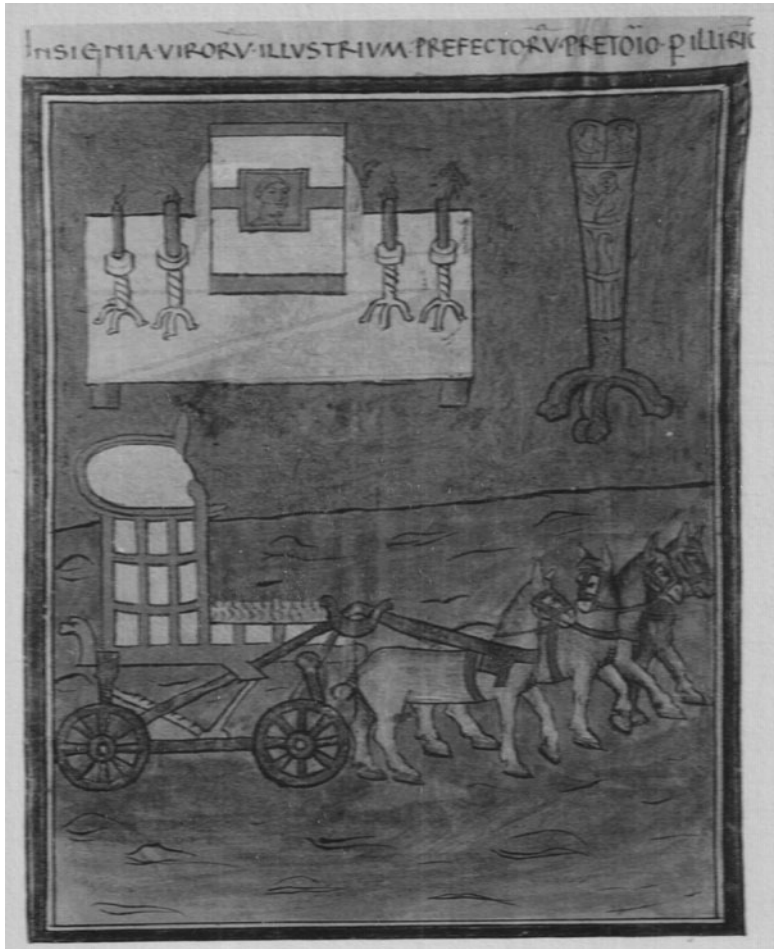


FIG. 1. Insignia of praetorian prefect in *Notitia Dignitatum*. (*Photo: H. Omont*)

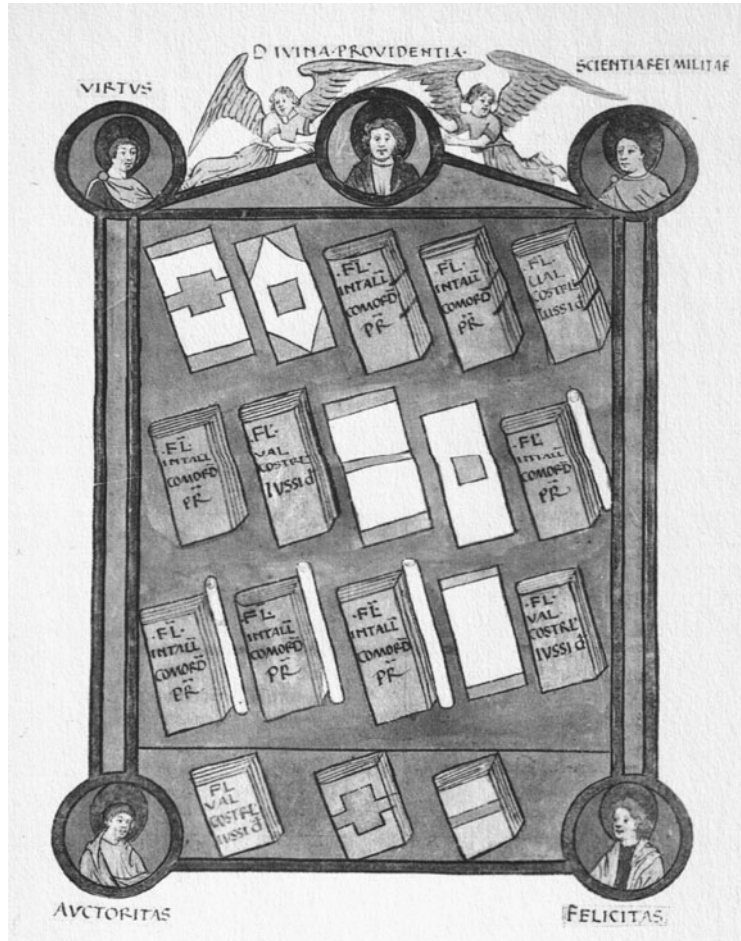


FIG. 2. Codicils of various offices in *Notitia Dignitatum*. (*Photo: H. Omont*)

hundreds of surviving *tabulae honestae missionis*, sealed bronze *codicilli* attesting to the years of service and honourable discharge of Roman soldiers. The official notarized copy of the document is inscribed in full on the inside, but was often repeated on the outside, to save the veteran breaking the seal unless he really needed to.[16]

A law issued at Milan in 381 appears to distinguish between *codicilli*, *epistulae* and *insignia* for different offices,[17] perhaps just literary variants. But the instruments for conferring some offices (notably the consulship) do appear to have been scrolls rather than diptychs. It would be unwise to assume that the forms remained constant between the fourth and tenth centuries, but this may have been so for some offices. According to *Caer*. 1.56, the patrician received *codicilli*, and the famous portrait of Anicia Juliana in the Vienna Dioscorides shows her holding what is clearly a gold-trimmed rectangular codex (the only official rank Juliana held, exceptionally enough for a woman, was that of patrician).

The tables in the *Notititia Dignitatum* miniatures suggest that officials displayed their codicils while conducting business, as a symbol of their authority. A striking parallel is provided by the blue cloth-draped table set in front of Pilate's throne in a miniature of the trial of Jesus in the Rossano Gospels.[18] Officials are also often depicted with codicil-diptych in hand. For example, Eucherius on the Stilicho diptych and Anicia Juliana in the Vienna Dioscorides. John Chrysostom refers in a sermon to emperors 'offering their prefects gold writing-tablets as a symbol of their authority'.[19] While few of his listeners will have witnessed the actual ceremony in person,[20] many will have seen it represented in art, and it is probably such representations he had in mind.

The original codicil-diptych presented by the emperor presumably existed in a single copy, no doubt treasured by the office-holder himself. If it carried a portrait, it must have been the emperor's portrait (as on some of the diptychs illustrated in the *Notititia Dignitatum*), not the office-holder's. But by the late fourth century people began to present their friends with diptychs of their own, decorated with elaborate depictions of the games they had given or insignia of the office they now held. As we shall see, office-holders also distributed other gifts: gold coins, silver plates, and even more modest mementos. Two large silver spoons (now lost) found near Aquileia and published in 1792 are evidently part of the *sportula* of a consul called Eusebius (there were consuls of that name in 347 and 359, perhaps father and son).[21] Both are decorated with consular tableaux: one shows the consul standing in *trabea*, the other seated on his *sella curulis* in tunic and chlamys; on both spoons he is accompanied by attendants and flanked by a curtain (Figs 3a and b). The curtain, different dress and different poses all appear in the consular portraits in the Calendar of 354 and reappear on consular diptychs.

The repertory of scenes and motifs we find on consular diptychs has a long history. But the diptychs themselves, gifts commemorating the holding of certain offices, are an innovation. The reason these gifts took this new form is surely someone's brainwave of copying the *form* of his codicils of office as a memento for his friends, an innovation that rapidly caught on. We have seen that by the mid-fourth century codicils of office might be made of ivory, at least for the highest offices, so it is not surprising that ivory

[16] M. M. Roxan and P. Holder, *Roman Military Diplomas* I–V; many colour images can be found by googling 'Roman Military Diplomas'.
[17] *Cod. Theod.* 6.22.5; Berger, op. cit. (n. 12), 175–6.
[18] W. Loerke, 'The miniatures of the trial in the Rossano Gospels', *Art Bulletin* 43 (1961), 171–95, at 177–9; see too Berger, op. cit. (n. 12), 196–7.
[19] οἱ βασιλεῖς τοῖς ἑαυτῶν ὑπάρχοις χρυσᾶς ὀρέγουσι δέλτους, σύμβολον τῆς ἀρχῆς (*In illud vidi* 2, *PG* 56.110).
[20] And probably not Chrysostom himself, at the time he delivered this sermon still a priest at Antioch, as Montfaucon correctly inferred from *PG* 56.111; cf. his introduction, quoted ibid., col. 95.
[21] See the drawings in R. Garruci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana* VI (1881), 90, pl. 462.

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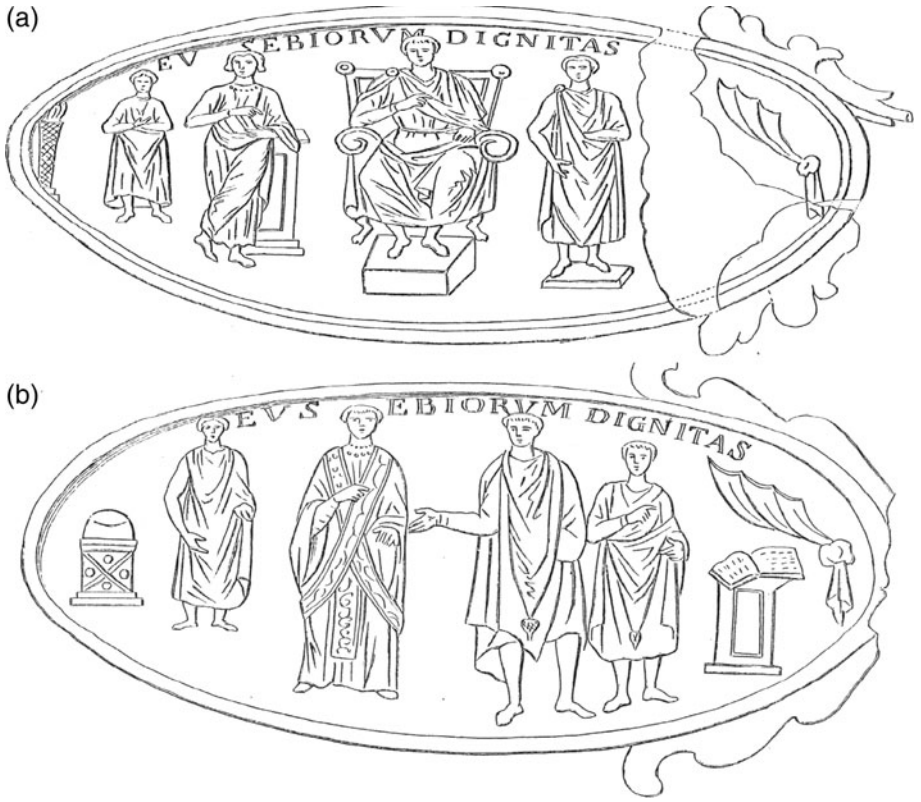


FIG. 3. Silver consular spoons from Aquileia. (*After R. Garruci*)

was the material chosen for these imitation, commemorative *codicilli*. The diptych Symmachus sent the emperor Eugenius in 393 was made of ivory with a gold trim, just like the *codicilli* depicted in the *Notitia*.[22]

III DIPTYCHS AND GAMES

Most surviving diptychs date from the late fifth and sixth centuries, and were undoubtedly issued by consuls. But to start with it was only one category of magistrate who presented them: those who provided games.[23] For late fourth-century Rome the most informative evidence on the distribution and distributors of diptychs is Symmachus' correspondence. The most illuminating single text is *Ep.* 2.81, sent to his oldest and closest friend, the elder Nicomachus Flavianus in 393/94:

> Now that his games as [quaestor] *candidatus* are over, my son [Memmius] Symmachus offers you his quaestorian gifts (*dona quaestoria*), and also honours the rest of our connections (*ceteras necessitudines*) with similar gifts. Please then, as one who made so many and such splendid contributions to his display, receive in his name the diptychs and souvenirs (*diptycha et apophoreta*). In addition I have sent our Lord and Emperor [Eugenius] a

[22] Symm., *Ep.* 2.81.2.
[23] By 'provided' I mean paid for, as an obligation of the office held.

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> diptych with gold trim (*auro circumdatum*). I have also honoured the rest of our friends with ivory writing-tablets (*eburneis pugillaribus*) and silver bowls. To your initiative and discretion I entrust the disposition of the enclosed (*quae missa sunt*) to individuals as you think fit.

