

have been “the cause” of his exile.⁴⁸ We know neither the accusation that earned Optatianus the punishment of exile from 322/323 to 326 nor the place of his retirement.⁴⁹

In 326, perhaps on the occasion of the festivals of Constantine’s *Vicennalia*, Optatianus sent the emperor a collection of *carmina* that earned him both a recall from exile and, above all, a fast-tracked political career.⁵⁰ J. Wienand has recently shown that Optatianus, politically insignificant for many years, had a career thanks to his codex, which was of extraordinary political importance because «The poetry book(s) celebrated the harmonious, integrative transformation of the Roman monarchy into the aureum saeculum of a Christian empire, governed peacefully and justly by a potent new dynasty under the aegis of Constantine».⁵¹ Indeed, after his return from exile, the codex, enriched

⁴⁸ Porphyrius stated in his *carmina* that he was exiled by “a false accusation”; indeed, at that time it was common «for a member of the Roman aristocracy to fall into the emperor’s disgrace on account of delatores»; Wienand 2017, p. 126; see also Van Dam 2011, p. 162. For a summary of the hypotheses on the cause of the exile see Wienand 2017, p. 125, n. 16.

⁴⁹ J. Wienand underlines that «Evidence in Carm. 6 allows us to place Optatian in Constantine’s *entourage* in 322, when the emperor was conducting a protracted campaign against the Sarmatians along the middle course of the Danube. This poem was composed to celebrate Constantine’s victory, and it indicates how Optatian witnessed the expedition in person (although perhaps only the *profectio* of the troops from Sirmium in the summer and their triumphal return in late autumn 322). The triumphal celebrations for Constantine’s Sarmatian victory were performed at Sirmium in 322, from 25. November to 1. December, so around this time the poem was composed. However, the poem also indicates that Optatian was already in exile when he finished the piece.²⁴ The banishment can thus be dated quite precisely to the late autumn of 322 or the winter of 322/323»; Wienand 2017, pp. 126-127.

⁵⁰ S. Jerome, *Chron. Ann. Const. XXIII*: «Porfirius misso ad Constantinum insigni volumine exilio liberatur». S. Jerome indicates 329 as the year Optatianus was recalled from exile, but all scholars agree that the year is wrong and that he returned from exile before 329; see Seeck 1908, p. 281, Kluge 1924, pp. 326-327, Polara 1974, pp. 118-119, Barnes 1975, p. 175; Chastagnol 1960, p. 404; Pipitone 2015, p. 20. Scholars suggested that some of Optatianus’s friends, members of Constantine’s *entourage*, supported his request for clemency and they delivered the volume to the emperor. According to E. Kluge, the intermediary could have been Sex. Anicius Faustus Paulinus, on the other hand, according to J. Wienand he could have been M. Ceionius Iulianus (the Ceionii and the Optatians would have been linked by marriage relations) or an unidentified Bassus, the addressee of Carm. 21; Kluge 1922, pp. 91-92; Wienand 2017, pp. 130-131.

⁵¹ According to J. Wienand, the poetry book of 326 comprised a selection of poems from the 31 ones that the manuscript tradition attributes to Optatianus («only a collection of ‘blueprints’: they were written on simple paper, without (or with only minimal) ornamentation, using black ink for the base text and red ink for the versus intexti»). It was only after his return from exile that, «Optatian fulfilled his vow and presented Constantine with a magnificently executed version of his poetry book» to which

by other *carmina*, was spread because it encapsulated the «manifesto for the Constantinian ‘revolution’».

Due to the political importance of his work, Constantine promoted Optatianus’ career, who between 326 and 329 was proconsul of Achaia, as indicated by the Spartan inscription. Optatianus’ proconsulate has been variously dated by scholars: T.D. Barnes places it before 306 (before Maxentius’ rule over Rome and Italy), A.M. Woodward in 330 or 334 (immediately after his urban prefecture).⁵² Recently, J. Wienand pointed out that the presence of the statue base in the theatre of Sparta, perhaps in its original location, until the Byzantine era – when it was reused as building material – would testify that Optatianus was proconsul of Achaia after his exile; otherwise his statue would have been removed.⁵³

