The ROMAN EMPIRE *in* LATE ANTIQUITY

A POLITICAL *and* MILITARY HISTORY

HUGH ELTON

THE ROMAN EMPIRE IN LATE ANTIQUITY

In this volume, Hugh Elton offers a detailed and up-to-date history of the last centuries of the Roman Empire. Beginning with the crisis of the third century, he covers the rise of Christianity, the key Church Councils, the fall of the West to the barbarians, and the Justinianic reconquest, and concludes with the twin wars against Persians and Arabs in the seventh century AD. Elton isolates two major themes that emerge in this period. He notes that a new form of decision-making was created, whereby committees debated civil, military, and religious matters before the emperor, who was the final arbiter. Elton also highlights the evolution of the relationship between aristocrats and the Empire and provides new insights into the mechanics of administering the Empire, as well as frontier and military policies. Supported by comments on primary sources and anecdotes, *The Roman Empire in Late Antiquity* is designed for use in undergraduate courses on late antiquity and early medieval history.

Hugh Elton is Professor and Program Coordinator in the Program of Greek and Roman Studies at Trent University. A scholar of Late Roman political and military history, he has directed two archaeological projects in Turkey. He is the author of *Warfare in Roman Europe, AD 350–425* and *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AE	*L'Année Epigraphique*
CJ	*Codex Justinianus*
CT	*Codex Theodosianus*
Ep.	*Epistula* = Letter
fr.	fragment
HE	*Historia Ecclesiastica* = Ecclesiastical History
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae*
IGLS	*Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*
IGRR	*Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes*
ILS	*Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*
OGIS	*Orientis Graecae inscriptiones selectae*
Or.	*Oratio* = Speech
P.Ital.	*Die nichtliterarischen lateinischen Papyri italiens aus der Zeit 445–700*, ed. Tjäder, J.O. (Lund, 1955)
SEG	*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecarum*
Select Papyri	Hunt, A. S. and Edgar, C. C., *Select Papyri II: Non-Literary Papyri, Public Documents* (Cambridge, MA, 1927)

NOTES ON NAMES, PLACES, AND TITLES

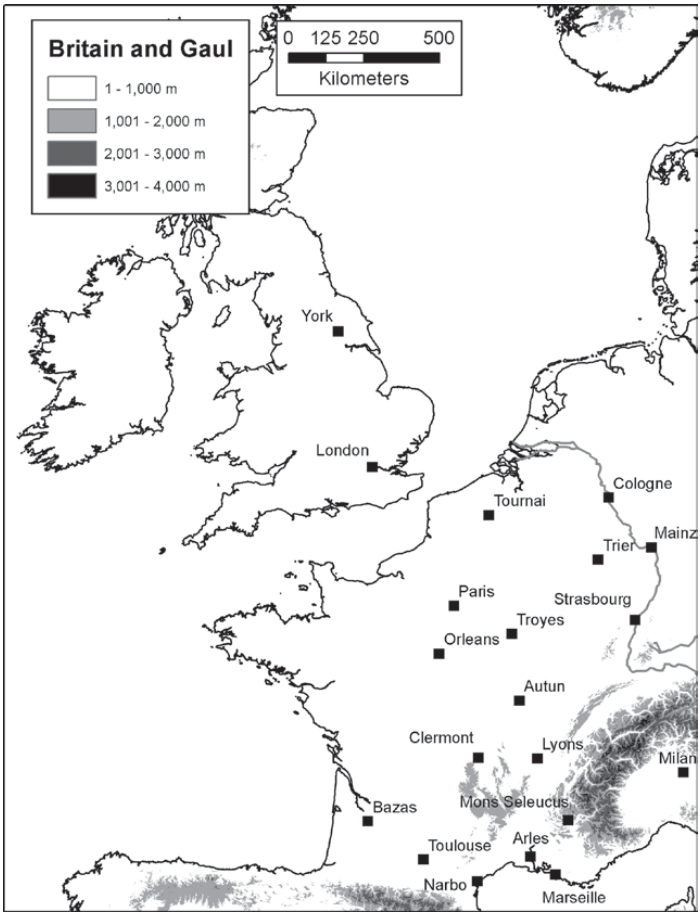
Names of individuals have normally been presented in the Latin form, following the spelling used in the *Prosopography of the Late Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 1970–1992), though some well-known names like Constantine, Julian, and Justinian have been left in their English forms. Referencing to primary sources is generally restricted to quotations, though with the intent that consulting the *Prosopography* will lead those interested directly to primary sources. City names follow the format of Jones, A. H. M., *Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*[2] (Oxford, 1971). Technical terms are kept as far as possible, though usually in Latin rather than Greek. For ease of reading, the bishop of Rome is used in the fourth century; pope thereafter; the bishops of Constantinople, Antioch, and Alexandria as patriarchs; and the bishop of Jerusalem as patriarch after 451.

Much of the scholarship on the Later Roman Empire depends on Jones, A. H. M., *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1964). This is explicitly a social, economic, and administrative study of the Empire, though it does contain a history covering 284–602. In its focus on the primary source material for these areas, it is unsurpassed as a single work and is indispensable to serious study of the Late Empire. Equally indispensable are the three volumes of *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 1970, 1980, 1992), covering 260–395, 395–527, and 527–641. These provide biographical entries with primary source references for the majority of secular figures. There are numerous addenda, as would be expected for such a project, as well as the gradual publication of similar volumes dealing with Christian prosopography, currently covering Africa (303–533), Italy (313–604), and the diocese

of Asia Minor (313–641). For topography, *The Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World* (Princeton, 2000) is invaluable.

Much of our understanding of the events of these centuries depends on coins, laws, and inscriptions. For the evidence of the coins, the series of *Roman Imperial Coinage* provides a detailed catalogue. For the laws of the *Codex Theodosianus*, Matthews, J. F. *Laying Down the Law* (New Haven, 2000) provides an excellent introduction, while Honoré, A., *Tribonian* (London, 1978) is very good on the reign of Justinian. For the whole topic of how the law worked in the Late Empire, see Harries, J., *Law and Empire in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1999).

Excellent introductions to the events are available in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Volume 12, eds. Bowman, A., Cameron, A. and Garnsey, P. (Cambridge, 2005) covering 193–337, Volume 13, eds. Bowman, A. and Garnsey, P. (Cambridge, 1998) covering 337–425, and Volume 14, eds. Bowman, A., Ward-Perkins, B. and Whitby, M. (Cambridge, 2000) covering 425–600. Similar broad approaches are provided by Johnson, S., ed., *The Oxford Handbook to Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2012), Rousseau, P., ed., *A Companion to Late Antiquity* (London, 2009), and Bowersock, G., Brown, P. and Grabar, O., *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Post-Classical World* (Princeton, 1999). Finally, the three recently published Cambridge Companions provide coverage at a more detailed level. Lenski, N., ed., *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*[2] (Cambridge, 2011), Maas, M., ed., *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Attila* (Cambridge, 2014), and Maas, M., ed., *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge, 2005). In all cases, although the coverage is often similar in depth to the approach followed here, the team-driven approach and the long time periods between the first commissioning of the chapters and the volumes' final publication sometimes means that there is no single interpretive framework.



