A HISTORY OF THE ROMAN EQUESTRIAN ORDER

CAILLAN DAVENPORT

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In the Roman social hierarchy, the equestrian order stood second only to the senatorial aristocracy in status and prestige. Throughout more than a thousand years of Roman history, equestrians played prominent roles in the Roman government, army and society as cavalrymen, officers, businessmen, tax-collectors, jurors, administrators and writers. This book offers the first comprehensive history of the equestrian order, covering the period from the eighth century BC to the fifth century AD. It examines how Rome's cavalry became the equestrian order during the Republican period, before analysing how imperial rule transformed the role of equestrians in government. Using literary and documentary evidence, the book demonstrates the vital social function which the equestrian order filled in the Roman world, and how this was shaped by the transformation of the Roman state itself.

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For my parents

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A Note on Translations

Most translations of ancient literary works and documents in this book are my own, except where otherwise specified in the footnotes.

Abbreviations

AE	*L'Année épigraphique*, Paris (1888–present).
ANRW	Temporini, H. (ed.) (1972–88), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, Berlin.
BGU	*Aegyptische Urkunden aus den staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, Griechische Urkunden*, Berlin (1895–2005).
CAH IX²	Crook, J. A., Lintott, A. and Rawson, E. (eds.) (1994), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. IX: *The Last Age of the Roman Republic, 146–43 BC*, 2nd edition, Cambridge
CAH X²	Bowman, A. K., Champlin, E. and Lintott, A. (eds.) (1996), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. X: *The Augustan Empire, 43 BC–AD 69*, 2nd edition, Cambridge.
CAH XI²	Bowman, A. K., Garnsey, P. and Rathbone, D. (eds.) (2000), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. XI: *The High Empire, AD 70–192*, 2nd edition, Cambridge.
CAH XII¹	Cook, S. A., Adcock, F. E. and Charlesworth, M. P. (eds.) (1939), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. XII: *The Imperial Crisis and Recovery, AD 193–324*, Cambridge.
CAH XII²	Bowman, A. K., Cameron, A. and Garnsey, P. (eds.) (2005), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. XII: *The Crisis of Empire, AD 193–337*, 2nd edition, Cambridge.
CAH XIII	Cameron, A. and Garnsey, P. (eds.) (1998), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. XIII: *The Late Empire, AD 337–425*, 2nd edition, Cambridge.
ChLA	Bruckner, A. and Marichal, R. et al. (eds.) (1954–present), *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores*, Lausanne.
CIL	Mommsen, T. et al. (eds.) (1862–present), *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berlin.
CJ	Krüger, P. (ed.) (1892), *Corpus Iuris Civilis Volumen Secundum: Codex Iustinianus*, 5th edition, Berlin.

CLE	Bücheler, F. and Lommatzsch, E. (eds.) (1930), *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*, 2nd edition, Leipzig.
Corinth VIII.2	West, A. B. (ed.) (1931), *Corinth: Results of Excavations Conducted by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens*, vol. VIII, Part II: *Latin Inscriptions 1896–1926*, Cambridge, MA.
Corinth VIII.3	Kent, J. H. (ed.) (1966), *Corinth: Results of Excavations Conducted by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens*, vol. VIII, Part III: *The Inscriptions, 1926–1950*, Princeton.
CTh.	Mommsen, T. and Meyer, P. M. (eds.) (1905), *Theodosiani Libri XVI cum Constitutionibus Sirmondianis et leges novellae ad Theodosianum pertinentes*, Berlin.
Eph. Ep.	Mommsen, T. et al. (eds.) (1872–1903), *Ephemeris Epigraphica: Corporis Inscriptionum Latinarum Supplementum*, Berlin.
FGrH	Jacoby, F. et al. (eds.) (1923–present), *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, Berlin and Leiden.
FHG	Müller, C. (ed.) (1878–85), *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*, 4 vols., Paris.
I. Ankara	Mitchell, S. and French, D. (eds.) (2012), *The Greek and Latin Inscriptions of Ankara (Ancyra)*, vol. I: *From Augustus to the End of the Third Century AD*, Munich.
I. Aph.	Reynolds, J., Roueché, C. and Bodard, G. (eds.) (2007), *Inscriptions of Aphrodisias* URL: http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/iaph2007
I. Didyma	Wiegand, T. (ed.) (1958), *Didyma 2: Die Inschriften*, Berlin.
I. Eph.	Wankel, H. et al. (eds.) (1979–81), *Die Inschriften von Ephesos*, 8 vols., Bonn.
I. Ilion	Frisch, P. (ed.) (1981), *Die Inschriften von Ilion*, Bonn.
I. Keramos	Varinlioğlu, E. (ed.) (1986), *Die Inschriften von Keramos*, Bonn.
I. Magn.	Kern, O. (ed.) (1900), *Die Inschriften von Magnesia am Maeander*, Berlin.
I. Perge	Şahin, S. (ed.) (1999–2004), *Die Inschriften von Perge*, 2 vols., Bonn.
I. Prusias	Ameling, W. (ed.) (1985), *Die Inschriften von Prusias ad Hypium*, Bonn.