The city of Sparta, and thus its council, dedicated a statue to Optatianus as the benefactor (*euergetes*) and saviour (*soter*) of the city. Unfortunately, we do not know his acts of euergetism: whether he financed the construction of a public building in Sparta or supported a petition to the emperor on behalf of the city. Recently, G. Deligiannakis suggested that when Optatianus was proconsul of Achaia, he may have dedicated a statue of the god Helios in nearby Gytheum. The life-size marble head is the only part of the statue which has been preserved and dates back to the end of the 3rd cent. AD. The statue, which was either set up in the theatre of Gytheum, where the head was found, or in the nearby *Kaisareion*, was a way of honouring the emperor, who was associated with the god Helios.⁵⁴ In Optatianus’ poems the god Helios

he would add the poems written before his exile, including two *carmina* where he praises Crispus, now condemned to *damnatio memoriae*, and the two *epistulae* sent to Constantine; Wienand 2017, pp. 132-135. On the book of 326 see also Pipitone 2015.

⁵² Barnes 1975, pp. 175-176; Woodward, Robert, Woodward 1927-1928, p. 36 [Woodward]; cfr. Wienand 2017, p. 136.

⁵³ Wienand 2017, pp. 138-139. In 2013, C. Davenport collocated Optatianus’ proconsulate between 324 and 329, the year of his first prefecture, because M. Aurelius Stephanus is defined ἀρχιερέυς τῶν Αὐγούστων instead of ἀρχιερέυς τῶν Σεβαστῶν and this change of the title would be appeared after, when Constantine tried «to reconcile the imperial cult with a Christian imperial ideology through the use of Αὐγουστος, a title less intimately linked with emperor worship»; Davenport 2013, pp. 232-233. According to J. Wienand, however, Constantine could have already assumed the title of ἀρχιερέυς τῶν Αὐγούστων after the Peace of Serdica (317), when Achaia became part of his dominion, consequently Optatianus could have been proconsul also between 317 and 322, the year of his exile; Wienand 2017, pp. 137-138.

⁵⁴ Deligiannakis 2017.

is mentioned «in an allusion to Constantine's rulership. Along with these poetic allusions, in one of Optatianus's picture-poems dedicated to Constantine the enigmatic solar symbol that we saw on the coin of Thessalonica appears once again».⁵⁵

The Spartan inscription also testifies to the close ties between the proconsul and M. Aurelius Stephanus, who paid for the statue of Optatianus. M. Aurelius Stephanus was the last known Spartan high priest of Imperial cult in Achaia.⁵⁶

By imperial will, Optatianus reached the highest rank of office. He was *Praefectus urbi* twice, albeit for short periods: from 7 September to 8 October 329 and from 7 April to 10 May 333.⁵⁷ These are the only certain dates available regarding Optatianus' life. The timeline of his death could be placed between 333, the year of the last urban prefecture, and 335, because there are no references to Constantine's *Tricennalia* in his *carmina*.

The statue of Anatolius

In 1926, during archaeological investigations in the theatre, a columnar base-statue was «found *in situ*, on a rough foundation of small fragments, at the W. angle of the bastion carrying the external stairway of the E. retaining-wall».⁵⁸ The base, roughly carved from a rectangular block, bore an honorary epigram to the proconsul of Achaia Anatolius (fig. 4).

⁵⁵ Deligiannakis 2017, p. 344.

⁵⁶ According to F. Camia and M. Kantiréa, he held office under Constantine, probably between 325 and 329 AD; Camia, Kantiréa 2010, p. 393; whereas according to A.S. Bradford, M. Aurelius Stephanus was high priest of the imperial cult between 329 and 333 AD; Bradford 1977, ΜΑΡ(ΚΟC) ΑΥΡ(ΗΛΙΟC) CΤΕΦΑΝΟC (11). It has been suggested that he could be perhaps a descendant of the homonym *eques* in the Severan age attested by IG V 1 596; Spawforth 1984, p. 280, n. 15; Cartledge, Spawforth 2002, p. 114; Camia, Kantiréa 2010, p. 393. See also *PLRE* I, Stephanus 4, p. 853.

⁵⁷ *Chron.* 354., a. 329 and a. 333.