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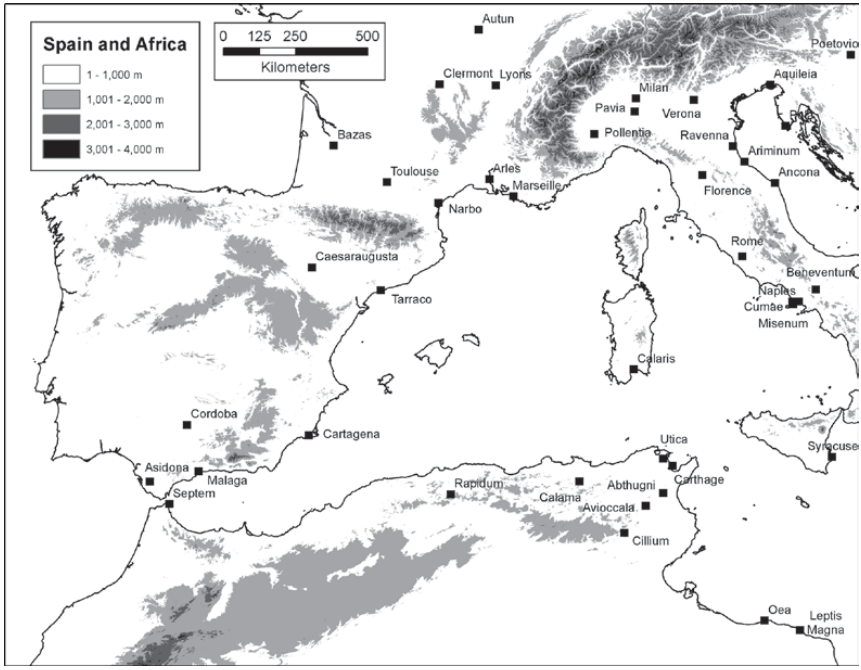

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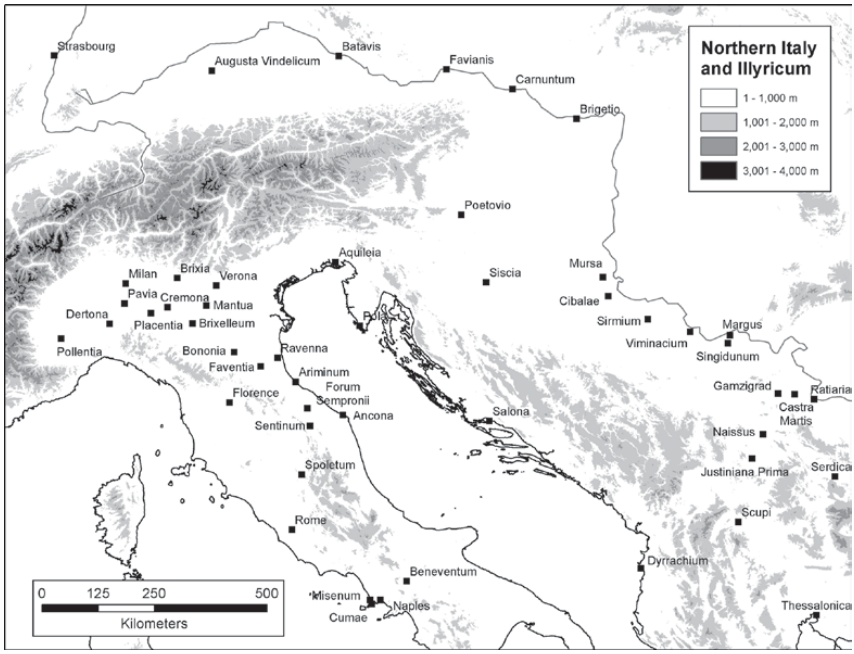

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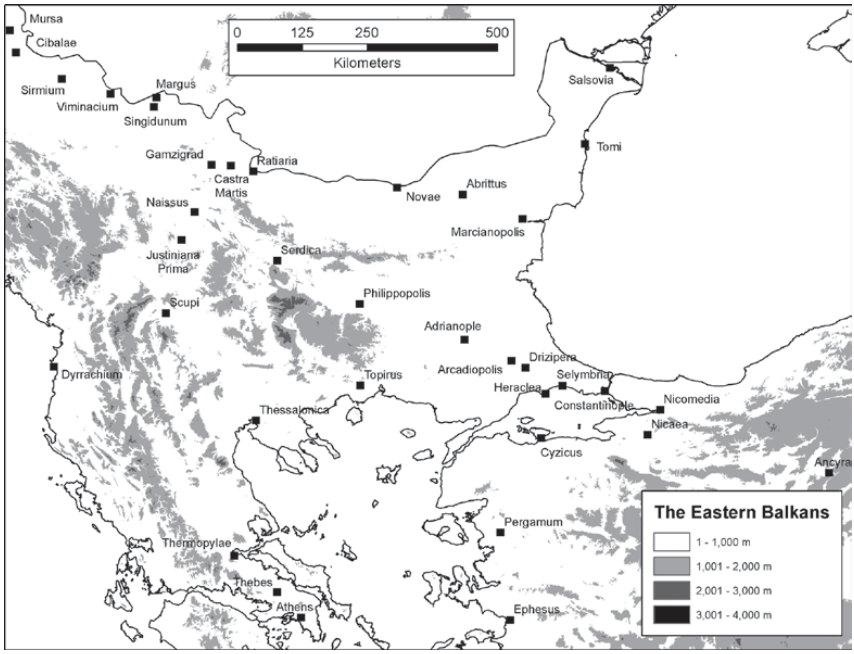