One or two additional details are supplied by another letter (*Ep.* 7.76) written at the same time to a plurality of addressees designated collectively 'brothers' (*fratribus*). Its ponderous formality and lack of personal detail suggest that it is Symmachus' standard 'cover-letter' to connections who were not intimates (copies sent to individual members of this group will naturally have been individually addressed):[24]

> It is a duty and a pleasure (*religiosum atque votivum*) to offer the customary gifts of quaestors *candidati* to eminent people and close friends (*potissimis atque amicissimis*), a category in which (of course) you are included. So I present you with an ivory diptych and two-pound silver bowl (*eburneum diptychum et canistellum argenteum librarum duarum*) in the name of my son, who has performed his quaestorian liturgy. I very much hope you will accept with pleasure this mark of respect.

The *dona quaestoria* (it appears) consisted of a diptych and silver bowl, and in 401 Symmachus distributed the same combination of diptych and bowl in commemoration of Memmius' praetorian games.[25] Another letter (5.56) sends the same package to a man who had missed the games. 'Diptych' (used five times by Symmachus)[26] was his standard term (*pugillares* in 2.81 for variety on his third reference in the same letter). *Ep.* 7.76 specifies that the bowl weighed two pounds, presumably as a check against substitution of a smaller bowl by the carrier. In 2.81 Symmachus claims to have sent sets of these two gifts to 'the rest of our connections' (*necessitudines*), later in the letter glossed as 'friends'; 7.76 adds 'eminent people' (*potissimi*). For a prominent aristocrat like Symmachus in his mid-fifties, a former prefect of Rome who had already been accorded the (for a civilian) rare honour of an ordinary consulate, such 'connections' must surely have been numbered in the hundreds. In addition, he sent Flavianus a number of 'spares' to distribute at his discretion to suitably important people Symmachus himself might have overlooked. At the time Flavianus was serving as praetorian prefect at court, where he was likely to meet important people he knew Symmachus would want to add to the already generous roster of his 'friends'. Aristocrat though he was, Symmachus was ever anxious to correspond with the latest arriviste ministers at court, however low their origins. Symmachus always knew who to tap for a favour for himself or those close to him.

The earliest surviving ivory that can be assigned a fairly firm date, place and social context (Rome, 402) is the celebrated SYMMACHORVM/NICOMACHORVM. Since several other panels have been linked to this diptych on stylistic grounds[27] and no surviving eastern diptych can be certainly dated before 506, it has been widely assumed that the custom originated as part of the ostentatious display of the aristocracy of Rome and only later spread to the East. The exact opposite may be nearer the truth. In the first place, the fact that the standard term 'diptych' was Greek in origin might be thought to imply an originally eastern custom. Both *diptychum* and δίπτυχον are neologisms of the late fourth century, of the age (in fact) when presentation diptychs first appear.[28] Instead of one of the well-established Latin terms for a writing-tablet

[24] Symm., *Ep.* 7.76.
[25] *Ep.* 5.56, to Sallustius, PVR 387.
[26] In addition to 2.81 (twice) and 7.76, cf. 5.56 and 9.119.
[27] Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (2011), 712–42.
[28] Apart from texts already quoted in this paper, the only other examples of the word I have come across in Latin (apart from references to ecclesiastical diptychs) are the Scholia to Juvenal 9.35, glossing *blandae … tabellae* by *blandis diptychis*; and the (probably fifth-century) *Vita beatae Pelagiae* 20, *transmisit diptychum tabularum*, in

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(*tabulae*, *tabellae*, or *pugillares*), for Memmius' presentation diptychs even the purist Symmachus uses the previously unattested *diptychum*. By contrast, the term for the actual appointive document remained Latin *codicilli*, established in official usage since the first century and simply transliterated into Greek as κωδίκελλοι.

More important, the earliest securely datable evidence for presentation diptychs comes from the East, a law dated 25 July 384 at Heraclea (on the Black Sea) and addressed to the senate (*ad senatum*):[29]

> No private person shall be permitted to distribute (*largiri*) pure silk vestments (*holosericam vestem*) at any exhibition of games. We also confirm by this constitution that, with the exception of ordinary consuls, no one else shall have the right to give presents of gold (*auream sportulam*) or ivory diptychs (*diptycha ex ebore*). When public spectacles are celebrated, the presents (*sportulis*) shall be silver coin and the diptychs made of other materials (*alia materia diptychis*).

Scholars unfamiliar with the problems of using imperial legislation as a historical source have assumed that this law was of general application, and that non-consuls who issued diptychs must either have ignored it or obtained a special dispensation.[30] Others have inferred that ivory was reserved for consular diptychs as a special mark of honour.[31] In fact, though issued (like all imperial laws) in the names of the whole imperial college, this law was addressed by the eastern emperor, Theodosius I, to the senate of Constantinople. It did not apply to and was not valid in the West. A few months later Theodosius addressed another edict *ad senatum* (*Cod. Theod.* 6.4.25, issued at Constantinople), raising the number of praetors and fixing limits to the sums they were to spend on their games.[32] These limits were clearly intended as maxima rather than minima. That is to say, this law was part of the same concerted attempt to regulate expenditure on the games of Constantinople as *Cod. Theod.* 15.9.1. The details of 6.4.25 prove beyond question that it was solely concerned with the financing of games and the senate of Constantinople (the number and names of the praetors differed in the two capitals).[33]

It is true that, in his capacity as prefect of Rome in the same year 384, Symmachus wrote to court with proposals for restricting expenditure on the games in Rome.[34] A law was no doubt issued in response, but it was not *Cod. Theod.* 6.4.25 or 15.9.1, nor even a suitably adapted or modified version. In the East the number of praetors was raised from four to eight in 384 (thus halving the cost of the games each gave at a stroke), and further reductions were added in the course of the next few years. No such drastic measures were taken at Rome.[35] A ban was imposed on distributing *holosericae vestes* (which Symmachus himself tried to evade),[36] but the number of praetors remained the same,

fact a literal translation from δίπτυχον in the Greek original (P. Petitmengin (ed.), *Pélagie la pénitente: Métamorphoses d'une légende* I (1981), 106–7, 172).

[29] *Cod. Theod.* 15.9.1.

[30] Delbrueck, op. cit. (n. 1), 6, 73; E. Weigand, 'Ein bisher verkanntes Diptychon Symmachorum', *JDAI* 52 (1937), 127; E. Capps, 'The style of the consular diptychs', *AB* 10 (1927), 62; W. F. Volback, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters*[3] (1976), 29.

[31] K. Bowes, 'Ivory lists: consular diptychs, Christian appropriations and polemics of time in Late Antiquity', *Art History* 24 (2001), 338–57, at 343, improbably arguing that the use of ivory 'may have been intended to evoke [the] … earliest consular lists … written on whitened tablets'.

[32] A. Chastagnol, 'Observations sur le consulat suffect et la préture au Bas-Empire', *Revue historique* 219 (1958), 237–52; G. Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale* (1974), 150–2.

[33] For more detail, Alan Cameron, 'A note on ivory carving in fourth century Constantinople', *AJA* 86 (1982), 126–9.

[34] *Rel.* 8, with commentary by D. Vera, *Commento storico alle relationes di Q. Aurelio Simmaco* (1981), 74–82.

[35] Chastagnol, op. cit. (n. 32), 249.

[36] *Ep.* 4.8.1 (more below).

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and those who really wanted to make a splash were evidently free (as we shall see) to spend staggering sums (Symmachus himself laid out 2,000 pounds of gold). Not only is there no evidence for a corresponding western restriction on the issuing of diptychs. It would have made no sense in the Roman context.

It is often stated that diptychs were announcements of the honorand's promotion or invitations to the consular ceremonies. But we are fortunate enough to have the invitations Symmachus issued for Memmius' praetorian games in 401: *Ep.* 8.71 (headed *ad praeturam multos invitat*) and 72 (headed *similis*). They say nothing about diptychs. The eastern law of 384 includes the distribution of diptychs as one item in a series of regulations about expenditure on games in Constantinople. As for Rome, on three separate occasions Symmachus directly and explicitly links the presentation of Memmius' diptychs with the *completion* of his games.[37] Significantly enough it is while describing the animals captured for Stilicho's consular games that Claudian evokes the distribution of his diptychs (see below).

Representations and imagery of the games are ubiquitous on the figural consular diptychs of the sixth century:[38] almost every representation of the consul himself shows him holding the *mappa* (Section VII below). The games were after all the consuls' only real obligation as consuls.[39] Thus the earliest literary evidence bears out the abundant iconographic evidence that the original function of diptychs was to commemorate the games the official gave rather than the office he held. That is to say, diptychs were originally an obligation on the handful of magistrates who provided games: at Rome, quaestors, praetors and suffect consuls; at Constantinople, praetors and ordinary consuls; elsewhere, provincial priests.

The uninscribed diptychs in Leningrad and Liverpool decorated with wild beast shows (59 and 60 V)[40] clearly commemorated the games of some magistrate, probably (as we shall see) those of a quaestor or praetor rather than consul (Fig. 4). Compare too the diptych in the Louvre (58 V), usually dated *c.* 400 (Fig. 5). The crown at once identifies the official presiding at the games illustrated in the lower register as a priest of the imperial cult, officials whose main responsibility, in East and West alike, was providing games.[41]

We also have the evidence of several clay tablets, most from North Africa, apparently cheap copies of ivory diptychs, perhaps made by actually pressing the original diptych into wet clay to form a mould. The most sensational of these is Jeffrey Spier's recent publication of two fragments that when joined make up the greater part of one leaf of a hitherto unknown consular diptych, that of Anicius Auchenius Bassus cos. 408 (Fig. 6).[42] But in some ways more historically interesting and important are the fragments of diptychs like the Liverpool and LAMPADIORVM panels, where three officials stand in a circus loge watching racing or *venationes* represented in the lower register. One is a fragment in the Benaki museum in Athens, showing three officials

[37] 'peracto munere candidato offerto' (*Ep.* 2.81); 'offero … filii mei nomine qui quaestorium munus exhibuit' (*Ep.* 7.76); *Ep.* 5.56, sending Sallustius his diptych, remarks that he had missed the games.

[38] J. Engemann, 'Die Spiele spätantiker Senatoren und Consulen, ihre Diptychen und ihre Geschenke', in G. Bühl, A. Cutler and A. Effenberger (eds), *Spätantike und byzantinische Elfenbeinbildwerke im Diskurs* (2008), 53–77; C. Olovsdotter, *The Consular Image: An Iconological Study of the Consular Diptychs* (2005), 123–7.

[39] Of course, many consuls were also simultaneously prefects or generals, with heavy responsibilities, but games were their only obligation *as consuls*.

[40] Diptychs are cited according to their numbers in W. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*[3] (1976); 34 V = 34 Volbach.

[41] D. Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires médiévaux V^e–XV^e siècle* (2003), 43–4, no. 6. For the crown, J. Rumscheid, *Kranz und Krone: Zu Insignien, Siegespreisen und Ehrenzeichen der römischen Kaiserzeit* (2000), 38–9, 144–5, no. 66 for the Louvre diptych; D. Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West* II.1 (1991), 477–8, with 574–84 for the games they provided.

[42] 'A lost consular diptych of Anicius Auchenius Bassus (AD 408) on the mould for an ARS plaque', *JRA* 16 (2003), 350–4.