I. Selge	Nollé, J. and Schindler, F. (eds.) (1991), *Die Inschriften von Selge*, Bonn.
IDR III.2	Russu, I. I. and Pippidi, D. M. (eds.) (1980), *Inscriptiones Daciae Romanae III. Dacia Superior 2. Ulpia Traiana Dacica (Sarmizegetusa)*, Bucharest.
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae*, Berlin (1890–present).
IGBulg.	Mihailov, G. (ed.) (1956–97), *Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria repertae*, 5 vols., Sofia.
IGR	Cagnat, R. et al. (eds.) (1906–27), *Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas pertinentes*, 4 vols., Paris.
ILAfr.	Cagnat, R. and Merlin, A. (eds.) (1923), *Inscriptions latines d'Afrique*, Paris.
ILAlg.	Gsell, S. and Pflaum, H.-G. (eds.) (1922–23), *Inscriptions latines d'Algérie*, 2 vols., Paris.
ILLRP	Degrassi, A. (ed.) (1963–5), *Inscriptiones Latinae Liberae Rei Publicae*, 2 vols., Florence.
ILS	Dessau, H. (ed.) (1892–1916), *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, 3 vols., Berlin.
Inscr. It. XIII	Degrassi, A. (ed.) (1937–63), *Inscriptiones Italiae XIII: Fasti et Elogia*, 3 vols., Rome.
IRT	Reynolds, J. M. and Ward-Perkins, J. B. (eds.) (1952), *The Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania*, Rome.
LIA	Ehmig, U. and Haensch, R. (eds.) (2012), *Die lateinischen Inschriften aus Albanien*, Bonn.
LSA	Smith, R. R. R. and Ward-Perkins, B. (eds.) (2012), *The Last Statues of Antiquity Database*. http://laststatues.classics.ox.ac.uk
LTUR	Steinby, E. M. (ed.) (1993–9), *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*, 6 vols., Rome.
M. Chr.	Mitteis, L. and Wilcken, U. (eds.) (1912), *Grundzüge und Chrestomathie der Papyruskunde*, vol. II: *Juristischer Teil*, Part II: *Chrestomathie*, Berlin and Leipzig.
ME	*Monumentum Ephesenum* in Cottier, M. et al. (eds.) (2008), *The Customs of Law of Asia*, Oxford.
OGIS	Dittenberger, W. (ed.) (1903–5), *Orientis Graecae Inscriptiones Selectae*, 2 vols., Leipzig.
OLD	Glare, P. G. W. (ed.) (2012), *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 2nd edition, 2 vols., Oxford.

ORF[4]	H. Malcovati (ed.) (1976), *Oratorum Romanorum Fragmenta*, 4th edition, 2 vols, Turin.
P. Berl. Leihg.	Kalén, T. and Tomsin, A. (eds.) (1932–77), *Berliner Leihgabe griechischer Papyri*, Uppsala.
P. Berol.	*Papyrus Berolinensis* (Berlin papyri). Inv. 8334 published in Körtenbeutel, H. (ed.) (1940), *Ein Kodizill eines römischen Kaisers*, Berlin.
P. Dura	Welles, C. B., Fink, R. O. and Gilliam, J. F. (eds.) (1959), *The Excavations at Dura-Europos: Final Report V, Part 1: The Parchments and Papyri*, New Haven.
P. Euphr.	Feissel, D. and Gascou, J. (1995), 'Documents d'Archives romains inédits du moyen Euphrate', *Journal des Savants*, 65–119.
P. Flor.	Vitelli, G. and Comparetti, D. (eds.) (1906–15), *Papiri greco-egizii, Papiri Fiorentini*, Milan.
P. Giss.	Eger, O., Kornemann, E. and Meyer, P. M. (eds.) (1910–12), *Griechische Papyri im Museum des oberhessischen Geschichtsvereins zu Giessen*, Leipzig and Berlin.
P. Harr.	Powell, J. E. et al. (eds.) (1936–85), *The Rendel Harris Papyri of Woodbrooke College, Birmingham*, Cambridge.
P. Hib.	Grenfell, B. P. and Hunt, A. S. (eds.) (1906), *The Hibeh Papyri I*, London. Turner, E. G. and Lenger, M.-T. (eds.) (1955), *The Hibeh Papyri II*, London.
P. Lond.	Kenyon, F. G. et al. (eds.) (1893–1974), *Greek Papyri in the British Museum*, London.
P. Mert.	Bell, H. I. et al. (eds.) (1948–82), *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Greek Papyri in the Collection of Wilfred Merton*, London.
P. Oxy.	*The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, London (1898–present).
P. Stras.	*Griechische Papyrus der kaiserlichen Universitäts- und Landes-bibliothek zu Strassburg*, Leipzig, Paris and Strasbourg (1912–89).
PLRE	I Jones, A. H. M., Martindale, J. R. and Morris, J. (eds.) (1971), *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. I: *AD 260–395*, Cambridge.

PME	Devijver, H. (ed.) (1976–2001), *Prosopographia militiarum equestrium quae fuerunt ab Augusto ad Gallienum*, 6 vols., Leuven.
PSI	*Papiri greci e latini*, Florence (1912–present).
RE	Pauly, A. F., Wissowa, G. and Kroll, W. et al. (eds.) (1893–1980), *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Stuttgart.
RECAM IV	McLean, B. H. (ed.) (2002), *Greek and Latin Inscriptions in the Konya Archaeological Museum (Regional Epigraphic Catalogues of Asia Minor IV)*, London.
RG	Cooley, A. E. (ed. and trans.) (2009), *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, Cambridge.
RIB	Collingwood, R. G. and Wright, R. P. (eds.) (1965), *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain*, vol. I: *Inscriptions on Stone*, Oxford.
RIC	Mattingly, H., Sydenham, E. A. et al. (eds.) (1923–present), *Roman Imperial Coinage*, London.
RPC IV Online	Howgego, C., Heuchert, V. and Yarrow, L. M. (eds.) (2006), *Roman Provincial Coinage*, vol. IV: *The Antonine Period*. http://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/
RS	Crawford, M. H. (ed.) (1996), *Roman Statutes*, 2 vols., London.
SB	Shackleton Bailey, D. R. (ed.) (1965–80), *Cicero's Letters*, 6 vols., Cambridge. (Shackleton Bailey's numbering is cited in square brackets following the traditional reference.)
SCPP	Eck, W., Caballos, A. and Fernández, F. (1996), *Das senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre*, Munich.
SEG	*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, Leiden and Amsterdam (1923–present).
SIG^3	Dittinberger, W. et al. (eds.) (1915–24), *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 3rd edition, Leipzig.
Tab. Vind. II–III	Bowman, A. K. and Thomas, J. D. (eds.) (1994–2003), *The Vindolanda Writing Tablets*, vols. II–III, London.