⁵⁸ Sparta, Arch. Mus. 2831. H. = 86.5 cm; diam. = 62 cm; letters 3-4 cm. Woodward 1925-1926, pp. 245-247, n. 35 (*editio princeps*), pp. 185, 208; *AnnEp* 1929, 23; *SEG* 11, 773; Groag 1946, pp. 57-58; Robert 1948, p. 63; Feissel, Philippidis-Braat 1985, p. 288, n. 26; Di Napoli 2007, p. 335, E AA 9; Gehn 2012, LSA-357; Oikonomou 2014, p. 35.



Fig. 4. Statue base with honorary epigram for Anatolius at the western angle of the bastion stairway of the eastern retaining-wall (© BSA; Woodward 1925-1926).

Ἀντολίῃ πολὺολβε,
 σέθεν καλὸν οὔνομα
 ἔδεκτο
 ἀνθύπατον Ῥώμης
 ἄνθος εὐκτιμένης.
 Ὡς ἀγαθὸς γὰρ ἐὼν πάν-
 των ἀπὸ κῆρας ἐρύκει
 Σπάρτην τ' εὐάνδρον τευ-
 ξεν ἐρειπομένην,
 ἦ οἱ δῶκεν ἄγαλμ<α> κατὰ
 πτόλιν ἄγχι Λυκούργου,
 ὄφρα πέλοιτο βροτοῖς
 αἰὲν ἀοιδότατος·

Blessed *Antolie* (East), | your beautiful name | has received | the
 proconsular flower | of well-built Rome. | Indeed, in his goodness, |
 he saves all from adverse fate | and rebuilds Sparta, rich in men, | in
 ruins, | which dedicated to him a statue in | the city near Lycurgus, | so
 that among human beings he would always be | celebrated.⁵⁹

The base on which the dedication was inscribed carried an earlier epigram, which was erased to make room for the new text.⁶⁰ In late

⁵⁹ Translation by the author; for another translation see Feissel, Philippidis-Braat 1985, p. 288 (French).

⁶⁰ The editor records the remains of the previous epigram, but they are not comprehensible; Woodward 1925-1926, p. 246. B. Oikonomou hypothesises that

antiquity, dedication inscriptions often took the form of epigrams with classicising and magniloquent phrases. Honorary epigrams, as in this case, provided few details about the life and deeds of the honorand.⁶¹

The honorand, the proconsul Anatolius,⁶² could be Ἀντόλιος Ἑλλάδος ἀνθύπατος, the Proconsul of Achaia,⁶³ who dedicated a bronze portrait statue⁶⁴ to the prefect of Illyricum (Sextus Petronius) Probus in Athens (*IG II² 4226*).⁶⁵ The statue base was found, not *in situ*, in the Plaka north the Tower of the Winds in 1869.

In turn, Sparta honoured Anatolius with a statue, because as proconsul he had rebuilt the ruined city. According to E. Groag, the proconsul would have funded the reconstruction of Sparta, but D. Feissel and A. Philippidis-Braat pointed out that the text does not necessarily imply that Anatolius financed the works of reconstruction.⁶⁶

The chronology of the inscription found in the theatre is unknown, but the reference to the prefecture of Probus in the Athenian text along with the allusion to destruction in the Spartan epigram may provide useful chronological clues. According to the editor, the inscription could refer to the great earthquake of 375 (*Zos. 4, 18, 2*). The allusion to the devastation of the earthquake provides a *terminus post quem* for Anatolius' proconsulate of Achaia, which has, however, been

the base was reused, but the statue was that of the previous honorand; Oikonomou 2014, p. 35. According to some scholars, the late Roman bearded male portrait head (11322), found in fill of orchestra drain, could belong to the statue of Anatolius, but there are not certain elements for this attribution; Waywell, Wilkes, Powell et alii 1995, p. 459 [Waywell, Wilkes]; Oikonomou 2014, pp. 30-31.

⁶¹ Deligiannakis 2013, pp. 129-130; Smith 1999. G. Deligiannakis underlines the similarity between such honorary epigrams and panegyric orations, the same ones that were pronounced for the erection of honorary statues; Deligiannakis 2013, p. 130.

⁶² *PLRE I*, Anatolius 8, p. 61.

⁶³ The term Ἑλλάς was used to refer to the Roman province of Achaia and in the 4th cent. AD it was used as an official term in inscriptions; Corsten 1997, pp. 117-122.