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FIG. 4. Liverpool Venatio Diptych. (*Photo: Liverpool Museum*)

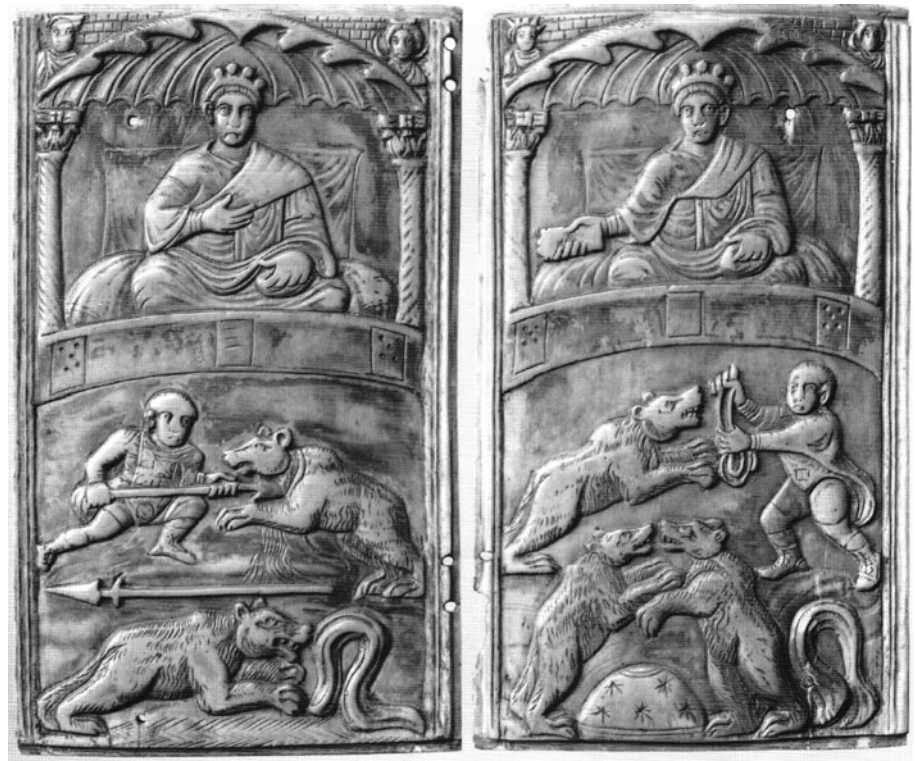


FIG. 5. Louvre Venatio Diptych. (*Photo: Louvre*)

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FIG. 6. Clay mould for diptych of Anicius Bassus. (*Photo: J. Spier*)

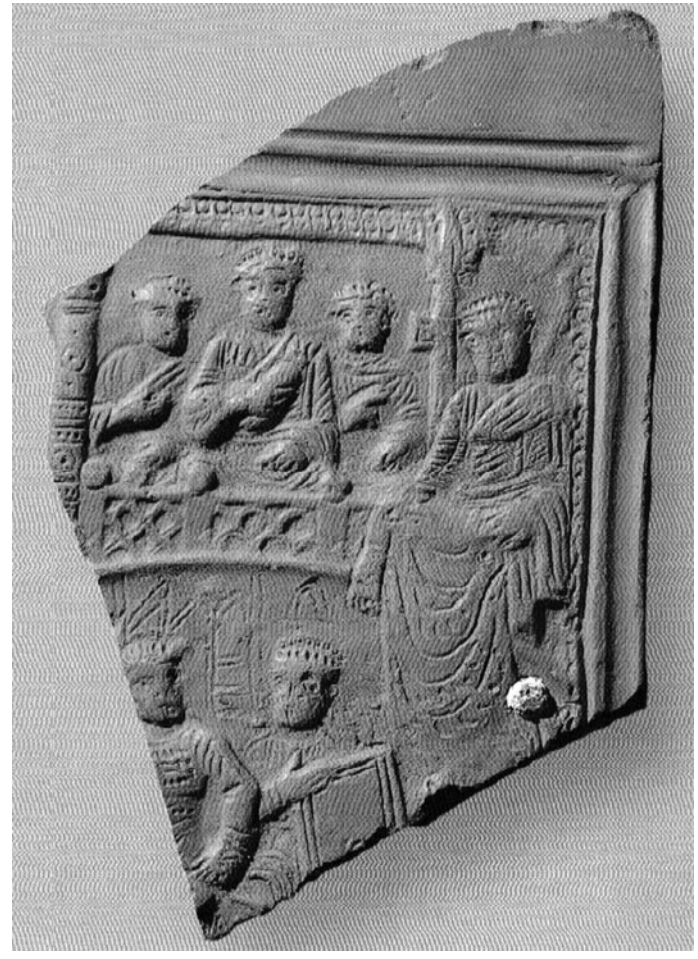


FIG. 7. Benaki panel. (*Photo: Benaki Museum*)

(Fig. 7);[43] a second, found at Ephesus, must originally have shown three officials, but the left-hand side is broken off, leaving only two. But in both there is another figure to the right-hand side of those in the loge, holding out over the arena a piece of fabric. It is tempting to identify this fabric with the 'pure silk vestments' (*holosericam vestem*) mentioned along with diptychs in the law of 384. What is so interesting about these two pieces is that, as on the Louvre diptych, all the presiding officials, including the man holding the fabric, are wearing crowns. Clearly these panels commemorated games given by provincial priests, the Ephesus fragment perhaps in Ephesus itself. That is to say, not all diptychs were either made in or made for distribution in Rome or Constantinople.

On the basis of the law of 384 and the fact that most surviving presentation diptychs (almost all much later) are consular, it has been generally assumed that the presentation of ivory diptychs was originally (in both East and West) a consular privilege subsequently usurped by lesser officials. But this law did no more than regulate the *sportulae* expected of the only two officials obliged to provide games at Constantinople: praetors and ordinary consuls. Its purpose was to reduce the expenses incurred by praetors by removing one of their obligations. That only left the consuls.

At Rome diptychs were clearly not originally a consular privilege. The earliest western consular diptych we know of is that of Anicius Probus in 406. But at least half a dozen *non*-consular diptychs probably earlier than this have survived.[44] We have both leaves of a particularly splendid diptych commemorating Rufius Probianus *vicarius Romae* (62 V), an official who never gave games (actually, the Probianus diptych may have been presented to rather than by its honorand).[45] Then there is the diptych of the general Stilicho (63 V), presented in honour of his son Eucherius, promoted to the fairly junior post of tribune and notary as a small boy; the SYMMACHORYM/NICOMACHORVM diptych (55 V) and the LAMPADIORVM panel (54 V), where the family names in the genitive plural suggest commemoration of shared family occasions (weddings or funerals);[46] the Leningrad Lion Hunt diptych (59 V), the Liverpool Venatio (60 V) and the Consecratio panels (56 V). All are western, and at Rome none of them would have fallen within the purview of the 384 law.

IV OFFICIAL OR UNOFFICIAL?

Together with the *Notitia Dignitatum*, consular diptychs are perhaps the most important surviving repertory of the motifs and conventions of the official art of Late Antiquity. Given that they are visual commemorations of the highest offices of state, this is not surprising. But that does not automatically give the artefacts themselves official status. The codicils of appointment came from the emperor himself, whereas consular diptychs were gifts presented by the consul to colleagues and friends.

Presentation diptychs were *private* mementos, with no official standing or significance. We have seen that Symmachus handed them out by the score. We have one or both leaves of two copies of the diptychs of Magnus cos. 518, three each of Justinian cos. 521 and Philoxenus cos. 525, five of Anastasius cos. 517, and no fewer than seven of Areobindus cos. 506. There has been some discussion about just how valuable ivory was,[47] but the labour and skill required must have added considerably to the cost of the raw material. The expense was evidently

[43] See the wide-ranging discussion by J. W. Salomonson, 'Kunstgeschichtliche and ikonographische Untersuchungen zu einem Tonfragment der Sammlung Benaki in Athen', *BABesch* 48 (1973), 3–82.
[44] For discussion of their dates, see Cameron, op. cit. (n. 27), 712–42.
[45] As I argued in *JRA* 25 (2012), 509.
[46] See Cameron, op. cit. (n. 27), 730–4. On surviving evidence all these extensions are western, and it may be that this sort of extravagance did not survive the sack of Rome in 410.
[47] A. Cutler, *The Craft of Ivory* (1985), ch. 2.

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borne by the honorand, not the emperor. The cost of Symmachus' praetorian diptychs was surely part of the infamous 2,000 pounds of gold he spent on Memmius' games, and Areobindus was married to the fabulously wealthy heiress Anicia Juliana.

This point needs to be emphasized, since it is the implicit (often explicit) assumption of almost all modern writing on the subject that presentation diptychs are in some sense official. Robert Grigg's useful article on codicils repeatedly compares the evidence of 'official ivories'; Kathleen Shelton distinguished between 'official and private commissions', remarking that Stilicho's wife Serena 'appears to be the only woman represented on an official diptych'.[48] All surviving diptychs are private commissions. Let us examine a couple of cases.

The central figure on the LAMPADIORVM panel is clearly shown as a consul, wearing the *trabea*, carrying a sceptre capped by two imperial busts, and presiding at circus games (Fig. 8). But no Lampadius held the ordinary consulate before 530, and even if it were possible to date the panel that late, the genitive plural of the family name shows that the emphasis falls on the family rather than the office.[49] The obvious alternative is that the games it commemorates were provided by a *suffect* consul. At Rome the suffect's principal (perhaps only) obligation was the games for the *Natalis urbis* on 19–21 April, known as Parilia. The LAMPADIORVM ivory was surely issued by a suffect for this occasion. But Kruse insisted that only an ordinary consul could be shown with imperial busts on his sceptre; suffects, he pointed out, were appointed by the senate, not the emperor.[50] That is an overly legalistic reading of the sceptre, presupposing that the diptych is official. But Ausonius evokes the *trabea* and *sella curulis* of his young friend Paulinus of Nola as suffect, and Symmachus describes an (unnamed) suffect of 401 as wearing full consular regalia, which surely included a sceptre.[51]

Then there is the Trier panel (34 V). We have only the rear leaf, but its inscription, Q(ue) PATR(icius) ET SECVNDO [*consul ordinarius*], unmistakably identifies it as a diptych commemorating the second consulship of a man who was already a patrician.[52] This combination allows two possible candidates: Fl. Aetius cos. II 437 or the future Emperor Constantius III, cos. II 417, for various reasons almost certainly the latter. The panel shows a Muse reclining against a pillar holding a scroll while to her right a putto holds up a palm leaf; in a rectangular field to itself beneath the pediment at the top there is a bust of a young man with curly hair. But for the consular inscription it would surely never have occurred to anyone to identify the panel as half of a consular diptych.

Taking it for granted that consular diptychs were official commissions, Delbrueck did his best to read some contemporary, political meaning into this unexpected scene. His solution was to identify the putto as Eros and the Muse as Erato, patroness of lyric (and so wedding poetry), and find a reference to the marriage of Constantius to Honorius' sister Galla Placidia. It is true that the couple did in fact marry on 1 January 417, the day Constantius entered his second consulship. But Shelton rightly objected that there is no basis for this identification of either the Muse or her function, and that putti by no means always have erotic connotations.[53] The motif of a Muse leaning on a pillar is very common on sarcophagi, where she is identified as either Polyhymnia or (when

[48] K. Shelton, 'The diptych of the young office holder', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 25 (1982), 132–71, at 133 (later in the article she questions the traditional identification).

[49] Kruse (next note) follows Delbrueck in dating LAMPADIORVM to *c.* 425, without explaining either the genitive plural or how a man could be ordinary consul without appearing on the consular fasti.

[50] H. Kruse, *Studien zur offiziellen Geltung des Kaiserbildes im römischen Reiche* (1934), 107–8.

[51] 'hic trabeam, Pauline, tuam Latiamque curulem', Auson., *Ep.* 21.60; 'bigarum quae triumphum vehebant… palmata amictus et consulari insignis amictu', Symm., *Ep.* 6.40.1.

[52] Earlier work on this panel is superseded by K. Shelton, 'The consular Muse of Flavius Constantius', *AB* 65 (1983), 7–23.

[53] The Muse cannot be identified with any confidence, though by a process of elimination L. Paduano Faedo poses a choice between Polymnia or Calliope, both of whom, like the Muse of the panel, are usually shown holding a bookroll ('I sarcofagi romani con Muse', *ANRW* II.12, 2 (1981), 65–155, at 134–40).

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FIG. 8. Lampadiorum panel. (*Photo: K. Shelton*)

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holding a scroll) Calliope. Calliope is generally seen as the Muse of epic, Polyhymnia of mime, neither appropriate for a wedding. Members of the late Roman élite liked to think of themselves as men of culture,[54] and that is surely the purpose of this scene. We are not meant to identify a particular Muse, nor is she performing a particular function for the new consul.

The aim of the scene as a whole is simply to present Constantius as a man of culture, or (perhaps more plausibly in a military man) a patron of letters.[55] Since we know that sixth-century consular diptychs were produced in multiple non-identical copies, sometimes tailored to individuals (two of Justinian's diptychs carry an address to senators), we might infer that this one was sent to a man of letters, someone who would recognize a Muse when he saw one, rather than (say) a fellow military man, who might be puzzled (if flattered) by the learned imagery. For proof that the Muse has no specific relevance to either Constantius or the year 417, we may turn to one of the silver spoons of Eusebius cos. 347 or 359, where to the left of the consul seated on his throne, we find — a Muse leaning on a column holding a scroll. Constantius was not even the first consul to employ this motif on his consular *sportula*.