TAM	*Tituli Asiae Minoris*, Vienna (1901–present).
vdH^2	van den Hout, M. P. J. (1988), *M. Cornelii Frontonis Epistulae,* 2nd edition, Leipzig.
W. Chr.	Mitteis, L. and Wilcken, U. (eds.) (1912), *Grundzüge und Chrestomathie der Papyruskunde*, 2 vols., Lepizig and Berlin.

Introduction: Charting the History of the Equestrian Order

Aims and Rationale

This book is an institutional and social history of the equestrian order (*ordo equester*) in the Roman world. It charts the history of the equestrians (*equites*) in their various guises from the eighth century BC to the fifth century AD. We begin with the mounted aristocracy of the Regal period and the cavalry of the early Republic, as the Romans regarded these warriors as the ancestors of the later equestrian order. The order itself only emerged as a constituent status group within the Roman state (*res publica*), distinct from both the senate and the plebs, in the late second century BC. Membership of the equestrian order in the Republican period included tax-collectors, businessmen, jurors, and military officers. The *equites Romani* were distinguished by their own status symbols, such as gold rings and the tunic with a narrow stripe, ceremonies with religious and political meaning, and privileges such as front-row seats of the theatre. In the age of the emperors, the ranks of the *equites* included governors, financial administrators and other officials, as Augustus and his successors gave them an important role in the management of the *res publica* alongside senators.[1] Over the course of the imperial period equestrian rank was subdivided into further status grades, of which the higher could only be obtained by service in the army or administration. The proliferation of titles and honours bestowed by the Roman state meant that by the mid-fourth century AD the status of *eques Romanus* had become the least prestigious of these imperial perquisites, though it still retained inherent

[1] 'Republic', 'empire', 'imperial period', 'principate' and similar expressions are terms of modern convenience given to specific periods to give shape to our narrative of Roman history. However, in both the 'Republic' and 'empire', the Romans themselves referred to their state as the *res publica*, and recognised the emperor as operating within this system. The 'imperial period', therefore, right through to the fall of Constantinople in 1453, was what we might call a 'monarchical *res publica*'. For this argument, see Kaldellis 2015: 1–31.

value by offering immunities above the level of ordinary citizens. In one form or another, the privileged citizens called *equites* constituted a fundamental part of the socio-political hierarchy of the Roman state for more than a thousand years of history.

The equestrian order has not lacked modern commentators. Fundamental aspects of its social and political history were established by Mommsen in his monumental three-volume *Römisches Staatsrecht* (1871–8). The first independent history of the equestrian order came with Stein's monograph *Der römische Ritterstand*, published in 1927. Stein's work began with the origins of the order proper in the late Roman Republic, but the book primarily focused on equestrians in the imperial period. His research was based on a pioneering prosopographical analysis of *equites* derived from the epigraphic evidence. This demonstrated the analytical potential inherent in Mommsen's *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* and other corpora of inscriptions for prosopographical research and social history. The Regal period and the Republic gained greater attention in Hill's *The Roman Middle Class in the Republican Period* (1952), which, despite its misleading title, was an important and fundamental scholarly work. Hill's book was, however, soon surpassed by Nicolet's seminal *L'ordre équestre à l'époque républicaine (312–43 av. J.-C.)*. The first, analytical volume was published in 1966, followed by a detailed and expansive prosopography of Republican *equites* in 1974. In the course of more than one thousand pages, Nicolet put the study of equestrians in the Republican period on a new footing, especially the ideological function of the order and its relationship with the senatorial order. Nicolet's work was complemented by Badian's short but incisive book of 1972, *Publicans and Sinners*, which brought to life the role played by businessmen and tax-collectors in the administration of the expanding Republic.

In the second half of the twentieth century the imperial period received two new prosopographical corpora which updated and extended the work of Stein. Pflaum harnessed the large number of inscriptions recording equestrian careers to produce his fundamental study of the procuratorial service. *Les procurateurs équestres sous le Haut-Empire Romain* was published in 1950, followed by three volumes of detailed prosopography, *Les carrières procuratoriennes équestres sous le Haut-Empire Romain* in 1960–1, with a further supplement in 1982. The career patterns of *equites* identified by Pflaum have been the subject of some criticism, and not all his conclusions should be accepted, but his study of the material remains unparalleled. The equestrian military officers of the empire were painstakingly assembled

by Devijver in his six-volume work *Prosopographia militiarum equestrium quae fuerunt ab Augusto ad Gallienum* (1976–2001). Devijver accompanied this with a series of important articles on the officers and their career, known as the *militiae equestres*.

The work of both Pflaum and Devijver provided an essential foundation for a new socio-political study of imperial *equites*, along the lines of that which Nicolet produced for the Republic. This was Demougin's two-part study, *L'ordre équestre sous les Julio-Claudiens* (1988) and *Prosopographie des chevaliers romains julio-claudiens (43 av. J.-C.–70 ap. J.-C.)* (1992a). Starting with the triumviral period, where Nicolet had concluded his research, Demougin examined the pivotal transformation of the order from Republic to empire and the foundation of the imperial system of equestrian administrative posts. The economic and social world of the equestrian order in the empire has been the subject of a number of important studies by Duncan-Jones, culminating in his 2016 monograph, *Power and Privilege in Roman Society*. Finally, the political and ceremonial function of *equites* in the early empire received renewed attention in Rowe's incisive 2002 book, *Princes and Political Cultures: The New Tiberian Senatorial Decrees*. Rowe demonstrated the vital and important role played by the *ordo* in shaping the political culture of the imperial state, which was not solely determined 'top-down' by the emperors themselves, but also by the willing participation of *equites* individually and collectively. My research stands on the shoulders of these works and those of many other scholars, not only in terms of the prosopographical catalogues of *equites* which they compiled, but also their interpretations of the literary and documentary evidence for the equestrian order.