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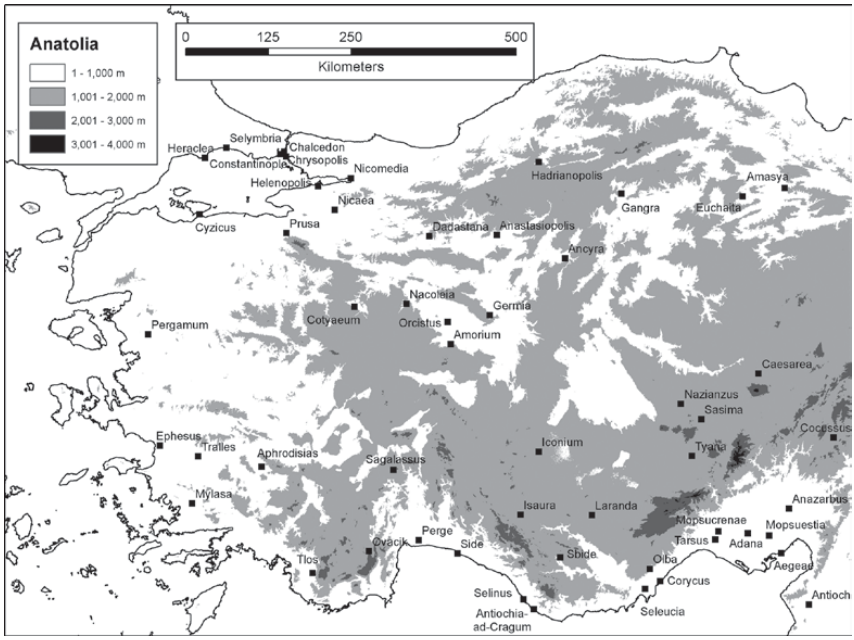

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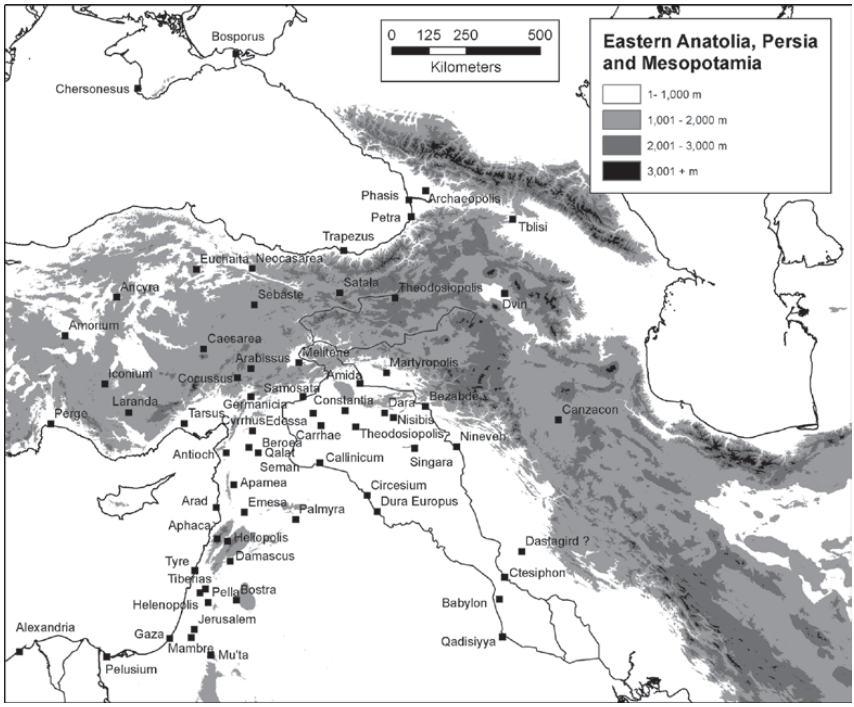

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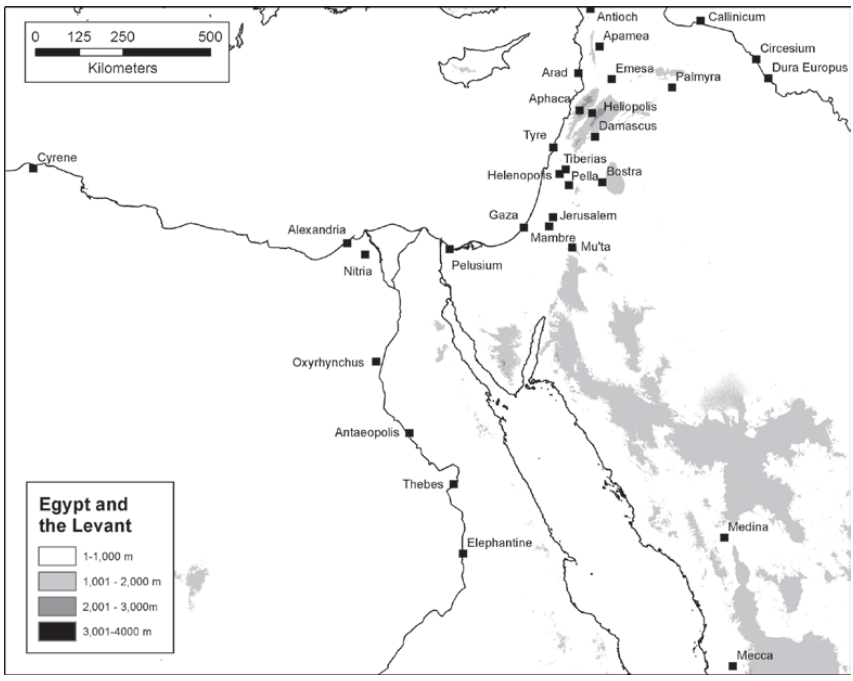

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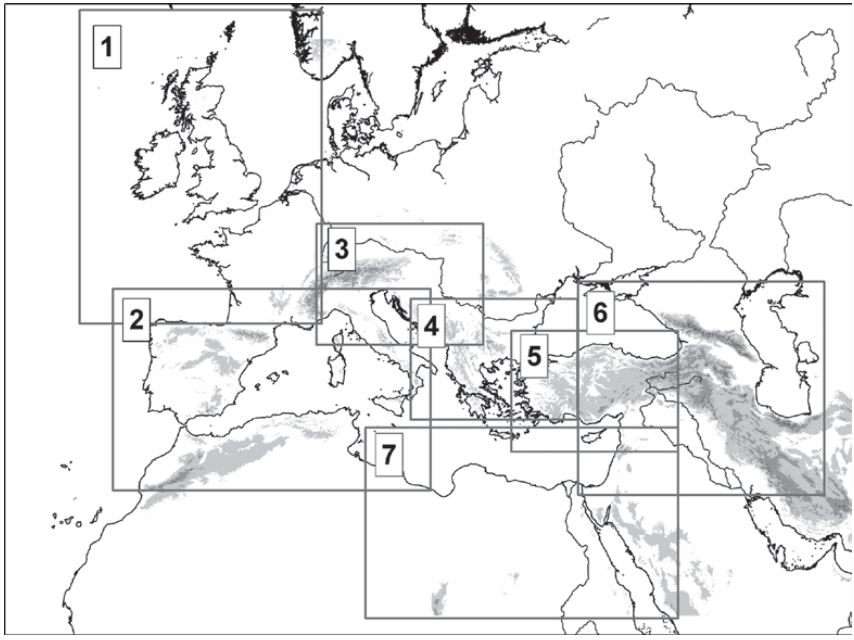

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INTRODUCTION

There are many ways to look at the Late Roman Empire. This book presents one version of Roman imperial history between AD 260 and 641. At its heart lies my feeling that much of the current study of late antiquity fails to understand the Empire itself. Too often, the complexity and reality of the Empire have been masked by the writing of simplified history, both by moderns and by ancients. It is easier to tell the story of Rome in this fashion, but it creates an image of the ancient world as somehow simpler than our own. Since we have only a few glimpses into the feelings of contemporaries about government, understanding the Empire from the point of view of the emperor himself is difficult. When one of the Empire's first rulers, Tiberius I (14–37), said that running the Empire involved "holding a wolf by the ears" (Suetonius, *Tiberius* 25), it poses significant questions about what the emperor did and about the Empire itself.