As Shelton saw, this interpretation of the Trier panel has wide-ranging repercussions. This is not the only late antique diptych to represent Muses. One panel of the so-called poet and Muse diptych in Monza shows Erato facing right playing her lyre, while on the other a bald male figure holding a scroll faces Erato (68 V). Then there is a diptych in the Louvre (69 V) showing six Muses and six poets (or philosophers), distributed in pairs between three registers on each panel (Melpomene holding a tragic mask, Euterpe with a flute, Urania with a globe, etc.). Both these diptychs have been assumed to be 'private' commissions, as distinct from the 'official' diptychs presented by consuls and other officials. Perhaps so. But we now know that at least one leaf of a diptych guaranteed consular by its inscription represented a Muse. Most critics have assumed that the now lost pair to the Trier panel must have carried a portrait of Constantius in consular regalia, yet that would make a very odd pairing for the Muse. Much more likely the missing leaf portrayed a poet or philosopher, like the Monza and Louvre diptychs. If so, the Monza and Louvre diptychs might also have been the *sportulae* of a consul or some other official.[56] On both these diptychs the 'poets' have been variously identified with anyone from Anacreon to Boethius, but, in the light of the Constantius diptych, might again be no more than non-specific figural evocations of classical culture, so important to the late Roman élite. The fact that they lack identifying inscriptions need not be an objection. There is no identifying inscription on a number of other undoubted presentation diptychs. Since they were his personal gifts, the consul could put whatever he liked on his consular diptychs, it seems. Probus cos. 406 had a picture, not of himself or even his games, but of the emperor Honorius celebrating a rare victory over barbarians.[57] Constantius no doubt sent out other, more conventional, diptychs as well.

V WHAT'S (NOT) ON THE BACK

For Kim Bowes, the more or less exclusive attention moderns have paid to the complex iconography on the front of the diptychs has led them to overlook 'the simple fact that

[54] Cameron, op. cit. (n. 27), ch. 10.
[55] So Shelton, op. cit. (n. 52), 20.
[56] So Shelton, op. cit. (n. 52), 21.
[57] Alan Cameron, 'The Probus diptych and Christian apologetic', in H. Amirav and Bas ter Haar Romeny (eds), *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron* (2007), 191–202.

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consular diptchs are *diptychs*, and that in the ancient world the diptych was first and foremost used for writing'.[58] On this basis she argues that what was written on the back of the diptych is the key to its function. Her own suggestion is consular fasti, 'intimately linked to Late Antique ideals of the consular office'. This presupposes as given that presentation diptychs were originally and after 384 exclusively reserved for consuls. But not only were they an obligation on *all* officials who provided public games. In the West at any rate they were also presented by a variety of other officials and indeed by members of the élite in general. Before the mid-fifth century specifically consular diptychs would actually have been in the minority.

Bowes's argument rests on two texts. First, Prudentius, *Contra Symmachum* 1.595–7, describing the few remaining pagan nobles, men who have won the highest honours,

> fastorumque arce potiti
> annales proprio signarint nomine chartas,
> atque inter veteres cera numerentur et aere …
>
> though they have reached the height of the fasti and marked with their names the record of the years, and in wax or bronze are numbered among their ancestors …

According to Bowes, 'the "record of the years" refers to a list of consuls, while the descriptive "of wax or bronze" indicates written lists, either monumental inscriptions with bronze lettering, or more significantly for us, lists kept on wax-filled writing tablets'.[59] But in context 'annales … chartas' refers to centuries of consular ancestors in the abstract rather than actual consular lists; and line 597 has nothing to do with consuls. The 'wax' undoubtedly refers to wax ancestor masks and 'bronze' to busts of ancestors, both on display in the *atria* of great houses.[60] What Prudentius has in mind is the nobility in general, not consuls in particular. Only one of the unrepentant pagans he was evoking had actually held the consulship — Symmachus himself.

Second, Sidonius' description of the consular inauguration of Astyrius cos. 449. There was a roar of applause as soon as the largesse (*sportula*) was distributed 'and the *fasti* were presented' (*datique fasti*).[61] As early as Sirmond (1652) these *fasti* were identified as diptychs, no doubt influenced by the fact that a copy of Astyrius' consular diptych has survived.[62] But even if this is correct, *fasti* need not (and surely does not) refer to a consular list inscribed on the reverse of his diptychs. At all periods, the word *fasti* was commonly used as a *metaphor* for the consulship (cf. *arx fastorum* in Prudentius, just cited).[63] In a passage contemptuously underlining the worldly pomp of the consulship ('trabearum et curulium possessores … terreni munificentia triumphi … purpura vestra … gestatoria sella … census dispendia'), in the early sixth century Ennodius uses the phrase *decora fastorum*, again probably referring to diptychs.[64] In context, this cannot have been intended to evoke anything so mundane as a consular list.

It is true that Late Antiquity saw a widespread transference of consular lists from public monuments to private copies in manuscript form, but this had nothing to do with 'ideals of the consular office'. Rather these consular lists were one aspect of the shift of ancient

[58] Bowes, op. cit. (n. 31), 341.
[59] Bowes, op. cit. (n. 31), 342.
[60] So rightly Lavarenne in the note to his Budé edition; for wax masks, see H. I. Flower, *Ancestor Masks and Aristocratic Power in Roman Culture* (1996), especially 40–2 (add this text to the list of passages in Appendix A (pp. 281–325)); for busts, ibid., 79 n. 78, 94.
[61] Sidon., *Ep.* 8.6.5.
[62] So the translations of O. M. Dalton (1915), W. B. Anderson (1965), and A. Loyen (1970). The front leaf is now lost, but known from a sixteenth-century watercolour of both leaves.
[63] For a host of illustrations, *OLD* s.v. and *TLL* VI.327 (*metonymice i. q. consulatus*).
[64] Ennodius, *Libellus pro synodo* 133–4 (p. 67.2 Vogel).

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historiography from narrative and biography to chronography.[65] This is made clear by the fact that the polyonomous heroes of past centuries are invariably reduced to two names linked by *et* in the ablative case (e.g. *Tatiano et Symmacho* = 391):[66] they are simply *dates*. Bowes concedes that only an abridgment of the complete consular list (some 1,800 names by A.D. 400) could have been squeezed on to two tablets *c.* 30 by 10 cm each, but what could the symbolic value of an abridgment be? Actually a list of the consuls of the past twenty-five years would have served a practical purpose for anyone trying to calculate (say) when debts or loans fell due. But that would be to treat consular diptychs, not as creating continuity between the new consul and the glorious Roman past, but as calendars given out to customers by small businesses. In any case, by *c.* 400 most likely recipients would already have current consular lists of their own.

According to Bowes, diptychs 'were a particularly fancy brand of writing-tablet, with an inset surface, probably of wax, upon which the text of the diptych was written'. But this is to confuse the appointive diptych with the presentation diptych. The function of the appointive diptych did indeed turn on the text written inside it, an imperial letter appointing the honorand to this or that office. Presentation diptychs were simply gifts, mementos of the occasion. That was their function. The list that mattered was nothing to do with the diptych itself; it was the list of recipients, a list prescribed by convention and politics rather than left to the donor's personal inclinations. Symmachus clearly thought he had been deliberately slighted when the consular gifts of Richomeres and Bauto arrived several months late.[67] On the other hand Libanius, a rhetor in far-off Antioch, was delighted to receive an unexpected diptych from Tatianus cos. 391.[68] They were gifts, but gifts that marked the recipient out as a person of consequence.

Many name the consul and all his titles in a grandiose inscription running across the front of both panels (Fig. 9). That was quite enough to identify both man and occasion. Some carry no inscription at all on the front. The now blank *tabulae ansatae* of the Liverpool Asclepius and Hygieia diptych (57 V) no doubt originally bore a painted inscription, and the Stilicho diptych (63 V) is a special case. No contemporary could have been in any doubt about the identity of the persons represented (a military man, exceptionally shown with his wife, holding up a rose, the symbol of imperial succession, over their small son, a grandnephew of the emperor Theodosius).[69] But there is no inscription and no place for one on the so-called Patrician diptych in Novara (64 V), the Liverpool Venatio panel (59 V), the Leningrad Lion Hunt diptych (60 V), and the two figural diptychs 29 V and 42 V. Yet even so recipients hardly needed to be told who the donor was. Sidonius describes diptychs (if that is what *fasti* means) being distributed in person at the consular inauguration itself. Symmachus despatched Memmius' quaestorian and praetorian diptychs to those who could not be present with cover-letters: form letters for the majority (*Ep.* 7.76; 8.71 and 72), something more personal for close friends (2.81; 5.56).[70]

[65] On late antique consular lists see B. Croke, 'City chronicles of Late Antiquity', in G. Clarke (ed.), *Reading the Past in Late Antiquity* (1990), 165–203; S. Muhlberger, *The Fifth-Century Chroniclers* (1990), 23–47; and (especially) Richard Burgess, 'Non duo Antonini sed duo Augusti: the consuls of 161 and the origins and traditions of the Latin consular fasti of the Roman Empire', *ZPE* 132 (2000), 259–90.

[66] Greek consular lists normally substitute the genitive absolute, as invariably in dates given on papyri (for a complete list of consulates in the papyri from 284–641, R. S. Bagnall and K. A. Worp, *Chronological Systems in Byzantine Egypt*[2] (2004), 172–216). Theon and the Fasti Heracliani use the nominative.

[67] *Ep.* 3.59 and 61; *Ep.* 4.15; see C. Sogno, *Q. Aurelius Symmachus: A Political Biography* (2006), 65.

[68] *Ep.* 1021 (οὐκ ἐλπιζόμενον).

[69] On this motif see Shelton, op. cit. (n. 48), at 163–6; on the Stilicho diptych, see too now N. B. Kampen, *Family Fictions in Roman Art* (2009), ch. 6.

[70] On the basis of these letters of Symmachus, A. Eastmond, 'Consular diptychs, rhetoric and the languages of art in sixth-century Constantinople', *Art History* 33 (2010), 742–65, strangely tries to explain the purpose of diptychs

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FIG. 9. Diptych of Boethius. (*Photo: British Museum*)

There was simply no need for anything more on the back. Many presentation diptychs were not even functioning writing-tablets. Delbrueck claimed to have felt traces of wax with his finger in the recesses on the backs of diptychs he examined in person, but Tony Cutler, who has examined all the diptychs Delbrueck handled and others besides, could

in terms of 'epistolary theory'. But most diptychs were surely presented in person (as Sidonius describes) at the consular inauguration, especially in Constantinople, where everyone invited could easily attend.

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find no trace, in many cases not even a deep enough recess to sustain a bed of wax that would bear erasure and reuse.[71] They were *imitation* writing-tablets, meant to be admired for their exterior beauty rather than their interior writing surface. That is why so many have survived: some, incongruously enough, set in the covers of medieval bibles; the very pagan SYMMACHORVM/NICOMACHORVM decorates a twelfth-century reliquary.[72]

What were recipients expected to do with their diptychs? Surely to *display* them, like modern Christmas cards, on the contemporary equivalent of a mantelpiece or sideboard or hung on a wall, exterior surface outwards, to show envious friends that they had been on the select list of recipients. From this perspective, the quaestorian or praetorian diptychs of young Memmius Symmachus might be more desirable than the consular diptychs of a barbarian general like Bauto, because everyone knew that the list had been drawn up by his father, Q. Aurelius Symmachus, the influential head of the clan. If anyone was expected to use them for writing, it was surely the recipient. Items of stationary (from pens, jotters and calendars to embossed briefcases and flashdrives) have always been popular gifts for guests at venues from academic conferences to the White House.

By an intriguing coincidence it is at about the same time, *c.* 400, that we first hear of diptychs inscribed with the names of martyrs, bishops and other heroes of the Church, read out by a deacon during the Eucharist.[73] Once again the use of the originally Greek term in West and East alike suggests that the practice originated in the East. Given the novelty of the term and the coincidence in time, it is tempting to link the two customs in some way.[74] It is true that the backs of a few consular diptychs were *later* inscribed with liturgical texts (for example, those of Boethius cos. 487, Areobindus cos. 506 and Clementinus cos. 513). But *centuries* later.[75] There is no continuity here. Presentation diptychs (not consular diptychs alone) were re-used for liturgical purposes simply because they were ornate writing-tablets with blank rear surfaces convenient for drawing up lists.[76] It may indeed have been precisely because the backs were blank that they were so used.

The written content was central to the function of ecclesiastical diptychs, while for presentation diptychs inscribed with the honorand's name and titles the front said it all. One of the only two ecclesiastical diptychs to survive in material form, datable to 661/77, is in fact made of ivory, of much the same proportions as the average presentation diptych (25.5 by 12 cm), but much lighter, with no decoration of any sort on the front surface (Fig. 10).[77] As it happens, the text was not inscribed on a wax surface but written directly onto the ivory in ink. The front was unimportant; what mattered were

[71] Delbrueck, op. cit. (n. 1), 20; A. Cutler, 'Five lessons in late Roman ivory', *JRA* 6 (1993), 175 and 'Il linguaggio visivo dei dittici eburnei. Forma, funzione, produzione, ricezione', in M. David (ed.), *Eburnea diptycha: I dittici d'avorio tra Antichità e Medioevo* (2007), at 142–7.

[72] See now P. Williamson, *Medieval Ivory Carvings* (2010), 35–8.

[73] F. Cabrol, 'Diptyques (liturgie)', in F. Cabrol and H. Leclerq, *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* IV (1920), 1045–94; R. F. Taft, *A History of the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom: vol. IV: The Diptychs* (1991); see Lampe, *Patristic Lexicon*. s.v. and *TLL* IV.1227 s.v. b for many references.