This book aims to make a contribution by offering a new history of the *equites* and equestrian order from the Regal period to Late Antiquity, the first time (to my knowledge) that this has been attempted since Stein. There are three main aims of this book. The first is to study the many different capacities in which equestrians served the Roman state – as cavalrymen, army officers, jurors in the criminal courts, and financial administrators (to name just a few). We will assess why the official positions available to members of the equestrian order increased significantly over time, especially during the late Republic and the imperial period. The second aim is to examine how membership of the equestrian order functioned on an individual and collective level, in order to discover what it meant to be an *eques Romanus* in the Roman world. In pursuing these first two aims, the book not only moves chronologically from Republic to empire, but also geographically, comparing the significance and function

of equestrian status and the positions held by *equites* in the city of Rome, Italy, and in the provinces. We will examine the commonalities that united the *equites*, as well as areas of fragmentation among its members and resistance to adopting equestrian status.

The third and final aim is to examine the wider sociological function of the equestrian order. We will ask why the order and its members constituted such an important part of Roman society, and why the title of *eques* remained an enduring mark of distinction for many centuries, even after equestrians ceased to be the state cavalry. The Romans were well known for retaining official titles, such as *quaestor* or *praefectus praetorio*, long after the original function of the position had changed. But the survival of the equestrian order and the distinction conveyed by membership represented more than mere administrative inertia; it speaks to a much deeper attachment to what the order represented. Indeed, the chronological framework of the book is designed to allow readers to trace the evolution of the equestrian order over the *longue durée*. Although this type of narrative history has largely fallen out of fashion, it remains a powerful way of assessing and explaining continuities and changes over time.[2] The wide chronological scope of the book, covering over one thousand years of Roman history, enables us to place the evolution of the equestrian order in the context of the transformation of the Roman state itself, which changed from monarchy under the kings into a *res publica*, and then into a curious hybrid, the 'monarchical *res publica*' (better known as the empire). The equestrian order shares many similarities with other elite status groups in pre-modern societies, but it has a unique character and developmental trajectory that can only be explained in the framework of the evolution of the Roman state itself. This is where we will begin our analysis.

The Equestrian Order in Historical Context

Comparative approaches to the civilisations of the ancient world have been especially popular in recent years.[3] This is not merely a fashionable trend, but represents an important step forward in historical analysis for ancient historians. Comparative history has all too often been the domain of

[2] Heather 2005 is a recent successful example (though the intended readership is much broader than this book).

[3] See, for example, Raaflaub and Rosenstein 1999; Mutschler and Mittag 2008; Scheidel 2009d and 2015; Arnason and Raafluab 2010; Bang and Scheidel 2013.

sociologists, political scientists and modern historians rather than classicists, but it has significant potential for understanding the societies and cultures of Greece and Rome.[4] As Scheidel has aptly put it, 'only comparisons with other civilisations make it possible to distinguish common features from culturally specific or unique characteristics and developments'.[5] Put another way, comparative history allow us to ask the question: what was 'Roman' about the Roman empire? The aim of this introductory chapter is to examine the history of the equestrian order in comparative perspective, in order to ascertain similarities and differences with comparable status groups in other pre-industrial societies. Throughout the introduction and the book as a whole, I will use the terms 'status group' or 'order' to describe the *equites* in preference to 'class', just as the Romans themselves did when they used the word *ordo*. Class is a term of economic stratification, whereas the equestrian order was an elite group that was defined by a range of criteria, of which financial wealth was but one.[6] The discussion herein will necessarily involve some simplification of complex historical phenomena in order to highlight essential points of comparison, but it is hoped that the rewards will outweigh any potential negatives that come with generalisation.[7] It also functions as a microcosm of many of the key sociological arguments presented in the book. In order to avoid repetition, the reader will be referred to specific chapters where the evidence is laid out in detail.

Monarchy and Aristocracy

We begin with Rome as a monarchy. The period from the eighth to the sixth centuries BC, traditionally described as the Regal period, is fiercely debated and is in large part unrecoverable. The Romans themselves believed that they were ruled by seven kings from the foundation of Rome by Romulus (commonly placed in 753 BC, though there were other contenders) to the expulsion of Tarquinius Superbus in 509 BC. Romulus himself is said to

[4] I have benefited from many such studies which take in the broad sweep of human history, especially Mosca 1939; Powis 1984; Mann 1986; Kautsky 1997; and Crone 2003.

[5] Scheidel 2009a: 5.

[6] See Weber 1968: 930–2 and Crone 2003: 101–4 for the basic definitions, and Cohen 1975: 261–7, Demougin 1988: 1–3, and Finley 1999: 49 for their relevance to ancient Rome and the equestrians. However, it is appropriate to use the term 'ruling class' in terms of 'ruling elite', as is common in scholarship by sociologists and political scientists (Mosca 1939: 50; Mann 1986: 25, 270).