In writing any sort of history, compromises have to be made. This book is written in the belief that the period between 260 and 641 forms a unity and that events in this period relate more closely to each other than to the period before or after. This period is not defined by Christianity, though this was a large part of what made the Empire different from the first or second centuries. Rather, it was defined by an aristocracy created through service to the emperor and the existence of centralized field armies. It is a long period, and to cover the major events and processes and yet keep the book short enough to be readable requires avoiding deep discussion of many points that would be considered more fully if space were not an issue. As Ammianus Marcellinus wrote in the fourth century, "Besides these battles, many others less worthy of mention were fought in various parts of Gaul, which it would be superfluous to describe, both because their results led to nothing

worthwhile, and because it is not fitting to spin out a history with insignificant details" (Ammianus 27.2.11). Nonetheless, I remain uneasy about the necessary compression of complex matters, though attempt to comfort myself by taking Plutarch's view that "the careers of these men embrace such a multitude of events that my preamble shall consist of nothing more than this plea: if I do not record all their most celebrated achievements or describe any of them exhaustively, but merely summarize for the most part what they accomplished, I ask my reader not to regard this as a fault" (*Alexander* 1)

This work is a history of the Late Roman Empire and thus not a history of late antiquity. There is something that justifies the broadly defined study of culture that at its widest covers an area between Ireland and the Indian Ocean between 200 and 800. This work might be seen as traditional or old-fashioned, closely following the approach of J. B. Bury's 1923 *History of the Later Roman Empire*, though covering a longer time span (Bury covered 395–565). However, the explosion of scholarly interest and the changes in society make it impossible to write a history in the early twenty-first century that could compare to Bury in depth. Religion, for example, plays a much larger role in this work than in his. I feel that this work also benefits considerably from the Brownian approach to late antiquity, since we now have a much more nuanced view of the cultural world of the Roman Empire, i.e., the climate in which decisions were made and the various influences to which Late Roman officials were exposed. In this respect, Jill Harries' *Law and Empire* has been particularly inspiring for its exposition of a culture of criticism, as well as the concept that repeated laws were those which worked. I also feel that this work owes much to the approaches taken by John Matthews and Fergus Millar to the Empire.

This work is directed toward undergraduate students. In my experiences of teaching this period, I have felt a lack of a modern work that is short enough to be readable but also tells enough of the history of the Roman Empire to facilitate writing assignments and classroom discussion. I have tried to make it clear how our story is written from the primary sources. At the same time, I have restricted suggestions of secondary material to English language works that my students might read, though potential graduate students should not take this to mean that other languages are unnecessary

Three themes run through this history, linking Gallienus in 260 to Heraclius in 641. The first is that the Empire always remained centered on the person of the Roman emperor, who ran the state through meetings. These meetings generated paperwork that was disseminated to officials, and the officials then communicated back to the emperor. For the vast majority of the issues discussed at meetings, there were choices that could be made. Although our source material is imperfect, it frequently allows us to see the

political process at work, with factions putting forward differing proposals that were decided on by the emperor. This interpretation thus rejects the model (often poorly defined) of an emperor at the mercy of various advisers, such as his wife, eunuchs, or generals. There were periods when such individuals had an influence on policy, but the structure of the Empire was such that these influences were always challenged by other participants in the political process. The second theme is that ruling the Empire required the consensus of the ruled. In the short term, it might be possible to dominate subjects by fear, but in the longer term different methods were likely to be more effective. The Empire was most vulnerable at moments when this consensus broke down and imperial unity was fractured. By the mid-third century, all emperors were aware of the fate of Gaius, Nero, and Commodus and generally avoided their excesses. This brings out a third theme, that there was little that was new about the problems of the late Empire, dominated as it was by issues of extracting resources (whether money, goods, or manpower) to provide security for its inhabitants. Although the means and methods of confronting internal and external problems changed greatly, it was still a continuation of the early Roman Empire, not an entirely new Empire. This did not change with Christianity, though the new religion provided a new way of confronting these sorts of issues. Nonetheless, there are two features that distinguish the study of the Roman Empire in late antiquity from that of the first two centuries AD, even as they do not define it. One is the presence of Christianity, a religion that eventually penetrated into every village of the Roman imperial state. And the other is the volume of primary evidence, itself in part the result of Christianity. We thus have far more details, far more complaints about taxation, etc., but know little about earlier situations where the evidence for the state, driven by epigraphy, is often different. The way that this evidence is read has changed dramatically over the past half-century, as modern scholars have a growing awareness of the tendency of our sources to select and edit their work, both as they were arguing their cases, and then subsequently as they made these cases to posterity.

The continuity of the Empire and its administration was part of its success. The repetition of the same events, of campaigns against the Franks and the Persians, of struggles with bishops, and of complaints and petitions to the emperors, can occasionally become tedious to read. But this repetition is the fabric of the Empire, even as it crumbled in the west in the fifth century. This history also takes a positive view of emperors and their administration. The majority of Romans involved in imperial administration worked long hours and tried to be fair. Many of them also made mistakes, and some would have been corrupt, others lazy. But to judge their performance from the writings of petitioners arguing cases, and in particular from

the participants in ecclesiastical disputes, would be a poor methodology. Imperial records make a far better case for how the emperors wished to run the state, though we have so few of these and so many complaints. We find the bishop Theodoret in 448 writing two letters to imperial officials, questioning whether the emperor really had sent a letter to him. Since this letter had been delivered personally by the *comes* Rufus, and Theodoret had acknowledged its receipt in writing, it is probably better to see a man resisting authority rather than seriously doubting that the letter had actually been sent by the emperor (*Ep*. 79, 80). This sort of criticism of government is similar to that of sports fans of their team's managers; nonstop, negative, blessed by hindsight, and commenting on things about which they know little and can't do for themselves. This optimistic point of view may sometimes have led me to view events through rose-tinted glasses. The Late Roman Empire was often, if not always, a violent, corrupt, prejudiced state, but it was also one where imperial clemency was a virtue, and one often practiced.