[74] Bowes, op. cit. (n. 31), 347–50.

[75] For colour photo, transcription and discussion of the eighth-century liturgical list on the back of the Clementinus diptych, see M. Gibson, *The Liverpool Ivories* (1994), 19–22.

[76] Bowes's superficially attractive claim that liturgical lists 'are strikingly similar to the consular diptych's original function as holder of consular lists, not simply in their shared enumerative form, but in their function as definers of community' (p. 348), presupposes (of course) her hypothesis that they were indeed originally inscribed with consular lists. The same applies to her appeal to the garbled story in Quodvultdeus, *Gloria sanctorum* 15.23 (ed. R. Braun, 1964, p. 665. 23), about names of proconsuls inscribed *calculis eburneis* and read out to the people of Carthage.

[77] W. E. Crum, 'A Greek diptych of the seventh century', *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 30 (1908), 255–65; see too entry 287 in the catalogue *Ägypten: Schätze aus dem Wüstensand* (1996), 259. The other

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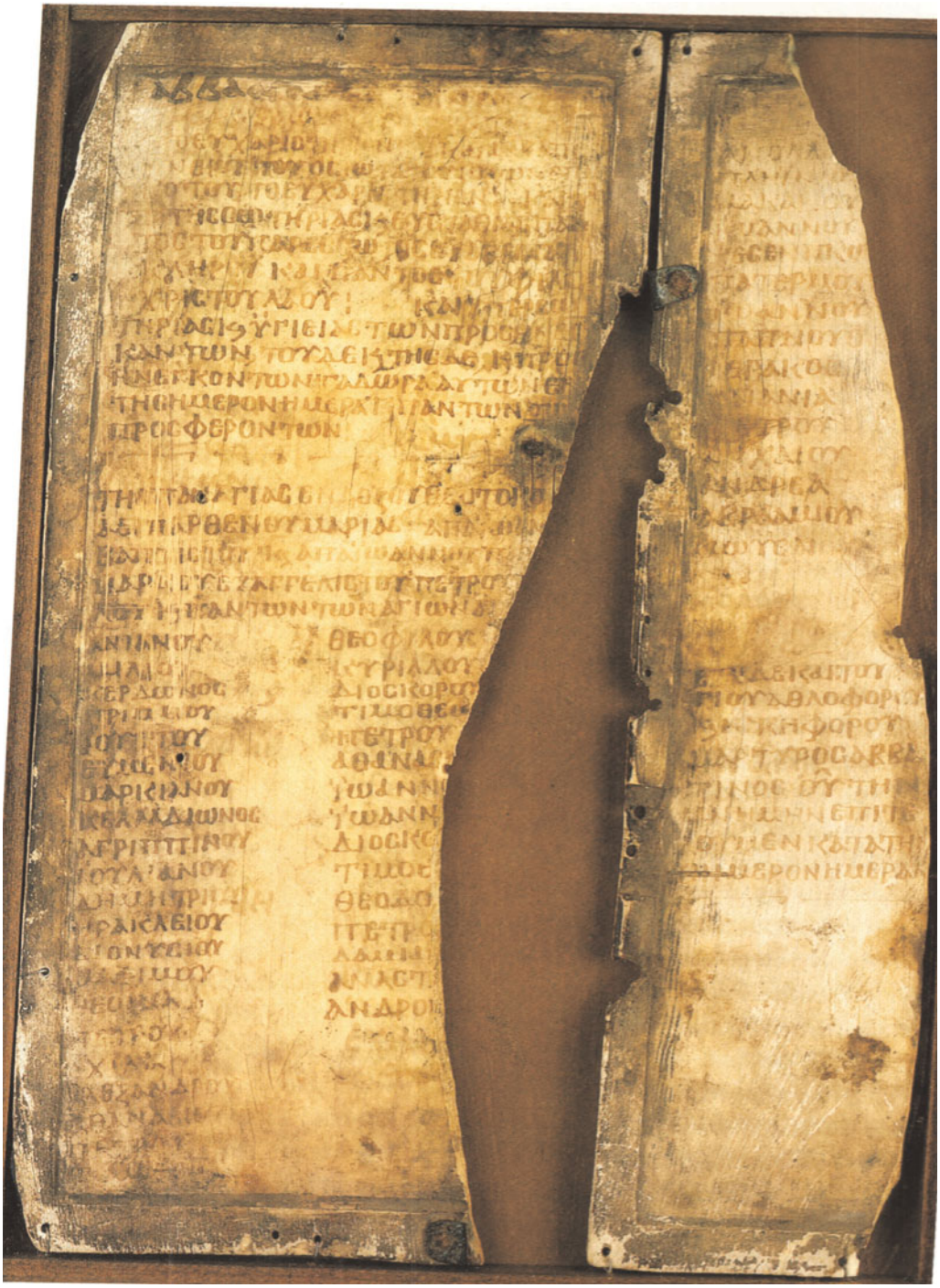


FIG. 10. Ecclesiastical diptych. (*Photo: British Museum*)

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the names on the inside, written to be read aloud to the congregation from the text held by the deacon. That was its function.

VI PRAETORIAN GAMES

As we shall see in more detail later, at Constantinople consular games took priority over praetorian games, so it made sense to reduce praetorian expenditure by restricting the burden of issuing diptychs to consuls. But in Rome praetorian games took priority well into the fifth century, and in the fourth at any rate western ordinary consuls seldom gave games, perhaps never in Rome itself. In fourth-century Rome it was quaestors, *suffect* consuls, and (above all, as they had been doing for centuries) praetors who provided games. It is enough to cite two passages of Juvenal that ridicule the pomp of the praetor presiding at the games:[78]

> What would he [Democritus] have made of a praetor standing there in his car,
> lifted high in the air amid the dust of the race-track,
> dressed in the tunic of Jove himself, with a curtain-like toga,
> of Tyrian embroidery draped on his shoulders …
> And don't forget the bird [eagle] that is perched on his ivory staff …
>
> The grandstands, meanwhile, are observing the rite, imported from Ida,
> of Cybele's napkin [the *mappa*]. The praetor (himself a prey to the horses)
> sits in state like a general in triumph.

The praetor is a 'prey to the horses' (*praeda caballorum*) because he has had to pay for them! Interestingly enough, after identifying the presiding official as *praetor* at 10.36, manuscripts surprisingly (and surely in error) call him *consul* at line 41, a reading variously emended by modern scholars.[79] And according to the scholia, which date from no earlier than *c.* 450,[80] 'the poet describes the consul dropping the *mappa* in the circus'. Both corruption and scholion surely date from the late fifth century, by when it was now the consul, not the praetor, who gave the big circus games in Rome.[81] A poem of Martial about a dinner guest who steals his hosts' napkins claims that he even stole the praetor's *mappa* when he was on the point of dropping it in the circus.[82] By the late fifth century the joke would surely have turned on stealing the consul's *mappa*.

By 361 praetors were designated up to ten years in advance to allow families to prepare for the expense. Given the tender age at which these offices were held — quaestors often still in their teens, praetors and suffects in their early twenties, occasionally younger — it was normally father who footed the bill and made the arrangements. The centrality of the praetorian games at Rome and the rôle played by the father (amply attested in

surviving diptych is wooden, also seventh-century, a single leaf inscribed on both sides in Coptic: M. McCormick, 'A liturgical diptych from Coptic Egypt in the Museum of Fine Arts', *Le Muséon* 94 (1981), 47–54.

[78] Juv. 10.36–43 and 11.193–5, trans. N. Rudd (1991); see Courtney's notes on both passages.

[79] See Courtney's note on 10.36, and R. G. M. Nisbet, *Collected Papers on Latin Literature* (1995), 252–3. James Willis in his 1997 Teubner solves the problem differently by deleting 10.41–2 as an interpolation.

[80] Alan Cameron, 'The date of the Scholia Vetustiora on Juvenal', *CQ* 60 (2010), 569–76.

[81] When these same scholia refer to *circenses quos praetores edunt* (on 11.195), the reference is no doubt specifically to the Ludi Apollinares (further below). For more on the praetor as president of the games, J. W. Salomonson, *Chair, Sceptre and Wreath* (1956), 34–7 and 82–8; for an engraving of a panel of a lost sarcophagus that may represent the praetor driving round the arena in a chariot, M. Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (2007), 283.

[82] Martial 12.28.9–10.

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Symmachus' correspondence) emerges with especial clarity from a well-known passage of Olympiodorus:[83]

> When Probus the son of Alypius celebrated his praetorship during the reign of the usurper John, he spent 1,200 pounds of gold. Before the capture of Rome, Symmachus the orator, a senator of middling wealth, spent 2,000 pounds when his son, Symmachus, celebrated his praetorship. Maximus, one of the wealthy men, spent 4,000 pounds on his son's praetorship.

Olympiodorus concludes with the remark that 'praetors celebrated their festivals for seven days'. Chastagnol identified these seven days as the first week of January,[84] supposedly the week-long games later provided by the ordinary consul. But the only evidence for consular games lasting for seven days comes from well over a century later, in Justinian's *Novel* 105 of 537, referring to Constantinople and clearly implied to be a reduction of the traditional programme:[85]

> It is our wish that [the consul's] processions (πρόοδοι, *processus*) shall number seven in all … The first procession shall be on 1 January, when he enters the office of consul and receives his codicils (σύμβολα, *codicilli*). The second spectacle will be horse-races, the so-called *mappa* (ἣν δὴ μάππαν προσαγορεύουσι). The third will be the chase of wild beasts in the (amphi-)theatre (τὴν τοῦ θεατροκυνηγίου), to be given not twice but once only. After that the so-called monhemerion (μονημέριον, *quod dicitur totius diei*) … the so-called pancarpon (πάγκαρπον), men fighting with beasts … The fifth procession will be the show called πόρναι… [theatrical entertainments] Next he will repeat the horse-races, called *mappa*, celebrating the sixth festal day. And then he will relinquish the annual honour … providing the usual entertainment for the people. And so the course of seven nights and processions will be completed.

The seven days are clearly not consecutive. While the first falls on 1 January, the day of the consul's inauguration, the seventh falls on 31 December, when he lays down his office. There is no indication when the other five fell, and the entertainments for the first and last days are not specified. While 2–6 January is one possibility, they might have been spread out at intervals over the year.[86] Polemius Silvius, in mid-fifth-century Gaul, records *prima consulis mappa* on 7 January, perhaps the second spectacle in Justinian's list.[87] It is usually assumed that consular diptychs were distributed at the consular inauguration, but it may be that those illustrating *venationes* were held back till the consul gave his *venationes*, on the third day (whenever that fell).

The obvious assumption is that, as in the Late Republic and Early Empire, the principal games provided by the praetors of Rome were the Ludi Apollinares, the responsibility of the urban praetor from as early as 212 B.C. By the mid-fourth century A.D., the Ludi Apollinares lasted from 5 to 13 July. Nine days are not seven days, but they were consecutive, as Olympiodorus implies, and it is possible that the number of days was reduced by the 420s when Olympiodorus was writing.[88] Furthermore, since consuls did give January games at court, this would have meant an embarrassing clash for VIPs

[83] Olymp. F 44 Müller = 41.2 Blockley, with Alan Cameron, 'Probus' praetorian games', *GRBS* 25 (1984), 193–6.
[84] Chastagnol, op. cit. (n. 32), 241, and, in a different context, in *Le sénat romain sous le règne d'Odoacre* (1966), 62 ('la semaine des jeux consulaires'); repeated as if fact by (e.g.) B. Lançon, *Rome in Late Antiquity* (2001), 142.
[85] Just., *Nov.* 105.1 (we have versions in both Latin and Greek), omitting rhetorical amplifications of the various events. On Justinian's reasons for reducing the programme, A. Cameron and D. Schauer, 'The last consul', *JRS* 72 (1982), at 140–1; M. Meier, 'Das Ende des Konsulats im Jahre 541/2 und seine Gründe', *ZPE* 125 (2002), 277–99.
[86] 'Altri cinque durante l'anno', E. Ravegnani, *Consoli e dittici consolari nella tarda antichità* (2006), 201.
[87] On Polemius, see below; his *secunda mappa* on 13 January and *consulis tertiae mappae* on 19 April cannot be squared with Justinian's programme.
[88] It is also possible that, though the festival lasted for nine days, only seven actually offered games.

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with sons scheduled to give praetorian games if they fell in January. It was considered bad form to refuse invitations to consular inaugurations at court,[89] even if this meant going all the way from Rome to Milan in the depth of winter.