[7] Note especially the sage remarks of Matthews 2000b about the complexities that lie beneath broad terms such as 'elite'.

have founded the *Celeres* or 'swift ones', composed of three hundred mounted warriors, whom Pliny the Elder identified as the ancestors of the equestrian order.[8] That the historical kings of Rome were supported by a mounted aristocracy is beyond doubt, though they were probably not a national army, but the personal followers of the king (*rex*). During this period central Italy was home to clans of warrior aristocrats who ranged widely across the region, competing with each other for influence and for kingship in cities such as Rome. It was not until the fifth century BC, a period traditionally identified as the beginning of the *res publica*, that these warrior clans were transformed into landed aristocracy. They preserved their military supremacy by acting as the cavalry of the new state, rather than the king's personal army. Early Rome was not unique in being dominated by a militaristic aristocratic elite; this was a fundamental characteristic of most pre-industrial monarchical societies.[9] Wealth and the ability to equip oneself and one's followers for campaigns has traditionally provided the basis for distinctive elite identity founded on martial valour. In many historical societies, aristocrats socialised their sons to follow in their footsteps by training them in military arts.[10] This helped to create a shared elite system of values, or ideology, which has traditionally provided a more enduring foundation for uniting aristocrats into a coherent social group than landed wealth alone.[11] We can obverse this ideology in the case of the knights of medieval Europe and their chivalric code or the Japanese mounted archers whom we call Samurai, who pursued a ritualised combat unique to their sense of valour and masculinity (to name just two examples).[12] In the Roman world, the culture of military excellence was displayed in the tombs and prestige goods of the warrior aristocracy of the Archaic period. Such military aristocracies exerted their power through what Max Weber called 'traditional authority', a supremacy that derived from accepted customs and norms rather than the rule of law.[13]

[8] The process of evolution described here is discussed in detail in Chapter 1.

[9] Mosca 1939: 53–6, 222–3; Bendix 1978: 231; Kautsky 1997: 144–50; Crone 2003: 26, 42–3; Wickham 2005: 158, 175.

[10] Mosca 1939: 61; Ferguson 1999: 406. For specific examples, see Briant 1999: 113–16 on Achaemenid Persia, and Spence 1993: 198–202 on the *hippeis* of Classical Athens.

[11] On group solidarity defined by ideology, see Mann 1986: 519.

[12] Knights: Barber 1995: 26–7; Kaeuper 2009: 94–115. Samurai: Farris 1999: 60–6; Friday 2003: 103–7, 137–40. Momigliano 1966: 16–17 rejected comparisons between early Roman cavalry and the knights of medieval Europe, but this cannot be sustained in the light of the clear connection between aristocracies and cavalry in world history (thus Cornell 1995: 446 n. 31).

[13] Weber 1968: 226–7.

The specific association between cavalry and the aristocracy was not unique to Rome. In the pre-industrial societies of Europe, the Near East and Asia (commonly referred to as the 'Old World'), the ability to tame and breed horses and then deploy them in battle was one of the primary distinguishing features of wealthy military elites.[14] Chariot warfare was the pre-eminent form of aristocratic display and combat in Greece and the Near East from the eighteenth century BC until the seventh century BC.[15] This is demonstrated, for example, by the predominance of chariots in Homer's *Iliad*.[16] By the seventh century BC the civilisations of Greece and the Near East had largely made the transition from fighting from chariots to cavalry warfare. This was the result of horseback riding spreading south from the Eurasian steppe, where it had first developed in the ninth century BC.[17] The employment of chariots did not die out entirely in the Near East, with scythed chariots being used by the Achaemenids and the Seleucids, for example, but it was still very limited in comparison with horseback riding.[18] The shift from chariot to cavalry did not happen simultaneously throughout the Old World. In Asia, chariot warfare remained widespread for longer, with the Chinese aristocrats of the 'Springs and Autumns' period (722–481 BC) riding in their chariots with bows and arrows.[19] In Italy itself, the transition from chariot to horseback during the Archaic period was heavily influenced by contacts with Greek colonies. Although Athens, Sparta and Corinth only adopted cavalry units in the fifth century BC, there had long been a tradition of an aristocratic cavalry elite in good horse-rearing regions such as Thessaly, Boeotia and Macedonia from an early date.[20] The oldest Greek colony in Italy was Cumae, founded in the eighth century BC by settlers from Euboea, and the presence of an aristocratic cavalry cohort in this colony clearly influenced the appearance of a similar elite, famed for their prowess on horseback, in nearby Capua by the sixth century BC.[21] There were several regions in

[14] Ferguson 1999: 424; Bachrach 1999: 292–4; Raber and Tucker 2005. [15] Drews 2004: 51–4.

[16] Drews 2004: 72. Cf. Kelder 2012, marshalling the limited evidence for cavalry in Mycenaean Greece.

[17] Drews 2004: 99. Pre-conquest 'New World' civilisations did not have horses, but there were other ways of differentiating aristocratic combatants in Aztec society (Hassig 1999). Among the ancient Maya, however, elites and non-elites did not even use different weapons (Webster 1999: 343–6).

[18] Sabin and De Souza 2007: 417–18.

[19] Yates 1999: 18–20. Cavalry became important in the subsequent 'Warring states' period (Graff 2002: 21–2).

[20] Spence 1993: 176–8; Sekunda 2013: 201. On Thessalian horses, see Hyland 1990: 16–17. For the emergence of Athenian cavalry in the fifth century BC, see now Spence 2010.

[21] Nicolet 1962; Frederiksen 1968.

Italy, such as Tuscany and Apulia, that were good for horse-rearing and made the emergence of mounted warfare on the peninsula possible, with the proviso that cavalry service was restricted to those wealthy enough to breed and equip horses.[22] It is in this context that we can place the rise of the mobile and mounted warrior aristocracy of Latium, and Rome itself, during the Regal period.