⁶⁴ It seems «that for bronze statues, petitions to the emperor were necessary, and for less ostentatious marble statues in the provinces, the right to grant permission was up to local authorities»; Ögüş 2022, p. 237.

⁶⁵ Dittenberger 1878, n. 639; Kaibel 1878, n. 902; Groag 1946, p. 57; De Ruggiero 1895, p. 30; Robert 1948, pp. 53-55; Sironen 1994, p. 30, n. 14; Sironen 1997, p. 69, n. 13. At the beginning, the editor of the inscription U. Köhler, followed by J. Kirchner, had identified Anatolius with a consul of 440, but this identification was not possible, because Probus was prefect of Illyricum between 367 and 375; Robert 1948, pp. 54-55. On Probus' career see *PLRE I*, Probus 5, pp. 736-740.

⁶⁶ Groag 1946, pp. 57-58; Feissel, Philippidis-Braat 1985, p. 288.

variously dated to 376,⁶⁷ 380⁶⁸ or between 382/3 and the end of 384.⁶⁹ In particular, E. Groag pointed out that Probus, the Prefect of the Illyricum during the proconsulate of Anatolius, held four prefectures: from 367 to 376; from 379/380 to 381; from 382/3 to 384 and from 386/7 until his death after 389. According to the scholar, the first prefecture of Probus ending in 376 could not have given Anatolius enough time to rebuild the newly destroyed city. The second prefecture would also have to be disregarded, because in this case, Probus only ruled over the Pannonian diocese. Consequently, in his opinion, Anatolius would have been proconsul of Achaia during the third prefecture of Probus, between 382/3 and 384. This timeline implies a long period after the earthquake when the city could have been rebuilt.

Equally uncertain, apart from the chronology, is the identity of Anatolius. According to some scholars, this would be the Praetorian Prefect attested in a period from 397 to 399.⁷⁰ S. Mazzarino points out that it would be logical for the honorand to have held the prefecture in the same area after his proconsulate in Achaia, especially since his homonymous father, a native of Berytus, had also held the same post between 357 and 360.⁷¹ However, this hypothesis is not unanimously accepted, and it has also been suggested that he would be either Anatolius, son of the homonymous governor of Phoenice in 361, native of Cilicia,⁷² or the *vir clarissimus* who put an end to the abuses of the *cursus publicus* «per suburbicarias regions» in 365.⁷³

In conclusion, apart from the identification of Anatolius and the chronology of his proconsulate in Achaia, it is worth emphasising here that for the city of Sparta, and thus for the council, Anatolius' role was so important (it is not known whether also a direct financial co-involvement) in supervising the reconstruction of the ruined city

⁶⁷ PLRE I, Anatolius 8, p. 61.

⁶⁸ Mazzarino 1990, p. 256.

⁶⁹ Groag 1946, pp. 57-58.

⁷⁰ PLRE II, Anatolius 1, p. 83. Seeck 1906, p. 69; Groag 1946, p. 58; Mazzarino 1990, p. 25; Pietri 1975, p. 296.

⁷¹ PLRE I, Anatolius 3, pp. 59-60.

⁷² C. Th. XII.1.9α. For Anatolius, governor of Phoenice see PLRE I, Anatolius 4, p. 60; for his son PLRE I, Anatolius 9, p. 61. E. Groag suggested this hypothesis, but he rejected it as well as C. Pietri; Groag 1946, p. 58; Pietri 1975, p. 290.

⁷³ PLRE I, Anatolius 6, p. 61.

that Sparta dedicated a statue in an emblematic public place, moreover close to the mythical lawgiver Lycurgus.

The statues near Lycurgus

In the 4th cent. AD two honorific statues dedicated to two proconsuls of Achaia were set up near the statue of Lycurgus, thus creating a group of at least three sculptures in the eastern *parodos*, in the proximity of the eastern staircase leading to the *diazoma*.