VII THE *MAPPA*

The close link between diptychs and games is a further argument against linking them too closely with either the consulship or the wealth of the western aristocracy. In an earlier article I remarked that none of the earliest western consular diptychs carry depictions of the games or even show their consul holding the *mappa*.[90] Gudrun Bühl thought she had refuted the argument by citing coins showing *emperors* in consular robes holding the *mappa*.[91] But emperors are irrelevant to my point. The emperor had always been the Spielgeber *par excellence*. According to a late story, it was Nero who 'invented' the *mappa*; he was still dining when the games began and simply used his table napkin (*mappa*) to start the races.[92]

Even so, the first to be shown with the *mappa* on the coinage are eastern emperors. The motif first appears on the bronze coinage of the tetrarchs between 305 and 320.[93] The earliest example in gold is the solidus struck at Rome by Constantius II for his Roman visit of 357 (when he was cos. IX),[94] copied by almost all later emperors down to Phocas at the beginning of the seventh century (Fig. 11). Alföldi was shocked at what he saw as the official transformation of the soldier emperor of earlier times into an impresario of the games.[95] Games had in fact always been important to the way the emperors presented themselves in Rome, increasingly so by the fourth century,[96] but there can be little doubt that the consular *mappa* was an eastern innovation of the early fourth century.



FIG. 11. Consular solidus of Constantius II. (*Photo: British Museum*)

[89] J. A. McGeachy Jr, *Q. Aurelius Symmachus and the Senatorial Aristocracy of the West* (1942), 99.
[90] Alan Cameron, 'Consular diptychs in their social context: new eastern evidence', *JRA* 11 (1998), at 401.
[91] G. Bühl, 'Eastern or Western? — that is the question', in J. R. Brandt and O. Steen, *Imperial Art as Christian Art — Christian Art as Imperial Art* (2001), 193–203, at 198.
[92] First in Cassiodorus (*Var.* 3.48.9); in Polemius Silvius (on 7 January) it was Tarquinius Priscus. According to Quintilian (1.5.57), the word is Punic.
[93] Bruun in *RIC* VII (1966), 41 n. 5, 534.
[94] H. Stern, *Le Calendrier de 354* (1953), 163; *RIC* VIII (1981), pl. 11, no. 298.
[95] A. Alföldi, *Die monarchische Repräsentation im römischen Kaiserreiche* (1970), 152–4.
[96] Alan Cameron, *Circus Factions* (1976), ch. VII ('The Emperor and his People at the Games').

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The two best known pages of the Calendar of 354 are those that depict Constantius II and his Caesar Gallus, consuls that year, in full consular regalia. As Salzman rightly remarks, the 'consular imagery is strikingly similar to contemporary consular diptychs'.[97] I would omit the 'contemporary', since the earliest datable consular diptychs are a half-century later, but the representations of Constantius and Gallus are indeed strikingly similar to the consuls of the diptychs, not only in their elaborate consular robes, but in the architectural setting, the half shell beneath which the two figures sit or stand,[98] and (above all) in the representations of consular *sparsio*. Constantius is scattering coins from his outstretched right hand, while a large sack of coins stands by Gallus' right foot. There was a long-standing tradition of distributing *sportulae* at Rome, but specifically consular *sparsio* is first shown on coins of Constantine and is rare outside the coinage.[99] It was to become a standard feature of the bottom register of consular diptychs (Fig. 9). But until the fifth century only imperial consuls are shown in the act of *sparsio*. Furthermore, one standard feature of all the later diptychs is missing from even the imperial consuls of the Calendar: the *mappa*. The Calendar was painted three years *before* Constantius' consular solidi were struck in Rome.

The *mappa* is also missing from the thousands of contorniates that survive from the city of Rome, despite the fact that the majority are decorated with scenes and emblems from the games. Only two, two of the very latest, show a consul holding the *mappa*, the future emperor Petronius Maximus, cos. 433 and 443, and the emperor Majorian, cos. 458.[100] Nor is the consular figure on both silver spoons of the mid-fourth-century consul Eusebius shown with either sacks of coins or a *mappa*.

The evidence of yet another medium supports the inference that the motif of the consul with *mappa* originated in the East. Representations of the months were popular in Late Antiquity, particularly on mosaic pavements.[101] On one such pavement, in a villa in Argos, January is shown as a consul holding a *mappa* in an upraised right hand that is also dropping coins onto a stool, presumably his *sella curulis*.[102] On another, in a church in Gerasa, January is again shown as a consul with *mappa* in upraised right hand and a sceptre in his left.[103] The Argos January is a slightly incoherent combination of *mappa*, *sparsio* and *sella curulis* (on which the consul is usually shown sitting), but there can be little doubt that both scenes imply that consular games were the most characteristic or important event of January (Fig. 12). Then there is a January in the Vatican Ptolemy manuscript, again represented as consul with *mappa* in upraised right hand. The two pavements may be as late as the sixth century, but they must reflect a long-established tradition. The Vatican Ptolemy itself dates from 813/820, but the exact dates given for the entry of the sun into the various signs of the Zodiac on this page suggest that it is a careful copy of an original dating (according to Boll) from *c.* A.D. 250. Stern points out that the motif of the consul with *mappa* dates it to, at earliest, the first quarter of the fourth century.[104] But the astronomical indications will hardly permit a date much later than this.

[97] M. R. Salzman, *On Roman Time: The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity* (1990), 34.

[98] On the shell and architectural frame, Stern, op. cit. (n. 94), 306–14; Olovsdotter, op. cit. (n. 38), 152–4 and 157–73.

[99] Stern, op. cit. (n. 94), 155–8; see too Delbrueck, op. cit. (n. 1), 68–70; Ravegnani, op. cit. (n. 86), 192–5.

[100] A. and E. Alföldi, *Die Kontorniat-Medaillons* I (1976), no. 461 and 481, Taf. 188. 1–2 and 192. 4; II (1990), 213–14; cf. Kent, *RIC* X (1994), 383 no. 2179.

[101] In addition to Stern, op. cit. (n. 94), D. Levi, 'The allegories of the months in Classical art', *Art Bulletin* 23 (1941), 251–91; H. Stern, 'Les calendriers romains illustrés', *ANRW* II.12.2 (1981), 431–75; E. Courtney, 'The Roman months in art and literature', *Mus. Helv.* 45 (1988), 33–57; R. Hachlili, *Ancient Mosaic Pavements: Themes, Issues, and Trends* (2009), 191–5.

[102] Discussed in detail by G. Akerström-Hougen, *The Calendar and Hunting Mosaics of the Villa of the Falconer in Argos* (1974).

[103] S. J. Saller and B. Bagatti, *The Town of Nebo* (1949), 269 and 277 with pl. 50.3; correctly interpreted by Stern, op. cit. (n. 94), 376–7.

[104] Stern, op. cit. (n. 94), 221–2.

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FIG. 12. Mosaic of January and February. (*Photo: G. Akerström-Hougen*)

'The repertory of the allegories of the months', as Doro Levi describes it, 'is entirely composed of scenes referring to the characteristic events of each single month, which may be divided into two main categories: religious feasts … and civil events, mostly referring to life and activities in the country.'[105] Consular games, restricted to wherever the emperor might happen to be on the first few days of January, are an unexpected addition to this traditional, basically rural repertory. More interesting still, while appearing on eastern calendars as early as the fourth century,[106] on present evidence they *never* appear on western calendars before Polemius Silvius in 449. The best preserved, the codex calendar firmly dated to 354, offers for January a man with no insignia of office offering sacrifice. Some commentators see him as one of the new consuls, sacrificing on the Capitol; others identify him as a *vicomagister* sacrificing to the *Lares* at the festival of the *Compitalia* of 3–5 January, a better fit with the originally rural character of the repertory.[107] Since we

[105] Levi, op. cit. (n. 101), 276; see the table of such activities month by month in the fold-out table at the end of Stern, op. cit. (n. 101), 431–75.
[106] January is shown quite differently, pouring a libation, in earlier representations of the months, e.g. the second-century House of the Calendar in Antioch: S. Campbell, *The Mosaics of Antioch* (1988), 61.
[107] See Salzman, op. cit. (n. 97), 79–82, citing earlier discussions.

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have only Renaissance copies of the original, certainty is out of reach. But one thing is clear. Even if he is meant to be a consul, he is neither scattering coins nor starting circus games, and there is no hint of a *mappa*.

Most of the later western calendars are fragmentary and lack January, but we do know of one from Carthage, now lost, that was complete when R. Cagnat saw and described it in 1896.[108] The scenes have many similarities (as well as some differences) to those in the 354 calendar; Stern dated it no earlier than the first quarter of the fifth century. Like the January of the 354 calendar, the Carthage January is accompanied by a cockerel, but is otherwise shown in a heavy cloak carrying a basket with loaves of bread in one hand[109] and a branch stripped of leaves in the other, in keeping with the season.

If the mosaic calendars are often incomplete, we have seven fourth- to sixth-century Latin poems on the months, most of them probably written to accompany illustrated calendars, all of which cover January. Three of them remark that January was the month when the new consuls entered office,[110] but none link them to games or mention the *mappa*. One of them, a fanciful, cosmological account of the circus and its games, refers to Janus 'holding up a flag', 'vexillum … levans', to start the races. Courtney plausibly suggests that the poet had in mind 'a consul holding aloft his *mappa*', but (with the exception of Tertullian) none of the other surviving cosmologies of the circus are earlier than the sixth century, and there is no way of being sure that the poet was writing of the Roman rather than Byzantine circus.[111]

As a complement to the evidence of the calendars we have the similarly diverging evidence of accounts (mostly Christian diatribes) of the festival of the Kalends (held on the first few days of January) in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. For the West we have Augustine, Maximus of Turin and Peter Chrysologus (all writing before *c.* 430), none of whom mention chariot-racing among the evils that tempt the faithful.[112] For the East, we have Libanius, Chrysostom and Asterius of Amaseia. Libanius wrote both a eulogy and a description of the festival; the first mentions the consuls, the second chariot-racing. Chrysostom describes crowds cheering the eunuch consul Eutropius at the chariot-races.[113] Asterius denounces the consuls for lavishing gold on charioteers, pantomimes and *venationes*.[114]

Despite the occasional assumption that they go all the way back to Augustus, there is no evidence that multi-day consular games were a regular event before *c.* A.D. 300. For centuries, on 1 January the new consuls, preceded by lictors carrying their *fasces*, climbed the Capitol and sacrificed to Jupiter before processing to the Senate, where they made their first formal speech as consul (in imperial times a *gratiarum actio* to the emperor), and at some point in the day publicly freed some slaves (*manumissio* remained part of the consular inauguration right down into the sixth century).[115] The only studies of the consular procession known to me uncritically combine evidence from six centuries and assume that games were always a central part.[116] Yet the earliest

[108] 'Une mosaïque de Carthage représentant les mois et les saisons', *Mémoires de la Societé nationale des antiquaires de France* 57 (1896), 251–70, 257–8 for January; cf. Stern, op. cit. (n. 101), 466–70.
[109] A rustic calendar from Saint Romain-en-Gal shows a mill making bread: Stern, op. cit. (n. 101), 445.
[110] As do three late Greek poems (*AP* 9.383, 384 and 580); all the poems are discussed in detail by Courtney, op. cit. (n. 101).
[111] *Anth. Lat.* 197 R (= 188 S-B); Courtney, op. cit. (n. 101), 57; Averil Cameron, *Corippus in laudem Iustini Augusti Minoris* (1976), 143 for the parallel accounts in both prose and verse.
[112] Briefly, Cameron, op. cit. (n. 27), 787–8.
[113] αἱ ἐν ἱπποδρομίαις εὐφημίαι καὶ τῶν θεατῶν αἱ κολακεῖαι, *PG* 63.462.
[114] J. Martin, *Libanios, Discours*, II (1988), 200, 201–2; C. Datema, *Asterius, Homilies I–XIV* (1970), 42.
[115] Göll (next note), 606–7; Cassiod., *Var.* 6.1; *Dig.* 1.10 includes manumission among the duties of the consul, citing Ulpian, *De officio consulis* 2, but does not specify manumission as part of his inauguration.
[116] H. Göll, 'Über den processus consularis der kaiserzeit', *Philologus* 14 (1859), 586–612; C. Jullian, 'Processus consularis', *Revue de phil.* 7 (1883), 145–63; Salomonson, op. cit. (n. 81), 88–102 (claiming at 101 that it was

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explicitly documented appear to be those given in Constantinople by Mamertinus cos. 362, which Ammianus dates precisely to 1 January, adding that he performed his manumissions in the circus, in the presence of the emperor.[117] Nor is there any evidence that Mamertinus' games extended beyond a single day's races.