The *Res Publica*

The Roman *res publica* took shape in the fifth and fourth centuries BC after the expulsion of the kings, but it was a system of government and social organisation that was constantly evolving.[23] The name *res publica* meant that the state was essentially 'public property'.[24] At the beginning of the *res publica*, cavalry of the state was supplied by the wealthiest citizens, who were classified as *equites* during the quinquennial census. This meant that the *equites* no longer constituted a group that derived its power from 'traditional authority', as the warrior elites did, but now formed an 'occupational status group', defined by their official function, according to Weber's categories of status.[25] The appropriate Latin word for this new status group was *ordo* (plural: *ordines*) for which the English 'order' is a suitable translation, even if the basic concept does not translate well to our modern social hierarchy. An *ordo* was 'a body of people [with] the same political or social status' as defined in relation to their place within the Roman state.[26] The Romans thus conceived of their *res publica* as being composed of several *ordines* rather than economic classes.[27] Since the early Roman state organised its citizenry along military lines (as shown by the structure of the *comitia centuriata*), the earliest *ordines* were the *equites* (the wealthiest who fought on horses), the *pedites* (the citizen infantry), and the *proletarii* (the non-fighting poor).[28]

How did military elite of the *equites*, which represented one of Weber's true occupational status groups, diversify and transform into an aristocracy which was not solely defined by martial valour? Originally there were only

[22] Frederiksen 1968: 10; Hyland 1990: 17, 188.
[23] On the evolution of the *res publica*, see Hillard 2005 and Flower 2010.
[24] Judge 1974: 280–1; Hammer 2014: 30–1.
[25] Weber 1968: 306. Note especially Stein 1927: 1, who describes the equestrian order as an economic, social and juridical 'status group' (*Stand* in German).
[26] *OLD* s.v. *ordo* 4; Nicolet 1974: 175. [27] Nicolet 1974: 175–6; Cohen 1975; Finley 1999: 45.
[28] Cohen 1975: 281. On military organisation as a basis for social hierarchy, see Ferguson 1999: 400.

1,800 cavalrymen, known as the *equites equo publico*, whose horses were supplied at state expense. In 403 BC the state permitted any male citizen who met the highest census qualification to serve as an *eques*, so long as he provided his own horse.[29] However, over the course of subsequent centuries, the Roman state came to rely on auxiliary troops as cavalrymen, meaning that the *equites* themselves now only served as officers. Although military prowess remained important to the collective identity of the *equites*, it began to be rivalled by other sources of prestige, such as the pursuit and display of wealth through land ownership, business ventures and tax collection, as well as excellence in literature, rhetoric and oratory. This meant that the original cavalry aristocracy transformed into a wealthy ruling elite. Such a development was not unique to Rome; indeed, it can be described as a characteristic feature of the evolution of societies as they become more politically and economically complex.[30] By the mid-second century BC the Roman aristocracy was composed of elites who rejoiced in the title of *equites* even if they no longer constituted the main body of the cavalry. What had begun as an occupational status had become a mark of distinction.

The *equites* were composed of senators (of whom there were only 300), and all non-senators who also met the property qualification for cavalry service. The situation changed in the last decades of the second century BC, when members of the eighteen equestrian centuries were forced to relinquish their horse upon admission to the senate, and thus ceased to be *equites*. This measure was soon followed by a series of laws which gave the remaining (non-senatorial) *equites* a prominent and separate role in politics as jurors in the criminal courts. These two developments were the catalyst that forced a separation between senatorial and non-senatorial elites in terms of status distinctions, which had been simmering for centuries.[31] In the new hierarchy of the *res publica*, there was a clear distinction between the senatorial order (*ordo senatorius*) and the equestrian order (*ordo equester*). These *ordines* were superior in status and prestige to the third order, the people or ordinary citizens (*plebs*). Although the Romans continued to be organised in the military organisation of the *comitia centuriata* for voting purposes, the new social hierarchy replaced the old *ordines* of *equites*, *pedites* and *proletarii* of the early

[29] This discussion summarises the conclusions of Chapter 1.

[30] Mosca 1939: 57; Bottomore 1993: 29.

[31] Weber 1968: 306 notes how the acquisition of political influence often results in the formation of new status groups.

Republic.[32] The change does not mean that the equestrian order constituted in any sense an economic 'middle class'; rather, they were the second tier of the Roman aristocracy.[33] The distribution of the wealth acquired by the expanding Roman state in the Republican period shaped this two-tier aristocracy. The profits of empire were disproportionally allocated to affluent elites (senators and equestrians), rather than to ordinary citizens.[34] Indeed, in Polybius' description of the Roman state and the relationship between the senate, the consuls and the people as organs of government, 'the people' are largely wealthy non-senators, rather than the *plebs*.[35] The emergence of the equestrian order therefore gave these rich non-senators an official status within the framework of the *res publica*, elevating them above the other citizens.[36]

This was not a premeditated decision by any individual or group, of course, but the result of long-term evolution. Indeed, sociological studies of aristocracies have shown the vital function they perform in providing states with their essential structure and cohesion.[37] When viewed in historical perspective, we can see that the two-tier aristocratic structure of the Roman state was not a novel form of social organisation. As Mosca has observed, 'below the highest stratum in the ruling class there is always . . . another that is much more numerous and comprises all the capacities for leadership in the country'.[38] In both the Republican and imperial periods the equestrian order constituted the main source for new senators, who numbered between 300 and 600, depending on the time period. There were probably 15,000 *equites* in each generation in the first century BC, rising to 20,000–30,000 in the principate.[39] Moreover, the senate itself was not a closed and exclusively hereditary aristocracy.[40] Entrance into the senate and equestrian order was based upon financial and moral evaluation by the

[32] Cohen 1975: 281.

[33] Cohen 1975: 265; De Ste. Croix 1981: 42, 339–40; Finley 1999: 49–50. It is unfortunate that Hill 1952, which was otherwise a very important book for its time, refers to the equestrians as the 'middle class'. The true 'middle class' of ancient Rome, if we can apply such a concept to the pre-modern world, formed part of the *plebs*. See Harris 2011: 15–26 and E. Mayer 2012: 8–14 for methodological and theoretical reflections on the issue. They suggest that it is possible to think in terms of economic classes in Rome, even if the Romans themselves did not conceptualise their society in this way.

[34] Mann 1986: 256. [35] This is discussed further in Chapter 1.

[36] On the role of states in organising social hierarchies, see Poulantzas 1978: 127.

[37] See, for example, Weber 1968: 305–7; Zmora 2001: 1–2; Scheidel 2013: 19–20.

[38] Mosca 1939: 404. [39] See Chapters 1 and 5.