Writing this book would not have been possible without others. First are my fellow ancient historians, whom I find constantly stimulating on paper and in person; these dialogues have increased my understanding enormously. A second group is my colleagues (other teachers, librarians, and support staff) at the various institutions at which I have worked, whose constant interest in what I do both surprises and humbles me. And third are the students I've been privileged to teach. The staff at Cambridge University Press and the anonymous referees have also been outstanding. My thanks to you all.

I

THE LATE THIRD CENTURY, 260–313

In the second half of the third century, the Roman ship of state was a battered vessel. The emperor Gordian III had died on campaign against the Persians in Mesopotamia in 244, the emperor Decius had died in the Balkan marshes near Abrittus at the hands of a Gothic army in 251, and the emperor Valerian had been captured by the Persians and dragged off to captivity in early 260. The Empire would survive, but it needed to change dramatically if it was to harness its resources to deal with these storms.

At the moment that Valerian was captured by the Persians, there were two other Roman emperors. One was his son Publius Licinius Egnatius Gallienus, already a full partner in power with the status of Augustus, and the other was his grandson Saloninus, with the lesser imperial status of Caesar. These men ruled over an Empire that stretched from north Britain to the Red Sea, from Mauritania to the Black Sea, inhabited by about 60 million subjects, the majority of whom were Roman citizens. The emperor was the chief magistrate of the Roman state whose power was absolute. Thus, according to the legal theorist Ulpian in the early third century, "What is pleasing to the emperor has the force of law" (*Digest* 1.4.1). This statement was later included in the *Digest*, a compilation of laws issued in the reign of the sixth-century emperor Justinian, and was just as valid then as when written by Ulpian.

A theory of absolutism, however, did not make an emperor. There was no body that sanctioned his acclamation, and though emperors often appealed to the support of the Senate, the people, or the army, in practice the only qualification required for the position of emperor was acceptance by others. Any Roman could claim to be emperor, and by the middle of the third century this had become a common phenomenon. Since the theory of imperial power was built around a single emperor (or an emperor sharing his

power with his sons), acclamation while there was another emperor was a challenge to the current ruler. Emperors usually described a rival for imperial power as a *tyrannus*, a Latin term usually translated as "usurper." This understandable tendency makes more sense for contemporaries than for modern historians; to draw distinctions between imperial rivals based on their eventual success is a poor methodology for understanding imperial power. Until the final defeat of any claimant to imperial power, he could and did issue laws and coins, raise legions and taxes, and appoint officials. This legitimacy was, however, tempered by the amount of support that an imperial claimant had, and many emperors saw their imperial dreams rapidly crushed.

Although with enough support any claimant could become emperor, this does not mean that they could remain emperor. Acceptance by others was critical for running the Empire, and an emperor had to be seen to obey the law. Thus a law of Valentinian III from 429 included in the *Codex Justinianus* in the sixth century referenced the proverb that "for an emperor to be bound by the laws himself is profitable for the majesty of the ruler" (*CJ* 1.14.4). A certain amount of arbitrary behavior by an emperor might be acceptable, but only so much. In this respect, the lack of an accession process made contemplation of removing an objectionable emperor relatively easy.

Despite the lack of any formal need for qualifications, Romans of all sorts, not just lawyers, spent some time thinking about the role of the emperor. The orator Mamertinus, when addressing the emperor Maximian at Trier in Gaul in 289, described what he thought the emperor had to do:

> To admit into your heart the care of so great a state and take on the fate of the whole world and, having forgotten yourself, as it were, to live for the people; to stand on such a lofty summit of human affairs from which it is as if you are looking down on every land and sea, and in turn with your eyes and mind you look to where peace is assured, where a storm is threatening, which governors are emulating your justice, which generals maintain the glory of your courage, to receive innumerable messengers from every direction and to send out as many orders, to think about so many cities and nations and provinces, to pass all nights and days in perpetual care for the safety of all (*Latin Panegyrics* 10.3.3–4).

It was a daunting job description, but there was no shortage of candidates. Some, perhaps most, were driven by desire for power. But for many, the chance to show that they could do the job better and to help more people would have been a powerful motivator. After all, the hours were long, the work was frequently uncomfortable and dusty, and there was a high risk of failure resulting in death. Mamertinus' list of cares, however, does not tell us how the Empire was actually ruled. Although the emperor was

the final arbiter, imperial decision-making and the creation of policy normally took place through a consultative process. The emperor's advisory council (known as the *consilium* until the end of the third century, thereafter as the *consistorium*, the *sacrarium*, or the *silentium*) always remained a consultative body carrying out meaningful discussions. The consistory was originally a body that received imperial visitors and received its name from the fact that only the emperor sat, while the rest of the council met standing. The debate took place in front of the emperor, but he made the final decisions in all cases. On many occasions, contemporaries or later historians claimed that individuals had an undue influence on the emperor, particularly those described as weak or young, but this does not mean that such individuals actually controlled the government; council meetings were not normally attended by the emperor's wife or sister. The tone of discussions may have varied from emperor to emperor, but the commitment to presenting points of view and the logistical realities of running the state meant that it was difficult for dogma to overrule budgets. Membership of the advisory council was never statutory, but consisted of senior officials at court as well as friends and trusted advisers of the emperor; though there may have been some informality, the meetings were minuted. There are no detailed descriptions of the working of the imperial council in the mid-third century, but an anecdote from Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, a philosopher, is suggestive:

> The Emperor Gallienus and his wife Salonina greatly honoured and venerated Plotinus. He thought to turn their friendship to some good purpose, saying that there had been a certain city of philosophers in Campania, now in ruins; he asked for the city to be rebuilt and to make over the surrounding district to the city when it was founded; those intending to live there would live under Plato's laws: the city was to be called Platonopolis; and he himself promised to withdraw there with his companions. The philosopher's intent would have happened most easily, if some of those around the emperor, either by jealousy, by resentment, or some other wretched reason obstructed the opportunity (Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 12).