We have seen that there is no hint of major circus games under January on illustrated calendars before the fourth century, and then only in the East. The only possibilities listed on surviving calendars for the first week of January at Rome are the Ludi Compitales on 4–6 January and circus games in honour of Janus pater on 7 January. It is likely enough that this or that consul in the course of the first three centuries of the Empire celebrated his inauguration with circus games — and scattered coins to the crowd while processing to the Capitol or Senate. But there is no evidence that multi-day consular games were a formal obligation before the fourth or (in the West) fifth century. The Calendar of Polemius Silvius, compiled in Gaul in 448–49, follows the tradition of the Calendar of 354 closely[118] — except for the fact that it adds *prima consulis mappa* on 7 January. This and his *secunda mappa* on 13 January and *consulis tertiae mappae* on 19 April are events unknown to the earlier tradition.[119] It is fascinating to discover that *mappa* is now the Latin (and Greek) for 'chariot-racing'.

There is no evidence that even imperial consuls regularly gave inaugural games before the tetrarchs are shown in consular robes holding a *mappa c.* 305. Why the tetrarchs? This is not a question anyone seems to have asked, yet there can be little doubt about the answer. It was the tetrarchs who, in order to better position themselves for dealing with threats on different frontiers, built a number of what might be called secondary capitals, some in the West (Milan and Trier), but more in the East: Thessalonica, Nicomedia, Antioch, and, last and most important (if technically not tetrarchic), Constantinople. In all these capitals they built themselves palaces, always with an adjoining circus. Chariot-racing in Greek lands is as old as Homer, but in Classical and Hellenistic times it had been limited to the traditional athletic festivals held every two or four years. By the second century A.D. Roman-style chariot-racing had caught on in many eastern cities, and by the fourth and fifth centuries we find the Roman circus factions all over the Greek East.[120] There is abundant literary evidence for the popularity of chariot-racing in fourth-century Antioch, where Diocletian built a palace and hippodrome complex a year or two before 300.[121] Antioch was the principal residence of Constantius II for much of his reign (337–50 and 360–61). Emperors had long sought the favour and loyalty of their subjects by providing and presiding at elaborate games in the circuses, theatres and amphitheatres of Rome, and it is not surprising that Diocletian and his fellow tetrarchs continued the tradition in their new capitals, to now enthusiastic Greek audiences. To judge from the *mappa* on their consular coinage, their one innovation seems to have been institutionalizing consular games, more specifically chariot-racing. Libanius describes the rivalry of a packed hippodrome at Antioch on 3 January, the third day of the festival of the Kalends.[122]

One or other of the tetrarchs held one or both consulships most years between 305 and 320, and Constantine and his four sons more than twenty-five between them. If all or most

Augustus himself who 'instituted the investing games of the consulship'); M. Meslin *Le Christianisme dans l'empire romain* (1970), 23–70. Beard, op. cit. (n. 81), 385 n. 67 is rightly sceptical of the idea that consular games were a 'regular obligation of the office' as early as the second century.

[117] Amm. Marc. 22.7.1–2.

[118] Stern, op. cit. (n. 94), 32; A. Degrassi, *Inscriptiones Italiae* XIII.2 (1963), 263; Salzman, op. cit. (n. 97), 242.

[119] The *tertia mappa* is on 19, not 13 April, as in Stern, op. cit. (n. 94), 163: Degrassi, *Inscr. Ital.* XIII.2. 264 and 267.

[120] Cameron, op. cit. (n. 96), 193–229; J. H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses: Arenas for Chariot Racing* (1986), 438–539; C. Roueché, *Performers and Partisans at Aphrodisias in the Roman and Late Roman Periods* (1993); G. Dagron, *L'Hippodrome de Constantinople: Jeux, peuple et politique* (2011), ch. 1.

[121] G. Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria* (1961), 318–23.

[122] Liban., *Descr. Kal.* 13 (ed. Foerster VIII. 476).

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gave circus games at their inauguration, this must have created an expectation of races in January, and it is understandable that non-imperial consuls and lesser officials too were pressured into following suit. Here we have the evidence of a series of statues, most from the Greek East (seven from Ephesus alone), representing 'magistrates of high rank, clad in an unvarying dress of inner tunic, outer tunic or *colobium*, toga, and high shoes (*calcei*)'.[123] Most are shown with a sceptre in the left and *mappa* in the right hand. At one time they were all identified as consuls, but what would ordinary consuls be doing in Ephesus in such numbers? Foss argued from their dress that they were proconsuls of Asia, shown presiding at the games. There are two similar statues at Aphrodisias, one at Corinth, and a marble hand holding a *mappa* found at Sardis. There are also three bone statuettes found somewhere in Syria of 'people of high status' holding a *mappa*, identified by Archer St Clair as 'a badge of imperial authority'.[124] One of them wears a diadem and so presumably is an emperor (bearded and so perhaps Julian), but there is no indication that the others are. Mention has already been made of a clay tablet found at Ephesus representing imperial priests presiding at the games holding *mappae*. The wide distribution of such artifacts in the Roman East explains why we find *mappa*-waving Januarys in eastern calendar mosaics. Better known are the only two such statues found in the West, in excavations on the Esquiline Hill in Rome, apparently a father and son, both in ceremonial dress and holding *mappa* aloft.[125] The three men presiding at the games shown on the Liverpool Venatio and Lampadiorum panels (Figs 3 and 7) are likewise all holding *mappae*.

More puzzling are the numerous *mappa*-holders represented on the various faces of the base of the obelisk of Theodosius in Constantinople (390). In the top tier of the south-east and north-east faces, we have six *togati*, all holding lowered *mappae*. In the lower tiers of the south-west and north-east faces, ten with what look like raised *mappae* but might be no more than banners waved by enthusiastic spectators. Since all four faces show the emperor, accompanied by various members of the imperial family, presiding at the games, these *togati* cannot also be presiding at the same games. Bert Smith suggests that their *mappa* is simply 'part of the new dress toga suit, an item of Constantinopolitan fashion'.[126] Yet it seems unlikely that it could have lost its association with the games so completely so early. Of seventeen fully figural sixth-century diptych panels, all show the consul with *mappa* (eleven raised, six lowered), eleven also have scenes of games. Perhaps more striking still, on no fewer than twelve panels which offer only the consul's bust in a medallion, his insignia are reduced to two: sceptre in left hand, symbolizing his authority as consul; and *mappa* in right. Given the well established link between diptychs and games, the *mappa* must here symbolize the consul's games (Fig. 13). It is natural to wonder if there is any significance in the different positions of the *mappa*. But surviving presentation diptychs show the Spielgeber with raised or lowered *mappa* almost indifferently (31 raised, 15 lowered), and the diptych of Boethius (487) shows it raised on one panel and lowered on the other.

One instructive feature of the obelisk base reliefs is that on none of the four faces does the emperor himself hold a *mappa*. While he continued to be shown with *mappa* in the stereotyped image on the consular coinage, the emperor no longer played the modest rôle of 'starter' at the games, nor even that of Spielgeber. He had become an actor in the (increasingly Christianized) ritual of the hippodrome, the ruler whose god-given victories were reflected in the earthly victories of charioteers.[127] Furthermore, the

[123] C. Foss, 'Stephanus, proconsul of Asia, and related statues', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* (*Okeanos: Essays presented to Ihor Ševčenko*) 7 (1983), 196–219.
[124] 'Imperial virtue: four late antique statuettes', *DOP* 50 (1966), 147–62, at 153.
[125] M. Cima, 'Gli horti liciniani: una residenza imperiale della tarda antichità', *Horti Romani: Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Roma … 1995* (1998), at 442–52.
[126] R. R. R. Smith, 'Late antique portraits in a public context', *JRS* 89 (1999), 155–89, at 180.
[127] Alan Cameron, *Porphyrius the Charioteer* (1973), 248–52; K. M. D. Dunbabin, 'The victorious charioteer', *AJA* 86 (1982), 65–89; Dagron, op. cit. (n. 120), 241–51.

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FIG. 13. Detail from diptych of Apion cos. 439. (*Photo: Alinari*)

imperial box, the Kathisma, was now some 200 m from the *carceres*, too far for the emperor to be able to give the signal himself. As early as the fifth century Byzantine texts make it clear that it was an official called *mapparius*, stationed right by the *carceres*, who actually opened the gates for the racing to begin. Dagron suggests that the emperor gestured to officials in his immediate entourage who signalled to the *mapparius*. Whatever the nature of their signal, it was represented in art by showing them with the traditional *mappa*.[128]

Most of the other *mappa*-holders on other monuments were surely neither emperors nor consuls but office-holders who provided games — though not necessarily high office. At Rome, the praetorship was a well-born young man's first office, and chariot-racing was a first liturgy for young members of the élite at Antioch too.[129] The father and son Roman *mappa*-holders on the Esquiline were surely a praetor and the father who had paid for his games. The missorium of Aspar shows Aspar as consul and his son

[128] G. Dagron, 'L'organisation et le déroulement des courses d'après le *Livre des Cérémonies*', *Travaux et Mémoires* 13 (2000), 1–200, at 142, 159–60, 171, 174; 'From the *mappa* to the *akakia*: symbolic drift', in H. Amirav and Bas ter Haar Romeny (eds), *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron* (2007), 203–19; op. cit. (n. 120), 44, 131.

[129] W. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch: City and Imperial Administration in the Later Roman Empire* (1972), 147.

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Ardaburius, labelled as praetor, both holding up *mappae* (Fig. 14). A recently found fragment of a plate decorated with gold leaf inscribed at the top SYMMACHVS CONSVL O[rdinarius] shows a right hand holding a *mappa* and, just below it, the word IV[N]IOR and the head of a boy. The obvious inference is that the plate commemorated the quaestorian games of Symmachus' young son, paid for by his father.[130]



FIG. 14. Missorium of Apsar cos. 434. (*Photo: Hirmer*)

The single leaf of the Liverpool *venatio* shows three men presiding in the loge of an amphitheatre. The one on the right holds a *mappa* and the one in the centre a bowl, no doubt the silver bowl that formed part of the package presented by praetors. This is probably one half of a diptych issued by a praetor on the occasion of his games.

[130] *AE* 2004, no. 496; A. Carignani in S. Ensoli and E. La Rocca (eds), *Aurea Roma: dalla città pagana alla città cristiana* (2000), 149; the fragment is now on show in the Crypta Balbi museum. Symmachus was consul in 391, Memmius quaestor in 393.

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Incidentally, the fact that the Liverpool panel depicts a *venatio* shows that the *mappa* no longer implied chariot-racing alone. To quote a much later illustration, five panels of Areobindus, eastern consul in 506, represent him holding a *mappa* while presiding at amphitheatre games. A relief from Foligno generally dated to the third century offers basically the same scene: three men in togas beneath a canopy looking down on racing chariots, the central figure holding a *mappa* in his right hand and sceptre in his left. A similar relief in the Vatican, datable to the third or fourth century, offers four men in a circus loge, one holding up a *mappa* in his left hand and a sceptre in his right. Once again, these are probably praetors,[131] accompanied by fathers and/or other kinsmen.

VIII CONSULAR GAMES

Only one surviving western consular diptych before that of Boethius in 487 carries any trace of imagery of the games: the recently published clay copy of one panel of the diptych of Anicius Auchenius Bassus cos. 408, the first western ordinary consul to be shown with the *mappa* (Fig. 5). There is no *mappa* on the diptych of Felix cos. 428, nor that of Astyrius cos. 449. Despite the interval of twenty years, the Bassus diptych is strikingly similar to that of Felix, the one difference being Bassus' *mappa*.

It is important to underline the qualifying 'ordinary' in this context. The *suffect* consul Lampadius, whose diptych may be dated to 396, is shown with a *mappa*, but suffect consuls had long given games on the Natalis Urbis (21 April) rather than in January. It was Hadrian who established major circus games in honour of the Natalis Urbis in A.D. 121.[132] It was on his way to preside at these games that Symmachus describes the suffect of 401 falling out of his triumphal carriage and having to be carried off with a broken leg in full regalia.[133]

So what sort of games did Anicius Bassus give in 408? Since the consulate was the supreme mark of imperial favour, the new consul entered office and gave his inaugural January games at court. In the East, by the late fourth century this would normally be Constantinople, but in the West, Trier, Milan, Ravenna, even Sirmium — never Rome. Thanks to Symmachus' many letters accepting or rejecting invitations to consular inaugurations from non-imperial western consuls, we know that Syagrius (381), Richomeres (384), Bauto (385), Neoterius (390), Atticus (397), Theodorus (399), and Stilicho (400) all celebrated their consulates in Milan; Petronius Probus (371) and Ausonius (379) in Trier; Lollianus (355) and Olybrius (379) probably in Sirmium. Symmachus himself gave his consular games in Milan.[134] Claudian's panegyric on the two consuls of 395, Olybrius and Probinus, stops short of their inauguration and says nothing about games. The obvious inference is that both inauguration and games took place at court in Milan, and that Claudian performed his poem in Rome before the new consuls left for Milan.[135]

[131] Gibson, op. cit. (n. 75), 17 suggests that the Liverpool Spielgeber is a quaestor, but he is clearly shown with a beard, whereas quaestors were usually still in their teens.
[132] J. Beaujeu, *La religion romaine à l'apogée de l'empire* I (1955), 131.
[133] Symm., *Ep.* 6.40.
[134] O. Seeck, *Symmachus* (1883), lviii. It was presumably on this occasion that he delivered his panegyric on Theodosius (F 1–2, p. 340 Seeck; A. Pabst, *Q. Aur. Symmachus: Reden* (1989), 124).
[135] Only one of Claudian's other consular panegyrics describes the consul's games (*VI Cons. Hon.* 543–660). Of the rest, two describe preparations for games (*Theod.* 270–332; *Cons. Stil.* 3.223–369), and the other two (*III Cons. Hon.* and *IV Cons. Hon.*) have nothing at all about games. The realization that the consul's inaugural games were normally given at court, a considerable journey from Rome, calls into question the standard assumption that consular panegyrics performed in Rome were delivered on 1 January.