[40] Hopkins and Burton 1983. For the basic principle of aristocratic replenishment, see also Mosca 1939: 413.

censors, and later by the emperors.[41] Therefore, the evolution of the separate senatorial and equestrian orders in Rome is consistent with historical trends more broadly.[42] The *ordo equester* performed the sociological function of ensuring that a wide range of wealthy elites were invested in the *res publica*.[43]

We have already discussed above in the context of warrior aristocracies the need for status groups to be given meaning and unity through shared values and ideology. This sense of purpose has been styled 'immanence' by Mann.[44] In the case of the new *ordo equester*, it inherited the martial virtues, ceremonies and status symbols that had previously belonged to the aristocratic cavalry.[45] Even though the equestrians of the late Republic were not all cavalrymen (though some did serve as officers), these militaristic attributes, such as the annual parade on horseback through the city of Rome, helped to provide them with a distinctive ideological purpose which they otherwise might have lacked. For the equestrian order, 'there was genuine social-psychological meaning' in the title of *eques*, as Finley put it. This meant that as a collective unit *equites* became something more than publicans, businessmen, orators, grammarians, army officers, or small-town Italian elites, but the inheritors of a long and proud tradition of service to the state.[46] Their outward *raison d'être* was not the acquisition of wealth, but displaying their *virtus* in order to defend Rome and its interests.[47] This enabled the *equites* to assume a place in the *res publica* alongside members of the senate, whose own ideological purpose was to serve the state *domi militiaeque*. This literally means 'at home and abroad', and refers to both civilian magistracies and positions of military command.

The dissonance between the ideological expression that underpinned the collective identity of the *ordo equester* and the day-to-day lives of most *equites* was not a problem, but rather a source of strength. As Hillard has

[41] Of course, this did not stop the impulse towards a hereditary aristocracy in Rome, in the sense that senators' sons were usually *equites*, and thus part of the upper strata of society. In the imperial period Augustus formally extended senatorial dignity to the family members of senators, though descendants still had to be formally adlected into the senate itself. These developments are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

[42] There appears to be no consistency in the methods of stratification of society: sometimes there is strict legal definition of different status groups, as with the senatorial and equestrian orders, while at other times no such juridical criteria are imposed (Eisenstadt 1993: 84–6).

[43] Note in this regard the comments of Hillard 2005: 6 and Flower 2010: 11–12 on the *res publica* as an ideological concept that promoted Roman unity by including all citizens, even though in reality they were sharply divided by status.

[44] Mann 1986: 519. See also Weber 1968: 935.

[45] For discussion, see Chapter 3.

[46] Finley 1999: 46.

[47] M. I. Henderson 1963: 61. For ideology and group solidarity, see Mann 1986: 519, and as far as state service is concerned, Kautsky 1997: 169–71.

noted, Roman public ideology in all its forms was effectively 'theatre' – not in the sense of a performance devoid of meaning, but as 'a reflection of communal values'.[48] These ceremonies and symbols thus served a very real purpose, giving the *ordo equester* its social and political immanence. In pre-modern societies, regimes or social groups that lacked a coherent ideology tended to crumble or wither away.[49] It was very common, therefore, for military accomplishment to be retained as a basis for group cohesion, even though the elites concerned subsequently acquired sources of prestige beyond martial valour.[50] For example, the evolution of a mounted aristocracy into a status group defined by the state, as was the case with Rome's *ordo equester*, finds a parallel in the transformation of knights in medieval Europe.[51] However, medieval knighthood subsequently took a very different trajectory in that it became a hereditary nobility, in a way that the equestrian order never did.[52]

We have thus far identified here many aspects of the Roman aristocracy of the Republic that are common to pre-modern societies. Firstly, elite groups shared common values, which gave them an ideological purpose. Secondly, we have observed that complex societies usually had a larger secondary group of aristocrats beneath the top rank of the elite. However, it is important to emphasise that it was not inevitable that the equestrian order would emerge in precisely the way that it did. Instead, its evolution can only be explained by situations specific to Rome itself. In this context, it is instructive to compare the Roman Republic with Classical Athens and its democratic system of government. These two states not only existed contemporaneously within the Mediterranean, but they were also largely exceptional in the global context of the pre-industrial world, since the natural evolution of societies usually resulted in monarchical rather than republican or democratic constitutions.[53] Yet the cavalry aristocracy in each state evolved in fundamentally different ways. Like the Roman Republic, Athenian society was divided into distinct status groups organised on a timocratic basis from the time of Solon onwards.[54] Even after the Solonic hierarchy ceased to be relevant, cavalry service remained the

[48] Hillard 2005: 4.
[49] See the comments of Crone 1980: 62–71 on the early 'Abbāsids' failure to create a 'political rationale' for their state.
[50] Kautsky 1997: 169–77. [51] Duby 1976: 356; Barber 1995: 43; Zmora 2001.
[52] Duby 1980: 295.
[53] Crone 2003: 42. One cannot avoid thinking of Polybius' anacyclosis in this context (Polyb. 6.4.1–9.14). For Republics in world history, see Everdell 2000.
[54] Raaflaub 1999: 135.

preserve of the wealthiest citizens who could afford horses.[55] The cavalry was therefore the domain of rich, young aristocrats who trained together and performed in public displays and festivals, in a comparable manner to the Roman *equites* who marched in an annual parade through the city of Rome.[56] However, Athenian democratic ideology meant that the cavalrymen were not celebrated in the same way as the *equites*. Horse riding possessed strong monarchical overtones for the Athenians, as it was associated with autocratic states such as Macedon and Persia.[57] The rise of the hoplite infantry in the seventh century BC was idealised as the triumph of popular political participation over autocracy, even if the so-called hoplite revolution was really a much more gradual process than our sources would have us believe.[58] Henceforth, it was the citizen infantryman who demonstrated true *andreia*, the Greek equivalent of *virtus*, not the cavalryman.[59] Athens' democratic ideology did not always live up to its lofty claims of equality, and there was certainly debate and discussion as to whether democracy was always the best form of government, especially among elites, though this never produced any long-term social change.[60] The nature of the Athenian political system therefore meant that the citizens who served in the cavalry did not cohere into a distinct status group.