Porphyry was presumably making the most of the relationship between Plotinus and the emperor, but the way that he explains the rejection of Plotinus' plan suggests a consciousness of conciliar decision-making. Despite the emperor's friendship for Plotinus, Porphyry does not paint a picture of the philosopher attending the council. Not every matter would have been discussed by a large collection of imperial officials. On some occasions, the council was bypassed, either by individuals going to the emperor directly or by the emperor himself going directly to an individual. Thus in 269, a

Herul exile, Andonnoballus, approached the emperor Claudius II at dinner, "and said 'I wish to ask a favour of you'. The emperor, thinking that he would ask for something substantial, gave him permission to make his request. And Andonnoballus said 'Give me some good wine' " (Peter the Patrician *Claudius* fr. 4). This was in public, but even when a petitioner might be able to speak relatively privately, the emperor was never truly alone. He was always accompanied by his bodyguards and by various personal attendants (*cubicularii*) who looked after his private space, known as the imperial bedroom (*sacrum cubiculum*), though in palaces this was a series of apartments rather than a single room. There were also various retainers to look after the imperial vestments and to deal with immediate demands for money. Traditionally, the *cubicularii* were eunuchs whose lack of families meant they were thought less likely to be corrupted while also being safe to keep around the imperial women. Often perceived as gatekeepers, eunuchs were usually treated in a negative fashion by contemporaries. There were perpetual tensions between the need to protect the body and time of the emperor and the need for him to be accessible to his officials and subjects. Emperors, as well as subjects, were also well aware of the danger of isolation.

IMPERIAL ADMINISTRATION

Open speech at the consistory was one way for the emperor to remain in touch with his Empire. Another way, not mentioned in Mamertinus' list of cares, was to receive petitions from his subjects and respond to them. The right to petition was universal for imperial subjects, even for slaves, as well as for cities, while emperors were supposed to be generous givers. Some of these petitions could be dealt with by simple gifts of cash or land. Around 258, Lollianus Homoeus, a publicly funded teacher of grammar from Oxyrhynchus in Egypt, sent a petition to Valerian and Gallienus, requesting the emperor assign him the income from a local orchard worth 600 Attic drachmae instead of the civic salary of 500 Attic drachmae that had been paid unreliably. He explained that rather than continually asking for payment from the city, he preferred to ask the emperor to intervene. Lollianus also wrote a covering letter to a friend that reveals he had sent an earlier petition to the emperor about this via another friend (*Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 47.3366). Lollianus' request was typical. Was he the victim of an inept civic administration as he claimed or a manipulator going over the head of the city to increase his income by 20 percent? Much of our evidence for petitions comes from the cities in the Greek-speaking part of the Empire, though this may reflect a tendency to erect inscriptions rather than a greater

tendency to appeal to the emperor. Replies to petitions such as Lollianus', usually known as rescripts, were drafted by an official known as the *a libellis*, but by the end of the third century were known as the *magister libellorum*. There was a standard format for imperial rescripts that were dictated by the emperor in Latin and were then posted publicly. They tended to state the relevant law briefly, rather than making a judgment regarding the case, often followed by a request to a local official to investigate. Other imperial correspondence was handled by the *ab epistulis* (later *magister epistularum*), usually one each for Greek and Latin correspondence, while imperial laws, usually known as edicts, were drafted by the *magister memoriae* and then discussed in the consistory.

These imperial officials produced a lot of paperwork. We know little about how these records were stored, and the mobile nature of third-century Roman government meant that there were practical limits on how much documentation could be kept; much of the paperwork was probably sent to Rome, stored in imperial estates, or discarded. Even when the relevant paperwork was accessible, much depended on the quality of indexing and filing. Emperors were accustomed to rule on matters directly and then correcting themselves or overruling precedent where necessary.

These offices were in theory tightly organized, but reality varied enormously. The number of administrative officials was small and the emperor absolute, so there was often a tendency to get things done rather than to follow slavishly previous practices. This would have worried some, infuriated others, and been seen as an opportunity by yet others. Titles too were treated casually, with numerous variations even in documents produced by imperial officials. The bureaucracy could be very intimate. The plot that led to Aurelian's murder in 275 was incited by Eros, an official of one of these offices who, imitating the emperor's handwriting, created a list of names slated for execution and then showed it to the supposed victims. The claim that his officials knew the emperor's hand when they saw it says much about the size of government and the emperor's prominent role in it.

The imperial administration was relatively small, but it had to run a large empire that was constantly in touch with the emperor. There were rhythms to this contact, with cities sending delegations at the accession of a new emperor, a process that would have involved around two thousand embassies every time a new emperor was acclaimed, every celebration of five years of rule (*quinquennalia*), and for imperial triumphs. The embassies that brought the voluntary but expected gold crowns for the emperor added to the logistical strain imposed by the court on cities as it moved. For the ambassadors, this may have been a high point of their lives, and though not every ambassador had the chance to speak before the emperor, many did. Menander the

Rhetor advised keeping these speeches down to 150 to 200 lines, perhaps ten minutes of speaking, but even so, the majority of these carefully prepared speeches would have gone undelivered.

These crowns were brought to the emperor from all parts of the world because he, and not the city of Rome, was the capital of the Empire. Foreigners were struck by the diversity of the Empire. When the Persian king Sapur I (240–272) recorded his defeat of Valerian on his great inscription from Naqsh-i Rustam, he listed the peoples accompanying the emperor, men from "Germania, Raetia, Noricum, Dacia, Pannonia, Moesia, Istria, Hispania, Mauritania, Thracia, Bithynia, Asia, Pamphylia, Isauria, Lycaonia, Galatia, Lycia, Cilicia, Cappadocia, Phrygia, Syria, Phoenicia, Judaea, Arabia, Mauritania [again], Germania [again], Lydia, and Mesopotamia." Regional identities were not entirely submerged within a Roman identity, but being Roman was expressed in numerous ways. Thus court and government could always be subdivided into groups, some based on origins, but others formed by links created in education or government service. Illyrian soldiers were particularly common, with their characteristically shaven heads, but were not an undifferentiated group; men from Thrace spoke Greek as a first language, those from Pannonia Latin. Dalmatians lived on the coast of the Mediterranean and preferred wine, but Pannonians lived in temperate Europe and drank beer. This taste for beer might unite the Pannonians with Egyptians and Britons, but their language, dominant skin color, clothing, and food tastes could divide them (see Figure 1).

As well as soldiers there were numerous civil officials, poets, and other entertainers in the *comitatus*, and even a few intellectuals, such as the philosopher Plotinus, known to both Gallienus and his wife. Like the soldiers, the courtiers came from all over the Empire and even beyond. They included Pipa, daughter of a Marcomannic king and the mistress of Gallienus, though how she interacted with his wife, the Augusta Cornelia Salonina Chrysogone, is unknown. Some of the visitors had the prestigious title of companion of the emperor (*comes Augusti*), such as the Italian senator Pomponius Bassus, consul for 259 and a decade later the first man in the senate (*princeps senatus*) under Claudius II.