It is not possible to speculate on either the dating of the statue of Lycurgus or whether it was made to decorate the theatre - since statues of deities were commonly part of the sculptural apparatus of theatres - or whether it was moved here from elsewhere. It is unlikely, as has been suggested, that the statue could have been moved from its sanctuary.⁷⁴ Moreover, the *Periegeta* himself informs us that there was at least another portrait statue of Lycurgus in the city on one of the two bridges on the moat that surrounded the *Platanistas* where it was customary for the youths to fight (Paus. 3, 14, 8).⁷⁵

As J. Ma states «Statues attracted statues; honourable statues were set up next to other statues, be they honourable monuments or cult-statues».⁷⁶ Thus, in the first three decades of the 4th cent. AD, probably between 326 and 329 or shortly thereafter, *παρὰ* (by the side/near) Lycurgus the *polis* set up the statue of the proconsul Optatianus. About thirty years later, the *polis* together with its chief and priest of the imperial cult, M. Aurelius Stephanus, enriched this *ensemble* with the honorific statue of another proconsul, Anatolius.

As J. Ma further states, «Physical proximity acted as a metaphor for abstract relationship. The content of this relationship varied. It could express simple likeness ... In other cases, the relation was more complex».⁷⁷ It is likely, as has already been assumed in the past, that the proximity of the two statues to that of Lycurgus intends to attribute to the two proconsuls of Achaia the same judicial skills as the

⁷⁴ Deligiannakis 2013, p. 127.

⁷⁵ See also Richter 1984, pp. 156-157. Lycurgus was represented wreathed and bearded on coin-issues of the triumviral period and perhaps this imaginary portrait was based on some statue of him; Cartledge-Spawforth 2002, p. 182.

⁷⁶ Ma 2013, p. 118.

⁷⁷ Ma 2013, p. 119.

mythical lawgiver, for laudatory purposes.⁷⁸ Regarding Optatianus, his relationship with Lycurgus is made explicit by the inscription itself, which compares his character and deeds to those of the mythical lawgiver; it is probable that his actions in the field of law are referred to here. A similar example is an honorary epigram from Ephesus, dated to c. 400 AD, which compares the legislative actions of the governor Ἀνδρῆας to those of the three mythical lawgivers: Minos, Lycurgus and Solon (*Iv. Eph.* 1301).⁷⁹ Moreover, it is quite common in honorary inscriptions of the 4th cent. AD to praise imperial governors for their legislative action.⁸⁰

Another characteristic of the late antiquity is that the «statues of imperial officials and local personalities were also erected in association with venerable reliquaries (whether statues, temples, or other monuments) of the Greek past».⁸¹ The two Spartan honorary statues are, in fact, set up next to an older one, that of Lycurgus. In the mid-3rd cent. AD, Sparta had also dedicated an honorific statue to Heraclia, daughter of Tisamenus and his wife Aurelia Oppia, members of a learned and aristocratic family, *παρὰ τῇ ἀγιωτάτῃ Ὀρθία Ἀρτέμιδι* (*IG V 1 599*). Her pagan piety had therefore earned her the honour of a portrait statue in the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, beside the cult-image.⁸²

In late antiquity, it was common, as testified by many inscriptions, to set up honorific statues *παρὰ τῷ θεῷ*.⁸³ In Athens, the sophist Apronianus dedicated a statue of the Praetorian Prefect of the Illyricum Herculius (408-410) on the Acropolis beside the colossal statue of Athena Promachos (*παρὰ προμάχῳ Παλλάδι Κεκροπι[νης]*) (*IG II² 4225*).⁸⁴ This honorary epigram is interesting because Herculius,

⁷⁸ Deligiannakis 2013, p. 127.

⁷⁹ Keil 1942, pp. 194-196.

⁸⁰ Smith 1999, p. 186.

⁸¹ Deligiannakis 2013, p. 131. According to the scholar, the statue of the governor Polycharmos was erected in Olympia near the temple of Zeus and probably «the statue of Polycharmos stood together with the antique statuary that had been transferred inside the “post-Herulian” fortification wall and plugged in between the columns of the south pteron of the temple, forming a museum of ancient artworks».

⁸² Kaibel 1878, n. 874; Robert 1970, p. 299; Cartledge, Spawforth 2002, p. 108; Deligiannakis 2013, p. 127, n. 121.

⁸³ For the list of statues set up *παρὰ τῷ θεῷ* see Robert 1970, p. 299, n. 2.

⁸⁴ Kaibel 1878, n. 912; Robert 1948, p. 41; Sironen 1997, p. 82, n. 23. The statue base was found near the *stoa* of Attalos. Herculius was honoured in Athens with another