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Stilicho gave the traditional January games (in fact delayed by bad weather till February) at court in Milan, and then a second set of games in Rome later in the year,[136] probably the first time Rome had seen games presented by an ordinary consul in office in the best part of a century. Constantine made three visits to Rome, in 312/13, 315 and 326, when he was cos. III, IV and VII respectively; only in 313 could he have given consular games in the first week of January. The first explicit evidence for games given by an imperial consul in Rome itself is Claudian's account of Honorius' Roman visit of 404.[137] Stilicho's Milan games lasted for at at least three days. A letter Symmachus wrote his son from Milan happens to mention that the circus games were over and the *ludi* and *munus* (presumably theatrical and gladiatorial games) still awaited.[138] It is sometimes said that Claudian gives a description of Stilicho's Roman games. In fact he gives a mythologized picture of preparations for the games (*Stil.* 3.226–369). Diana summons her nymphs to hunt down every sort of wild animal, taking care not to kill them, so that Stilicho can exhibit them in the arena.[139] She would have supplied elephants but, afraid that their weight would delay the ships (a quaint touch of realism), collected only their tusks,[140]

> which, carved with iron into plaques and inscribed with the consul's name
> in shining gold, might pass through the hands of lords and commons.
>
> qui secti ferro in tabulas auroque micantes
> inscripti rutilum caelato consule nomen
> per proceres et vulgus eant.

The subjunctive *eant* reveals this as Diana's plan rather than a description of what was actually done, yet we may reasonably assume that ivory diptychs were distributed, some of them with Stilicho's name and offices inscribed (or painted) in gold. We also learn the rather surprising fact that they were not just presented to VIPs, but tossed to the crowd ('per proceres et vulgus'), as (it seems) were the *holosericae vestes*.

These diptychs of Stilicho are the earliest western *consular* diptychs known. They were established custom in the East by 384, and from a letter of Libanius we learn that the consular *sportula* of Eutolmius Tatianus, Symmachus' eastern colleague as ordinary consul in 391, was an ivory diptych (διθύρον) and silver bowl.[141] It might seem natural to assume that Symmachus too sent out diptychs and ascribe his failure to mention them to nothing more than chance. But it is not just that he does not mention them. Instead of diptychs we find him offering as consular *sportula* to an unnamed correspondent a gold solidus (*Ep.* 9.153), which he explicitly characterizes as the 'customary offering' ('sollemnia officii mei libamenta'). The 'customary offering' ('sollemnia … dona') for quaestorian and praetorian games (on the evidence of the same

[136] Symm., *Ep.* 7.4, 7 and 8, with Callu's notes. The 'greater' games reserved for Rome are mentioned by Claudian at *Stil.* 3.225, and the separate preface to Book 3 makes it clear that this book at least was performed in Rome. But Books 1–2 say nothing about the Milan games, and their ending would be curiously abrupt if they were recited at court in their present form. S. Döpp, *Zeitgeschichte in Dichtungen Claudians* (1980), 182–7, argues that the three books were conceived as a unity. Perhaps rather 1–2 were modified after recitation in Milan to exclude the Milanese games and consular procession so that Book 3 made a more harmonious conclusion to 1–2.

[137] Claud., *Pan. VI Cons. Hon.* 611–39, with M. Dewar, *Panegyricus de sexto cons. Hon. Aug.* (1996), 400–3.

[138] Symm., *Ep.* 7.4. Young Memmius Symmachus, preparing for his own praetorian games the following year, would have been keenly interested in such details.

[139] For a comparison of the various spectacles in Claudian's consular panegyrics, see U. Keudel, *Poetischer Vorläufer und Vorbilder in Claudians De Cons. Stilichonis* (1970), 133–48; and Dewar, op. cit. (n. 137).

[140] *Stil.* 3.347–9; despite *caelato*, the inscription was presumably *painted* in gold, whether onto an uninscribed *tabula ansata* (as on the Asclepius and Hygieia diptych) or in the crevices of the inscription to highlight it.

[141] ἔχω τὴν τιμὴν λαβὼν ἐν τῇ φιάλῃ καὶ τῷ διθύρῳ γραμματείῳ, τὸ μὲν ἐλέφαντος, ἡ δέ ἐστιν ἀργύρου, Lib., *Ep.* 1021; cf. Pollux, *Onom.* 1.207. 5, Ἡρόδοτος 'δελτίον δίπτυχον,' οἱ δ' Ἀττικοι 'γραμματεῖον δίθυρον'.

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Symmachus) was the bowl and diptych package. The eastern law of 384 mentions the *aurea sportula* together with an ivory diptych as the two exclusive consular privileges in the East.[142] Since his letters are so specific about the two components of the quaestorian and praetorian package, it is surely significant that when describing his consular *sportula* Symmachus mentions only the gold coin.

Four other letters thank consuls for their consular gifts: one to Syagrius cos. 381 (*oblatio consularis*, 1.103); one to Bauto cos. 385 (*munus consulare*, 4.15); and two to Richomeres cos. 384 (*munus*, 3.59; *consulatus tui munera*, 3.61). Tantalizingly enough, not one gives enough information to identify the gift. McGeachy assumed gold coins, Callu the package of bowl and diptych.[143] Symmachus' words are consistent with either. But his reference to Syagrius handing his gifts to those who were present in person (1.103) might be thought to fit coins better, as does his belittling characterization of the gift ('quicquid in praesentes muneris contulisti'). He uses similar depreciatory formulas of the modesty of his own nuptial *sportulae* of two solidi.[144]

When describing Astyrius' consular inauguration, Sidonius (who was present with his father as a very young man) indulges in a fanciful conceit about the *sportula* being distributed quickly (*brevi*) though not small (*nec brevis*). Translators have been unable to reproduce the wordplay, which, with its emphasis on the combination of value and smallness, perhaps implies a gold coin rather than a diptych.[145] Astyrius, it seems, presented both gold and ivory. The fact that imperial consuls distributed gold coins (the long series of consular solidi and multiples) may derive from an original custom of civilian consuls presenting gold coins. The fact that imperial consuls never gave diptychs may also reflect original civilian consular custom.[146]

There are two other reasons why Symmachus in particular might *as consul* have preferred to stick with what he saw as the traditional custom of presenting coins as consular mementos. First, as we have seen, diptychs commemorated not the conferment of the office but the games that holders of the office were obliged to provide. But while all members of the great Roman houses began their public careers with the praetorship and the games it entailed, in the last half of the fourth century only five nobles other than Symmachus reached the ordinary consulship: Q. Flavius Maesius Egnatius Lollianus (355), Sex. Petronius Probus (371), Probus' father-in-law Clodius Hermogenianus Olybrius (379) and his sons Anicius Hermogenianus Olybrius and Anicius Probinus (joint consuls in 395). There was thus no tradition of big consular games in the West, certainly not in Rome itself. That is also why suffect consuls were appointed, to take care of the games for the Natalis Urbis. There is no evidence that suffect consuls ever existed in Constantinople. There was no need. There was normally an ordinary consul at the eastern court.

Second, the miniatures of the *Notitia* suggest that codicils varied in form from office to office, and some are shown as a scroll rather than a codex (Fig. 2). Probianus vicar of Rome is shown on one panel of his diptych holding an open roll across his lap, inscribed PROBIANE FLOREAS, presumably typical opening words of codicils of office. No consul is ever shown with a codex, while (as Delbrück saw, without exploiting the point in this connection) no fewer than three diptychs show consuls holding or being presented with a scroll.[147] The clearest case is that of Astyrius cos. 449. And on the

[142] 'exceptis consulibus ordinariis nulli prorsus alteri auream sportulam, diptycha ex ebore dandi facultas sit' (*Cod. Theod.* 15.9.1). Presumably this means gold *or* diptychs, but there is neither connective nor disjunctive in the Latin.
[143] McGeachy, op. cit. (n. 89), 99; Callu's note on *Ep.* 1.103.
[144] 'parvum munusculum' (*Ep.* 9.93 and 107); 'parva fatemur esse quae misimus' (*Ep.* 9.104); see further below.
[145] Diptychs 'had no realizable value in themselves' and 'were difficult to recycle', Eastmond, op. cit. (n. 70), 750. On the other hand, a diptych would have been *non brevis* if the word is viewed as implying size.
[146] Justinian's magnificent consular diptychs date from 521, before he became emperor.
[147] Delbrueck, op. cit. (n. 1), 5–6.

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sceptre of the Hermitage Areobindus, the consul is shown receiving a scroll from the seated emperor. Given the immense antiquity of the consulate, the most ancient form of text, the scroll, was clearly appropriate. If presentation diptychs were more elaborate copies of codicil diptychs, it may be that a punctilious traditionalist like Symmachus felt it improper to issue a diptych to commemorate one of the few offices conferred by scroll rather than diptych. The Probianus diptych actually illustrates the paradox of an official commemorating with a diptych an office that was conferred on him in a scroll.

Memmius' praetorian games were the biggest show Symmachus ever put on. These were the games that Olympiodorus singled out for their extravagance. Symmachus' letters make it clear that he devoted far more time and effort as well as money to Memmius' games than to his own consular games. His own big splash will have been his own praetorian games, staged by his father when he was Memmius' age. Only three letters mention preparations for his consular games as compared with almost fifty spread out over two years on one aspect or another of Memmius' games. And there was a very good reason for this. Consular games were held at court, which might be at Milan, Trier, or even distant Sirmium. Quaestorian and praetorian games invariably took place in Rome, the power base for a wealthy and well-connected noble like Symmachus. Their purpose was to introduce the heir of a great family both to his peers and his future clients, and to demonstrate that the Symmachi outshone all competition on their home turf. There was no point in spending a fortune to make a splash like that in Trier or even Milan.

But by the late fifth century Roman aristocrats had transferred the big family splash from their sons' praetorian games to their own consular games. Cassiodorus never even mentions praetors,[148] and suffects too had ceased to exist. By then it was the ordinary consul who presided at the April as well as January games. Proof of this is provided by the fact that Asterius' well-known poem about his consular games in 494 is dated 21 April.[149]

There are two reasons for this change, both paradoxically enough consequences of what is popularly known as the fall of the Roman Empire in the West. First, it was not till the reigns of Odoacar and Theodoric (476–526) that Roman aristocrats were once more routinely appointed to the ordinary consulship, often very young: for example, every year from 480 to 490, then 493–495, 498, and 501–511. Second, although many of these nobles held a praetorian prefecture at court in Ravenna, after leaving office they returned to Rome, which was even more than before the centre of their social world. Most obviously, all consular games were now given in Rome. This is clear from the evidence of Cassiodorus, now studied in detail by Valérie Fauvinet-Ranson.[150] It is not even certain that there was a circus in Ravenna.[151]

Since diptychs commemorated the games rather than the office, it is not surprising that it is not till the 480s that we encounter diptychs issued in consecutive years by western ordinary consuls (Boethius cos. 487 and Sividius cos. 488). When Ennodius asked Boethius cos. 510 for his *sportula consularis*, it was presumably a diptych he had in mind.[152] We also have complete diptychs from Orestes cos. 530 and Basilius cos. 541, the last citizen consul ever appointed. Orestes' diptych illustrates the *sparsio*, Basilius' circus games.

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[148] Though a passage of Boethius implies that it is was still an expensive sinecure ('praetura magna olim potestas, nunc inane nomen et senatorii census gravis sarcina', *Cons. Phil.* 3.4).
[149] Cameron, op. cit. (n. 27), 468, 790–1.
[150] *Decor civitatis, decor Italiae: Monuments, travaux publics et spectacles au VI^e siècle d'après les Variae de Cassiodore* (2006), especially 303–440.
[151] D. Mauskopf Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity* (2010), 59–60.
[152] *Ep.* 8.37 (p. 290. 10 Vogel). The letter is dated to early 511; Ennodius had evidently not been on Boethius' original list.

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