THE TRAVELING EMPEROR

In the middle of the third century, the emperor was constantly on the move. Although modern writers often describe the environment around the emperor as a court, third-century writers often used the Latin *comitatus*,

Figure 1. Mosaic showing an Imperial official wearing a *chlamys*, from an early fourth-century villa at Piazza Armerina, Sicily. (Luigi Nifosi/Shutterstock.com)

meaning the imperial entourage, or even the Greek *stratopedon*, a military camp. As well as the emperor, bodyguards, soldiers, administrative officials, imperial records, and a traveling mint, there would also have been cooks, slaves, baggage carts, and pack animals, totaling thousands, if not tens of thousands, of men and animals. The *comitatus* stretched out for kilometers, a long train of men, animals, and carts. A generation later, Constantine wrote to Acilius Severus, urban prefect of Rome, about the *palatini*, who "are not strangers to the dust and work of the camp, who follow our standards, who are always performing their tasks, who the length of the marches and the difficulty of the campaign bothers as they are intent on their learned duties" (*CT* 6.36.1). The mobility would have been a challenge to petitioners and ambassadors who sometimes had to catch up with a moving emperor, but it brought him to more places in person.

Every time the emperor entered a city, he was officially welcomed with an arrival ceremony (*adventus*) by the city's dignitaries (see Figure 2). Although routine for the emperor, this procedure was not well practiced in many parts of the Empire and could be a great strain on small cities. When Constantine I arrived at Autun in Gaul in 311, an orator claimed that

> we decorated the roads by which he might come into the palace with modest ornamentation, but brought out the standards of all our *collegia* (guilds),

Figure 2. Arch of Galerius from Thessalonica in Greece, built in 296, showing an *adventus*. The emperor rides in a wagon with a military escort.

> the statues of all our gods, and a very small number of loud instruments which, in short bursts, we brought round to you often, by running (*Latin Panegyrics* 5.8.4).

There was then a speech of welcome from a local orator, terrifying for the orator, probably boring for the emperor, but like all such ceremonial occasions, sometimes surprising, amusing, or challenging. Billeting the visitors would involve temporary accommodation, with the emperor either staying on imperial estates or requisitioning one of the larger houses in the city to the simultaneous joy and horror of its owner. The cost of these imperial visits was high, though the financial strain was less on the larger cities on the imperial arteries such as Trier, Sirmium, or Antioch, where there were palaces and facilities. If the emperor kept moving, problems were lessened, but costs could be considerable if he and his *comitatus* stayed in one place for several days. But strain for some meant economic opportunity for others, with the chance to profit from hungry and thirsty soldiers and courtiers. For smaller cities, however, lying on the military route meant problems, sometimes documented when they appealed to the emperor. In 246, Philip wrote in Latin to the Aragueni, living on an imperial estate in Phrygia, in response to a Greek petition that claimed that "those sent to the district of the Appiani leave the road, the soldiers and the masters of the leading men in the city.

And they come to us as they leave the road, taking us from our work and requisitioning our plough oxen" (*OGIS* 519).

IMPERIAL RESOURCES

Feeding the men and animals of the imperial household and the *comitatus* lay in the hands of the praetorian prefect. With the exception of the emperor's personal possessions, all aspects of the Roman state ran through his office. The most critical of his duties was the extraction of resources from the Empire in the form of money, goods, and manpower and then redistributing these to support the army and other state agencies. But like all other imperial officials, the prefect received petitions and acted as a judge. The prefect could also lead military expeditions, as Heraclianus did against Palmyra in 267, although Gallienus' creation of a separate cavalry army under its own commander provided some relief from these duties. Providing figures for imperial income and expenditure or for changes is impossible, but some generalizations can be made. The emperor was deeply concerned about finance, but the Empire was not well equipped to maximize its income. Most taxation was nonprogressive, based on holdings of land rather than of income. The same applied to trade, which was usually taxed on the movement of goods rather than on their manufacture and sale. Tax concessions were one of the privileges of the aristocracy, so there were numerous exemptions. This attitude militated against using the power of the state to increase the rate of collection, while the custom for new emperors to remit uncollected arrears further reduced income. The largest single item of imperial expenditure was the army, perhaps a third of state income. Compared to this, all other items of expenditure were small, even when involving large sums of money. There are frequent comments by contemporaries on imperial finances, but much of it was by men who were poorly informed. Although we hear of difficulties in collection and complaints about being taxed, such complaints cannot be used to assess the weight of taxation, even when producing splendid rhetoric. Thus Lactantius' claim that under Diocletian the number of beneficiaries of taxation exceeded the number of taxpayers (7.3) is of little use in understanding the amount of wealth available to the Empire and how this changed over time.

In the middle of the third century, the income of the Empire was theoretically divided between the personal possessions of the emperor (known as the *ratio privata* or the *res privata*) and the possessions of the Roman state (*res summa*), but in practice these distinctions were technical. The *res privata* was administered by the *rationalis rei privatae* (later the *comes rei privatae*), the *res*

summa by the *rationalis rei summae* (later the *comes sacrarum largitionum*), and the other income streams came under the authority of the praetorian prefect. With some changes, all three offices continued to function into the seventh century. Below these political appointments was a complicated secretariat of professional bureaucrats in both the *comitatus* and in the provinces.

The emperor's possessions were huge, the result of the accumulation of the properties of three centuries of earlier emperors, with holdings in every province. How much of the Empire's land was owned by the emperor himself is, of course, unknowable, but an estimate of 5 to 10 percent of the land in the Empire might be plausible, though varying by region. In the mid-fifth century, the city territory of Cyrrhus in the province of Eufratensis contained 60,000 *iugera*, of which 10,000 belonged to the emperor. There was a core of estates in Africa and in Cappadocia known as the *domus divina* that served to support imperial household expenses. Many imperial estates were rented out, often on perpetual (emphyteutic) leases. The *res privata* also included the properties of individual emperors, bequests in wills (which often included the emperor as a co-heir), estates that were intestate, and confiscated estates. The largest source of confiscations was from those condemned, including the lands of unsuccessful challengers for imperial power. Soon after the death of Valerian, Gallienus defeated Regalianus and Ingenuus in the Balkans and added their estates to the *res privata*. He did the same with the properties of Macrianus and Callistus in 261. But as quickly as lands were added, they could be given away. The emperor was regularly approached with requests for money or favors and frequently granted them. Emperors were supposed to be generous, and Porphyry's narrative regarding Plotinus' request is built on the assumption that the emperor was only prevented from being generous by his counselors.

The second stream of imperial income, the *res summa*, included taxes on land (*tributum soli*) and on people (*tributum capitis*), as well as the *aurum coronarium* and the *aurum oblaticum*, which was paid by the Senate on the same occasions as the *aurum coronarium*. There were also numerous other minor streams of income, including sales taxes, fines, legacies, and customs duties, as well as income from mines. From the reign of Aurelian, devaluations sparked a period of major inflation of prices began, and the value of taxes paid in coin thus declined drastically.

The third stream of imperial income was of various goods in kind levied directly by the praetorian prefect. These were usually used to supply the *comitatus* and campaigning armies, issued as ration (*annona*) and fodder allowances (*capitus*). In the provinces, these taxes were handled by various procurators or *rationales* who reported directly to the prefect. These officials often had loosely defined roles, so the *a rationibus* Macrianus ended up in

charge of the supplies for Valerian's fateful campaign. Thus a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus records the despatch of thirty-six oxen and their drivers from Egypt to Syria in 253–256 for one of Valerian's campaigns in response to the orders from the prefect of Egypt, Titus Magnius Felix Crescentillianus (*Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 42.3109). Other responsibilities of the prefect included the physical infrastructure of the Empire, in particular roads and post stations for the *cursus publicus*.

IMPERIAL SPENDING

Most of the resources collected went to meet the emperor's two major financial responsibilities, feeding the city of Rome and paying the army that protected the Empire. Rome in the third century was a huge city with a population that some scholars are prepared to estimate as a million. Even at a very conservative half a million, this was a huge concentration of population. It was not equaled in Europe until the eighteenth century and as a premodern city Rome was rivaled only by medieval Baghdad and Chang'an. Water was critical for drinking, but also for bathing, and Rome was well equipped with aqueducts, maintained by imperial officials. There was also a free distribution of bread for 120,000 recipients, each of whom regularly received 50 ounces of bread to 369, 36 ounces of better-quality bread thereafter. This involved the state in shipping grain from Egypt and North Africa, the responsibility of the *praefectus annonae*, and in managing bakeries in Rome. The emperor also subsidized public entertainments at Rome, mostly gladiatorial combats and animal hunts in the Flavian Amphitheater (now better known as the Colosseum) and chariot races in the Circus Maximus. There were also displays for other reasons, such as Gallienus' celebration of ten years of rule (*decennalia*) in 262. These made the emperor accessible to his subjects, and at all of these events various chants allowed the population to express their feelings. The emperor might choose to listen, but we should not mistake this for democracy.

Most of the spending on the army came from the accounts of the *res summa*, including issues of clothing for imperial officials and soldiers, salaries, and donatives. Salaries had by the mid-third century been heavily eroded by inflation and from the 270s were little more than pocket money. They were replaced by the direct issues of food and fodder (previously deducted from salaries) and by donatives. In the third century, donatives were annual gifts for imperial birthdays and consulates that by the fourth century had become standardized to five gold *solidi* and a pound of silver per man, paid at imperial accessions and five *solidi* on five-year anniversaries

(*quinquennalia*). Donatives were the biggest payment at one time issued by the state. To make these payments, the Empire had a number of mints. There was a single imperial currency, though for small change this was often supplemented by locally minted coins in the third century. Most coins minted were in gold and in bronze, though there were occasional issues of silver. During the early third century, most imperial coinage was produced at Rome, Antioch, and Viminacium, though emperors during the late third century increased their numbers. Valerian moved the Viminacium mint to Milan and opened a new mint at Lyons in Gaul, while Gallienus created additional mints at Siscia and Cyzicus, and Aurelian moved the Milan mint to Ticinum. The third century did see major inflation although the large-scale use of in-kind payments reduced the impact of inflation. Moreover, since most imperial cash payments were in gold, not in silver or bronze, and the relationship between the metals was not fixed, the state was further isolated from inflationary effects. However, the continued minting of bronze coinage for donatives and military pay, none of which was withdrawn from circulation by taxation, tended to fuel inflation.

THE ARISTOCRACY

The manpower to run the Empire was drawn mostly from the Roman aristocracy. This was traditionally divided into two orders, the wealthier and more prestigious senate and the equestrians. Both orders were wealthy enough to live and to serve, or not serve, the emperor as they pleased. Italy was well represented, but most provinces had at least one senator and several equestrians. Although many inherited their status, the majority of senators and equestrians were appointed to these orders by the emperor, either as a result of petitions or so that they had the status required to hold imperial office. Augustus' achievement at the end of the first century BC of breaking the link between military and political success had by the third century led to a disassociation of the interests of the landed aristocracy and those of the Empire. This was not of great significance when things were going well, but if territory was not well defended, or even lost, then the attachments to Rome failed rapidly. Although senatorial status was still important, the Empire was ruled from where the emperor was. For most imperial purposes, therefore, the Senate of Rome had become a historical curiosity, and even when the emperor was in Italy, he was usually in the north, at Milan, not at Rome.

Successful service as a magistrate or general could be rewarded by the emperor with the consulate, of which there were two per year and used to

date all events within the Empire until the sixth century. Holding it with the emperor was a particular honor, though imperial consulates also had the effect of reducing the number of rewards for the aristocracy. Emperors usually held the consulate in their first full year in office. In 260, the consuls were Publius Cornelius Saecularis, urban prefect between 258 and 260, and Caius Iunius Donatus, urban prefect in 257. Similarly, in 261 Lucius Petronius Taurus Volusianus shared the consulate with Gallienus. Volusianus had had an almost exclusively military career, including service at the court of Valerian, before being promoted to praetorian prefect and becoming consul. After this, he went on to serve as Gallienus' urban prefect in 267–268.

In the mid-third century, the Empire was divided into about fifty provinces (in addition to Italy, not a province at this point), most of which were administered by two officials, a governor, and a procurator. The provincial governor, usually a senatorial *legatus Augusti pro praetore*, was concerned with law and order, which included commanding any troops stationed in the region. Almost all provincial governors and legionary commanders were imperially appointed, although the Senate assigned governors for Achaea, Asia, and Africa from a list of candidates provided by the emperor. The procurator, usually from the equestrian order, was concerned with collecting taxes. Smaller provinces were administered by equestrian prefects who combined both roles. Governors were often referred to as *praesides*, *iudices*, or *hegemones*.

The nominal senate membership of six hundred had never been sufficient to provide enough talented and willing individuals to serve as governors or legionary commanders. Moreover, from the early third century, many senatorial families ceased to hold government positions, and by the middle of the century limited themselves to offices such as urban prefect or the proconsulates of Asia, Achaea, or Africa. The emperor would have known many of these officials personally, though the more time he spent away from Rome, the less well he knew them. Emperors were thus forced to turn either to their own staffs or to the aristocrats of the much larger equestrian order to carry out an increasing number of administrative and military functions. The supposed exclusion of Senators from military command by Gallienus (according to Aurelius Victor) reflects the reality that by this point, unlike the early third century, few legions were commanded by senators. Senatorial governors of provinces were also a dying breed, and by the 280s almost every provincial governor (except in Asia, Africa, and Achaea) was an equestrian *praeses*, not a senatorial legate. Thus Lucius Artorius Pius Maximus in Syria Phoenice under Diocletian was one of the last senatorial legates known, but far more typical was the first known governor of the province of Isauria, an equestrian *hegemon*, Aulus Voconius Zeno, under Gallienus.