Why did the evolution of the cavalry elite in Rome take a different path? Rome was not a democracy in the same manner as Athens, but it was still formally a *res publica* in which the people exercised authority in matters such as declaring peace and war, authorising legislation, and deciding capital crimes.[61] The answer must be that the Roman Republic was a 'mixed constitution', as Polybius divined, which depended on a balance

[55] Kamen 2013: 3 rejects the use of the term 'order' for Athenian social groups because of the Roman associations.

[56] For this, and much of what follows, see Spence 1993: 181–230.

[57] Spence 1993: 193–5; Finley 1999: 47. For an example of 'democratic anxiety' about the cavalry in practice, see Blanshard 2010: 214–18.

[58] Lintott 2001: 158–60; Raaflaub 1999: 132.

[59] This is widely acknowledged by scholars, e.g. Spence 1993: 165–76; Raaflaub 1999: 137; Low 2002: 104–6; P. Hunt 2007: 126–7. We must be careful not to oversimplify, however, given the prominence of cavalry on monuments such as the Parthenon frieze: they were not excluded from Athenian civic pride altogether. See Spence 1993: 202; Balot 2006: 820.

[60] Balot 2006: 82–3, 89–90, 177; Spence 2010: 116. Low 2002 offers a sensitive appreciation of the ways in which cavalry service could both cohere and conflict with Athenian political ideology in the early fourth century BC. On the difference between ideology and practice in articulating status in Classical Athens, see Kamen 2013.

[61] Polyb. 6.14.4–12; Lintott 1999: 199–208; Millar 2002: 32–3. Indeed, in a series of important articles and books, Millar has emphasised the democratic elements of the Roman system which were previously neglected (Millar 1984, 1986, 1998, 2002).

between democratic, oligarchic and monarchical elements.[62] Indeed, after the Regal period the heads of the warrior aristocratic clans continued to exert influence and dominate political affairs and senior magistracies into the Republican period.[63] This meant that aristocratic ideology was not regarded with suspicion in Rome, as it was in Greece, but formed an essential part of defining social identity and hierarchy within the *res publica*.[64] Equestrian status gave wealthy, landed aristocrats who could not be (or did not want to be) enrolled in the senate an official status and public identity. This returns us to the sociological reason for the consolidation of the equestrian order as a status group, namely that it offered a way for elite non-senatorial citizens to be recognised and honoured within the *res publica*. The only way for Athens to give prominence to its aristocratic elites in the same manner was to change its whole system of government from democracy to oligarchy; attempts to do so did not meet with long-term success.[65]

We have thus far examined the cultural and sociological reasons for the evolution of the *ordo equester*, but it is equally important to recognise the importance of individual politicians in its development.[66] The *ordo*'s emergence as a status group distinct from the senate in the late second century BC was also the result of Gaius Gracchus' law regarding the composition of juries in the extortion court. This law empanelled equestrian citizens with no senatorial relations to sit in judgement on the conduct of senatorial governors. Although equestrians had been previously involved in political conflicts with senators about the issue of tax contracts, this is the first time that equestrians were given official posts in the civilian political sphere of Rome itself (as opposed to officer commands in the army).[67] The change can be attributed to the vision of Gaius Gracchus as a reformer who, among other things, wanted to hold senators to account for their conduct. The empanelment of equestrian jurors initiated much more significant tension between senators and equestrians, as it meant that the senators had to answer to *equites* for the first time. The conflicts between senators and equestrians in the late Republic were thus largely

[62] Polyb. 6.11.1–18.8. The constitution was not designed with this balance in mind, like that of Lycurgus of Sparta, but evolved over time (Polyb. 6.10.1–13). North 1990: 20–1 argues that for all Rome's 'democratic' features, Sparta actually bears a greater resemblance to the Roman Republic than does Athens.

[63] See Chapter 1.

[64] Moreover, as Hillard 2005: 3–4 notes, competition between elites was an inherent part of the political culture of the Roman Republic.

[65] Brock and Hodkinson 2001: 16–17. [66] Mann 1986: 531–2.

[67] These two laws are discussed at the end of Chapter 1.

the result of the new political role which Gaius Gracchus had bestowed upon the *equites*, rather than any class conflict.[68] Indeed, the story of the equestrian order in the first century BC, as illuminated through the works of Cicero, focuses on the question of how the order's new political authority should be integrated into the framework of a *res publica* in which they had previously been merely an order defined by wealth and status.[69] In Weberian terms, the *ordo equester* was transformed from an occupational status group to one with political power and influence.[70] However, it is important to sound a note of caution here, as the *equites* do not entirely map on to Weber's characterisation of a political status group. This is because the political influence of the *equites* was primarily reactive, in the sense that they did not, and could not, pursue their own policies, and only intervened as a collective in matters that directly affected their interests.[71]

The Monarchical *Res Publica*

In the late first century BC the monarchical element within the *res publica* became more pronounced with the rise of powerful aristocrats or 'dynasts' such as C. Iulius Caesar, Marcus Antonius, and Octavian, who became Augustus in 27 BC. Although Augustus is traditionally referred to as the 'first emperor' of Rome in modern historical discourse, this appellation is one of hindsight. For the Romans of the 'Augustan age', their state was still a *res publica*, albeit one in which the monarchical power of the consuls was gradually being invested in one man.[72] Therefore, as Kaldellis has argued, the Roman state was a 'monarchical *res publica*'.[73] The evolution of the Roman state had important ramifications for the equestrian order. For, like many monarchs, Augustus tried to ensure that the elites were dependent on him for their sources of prestige, as a way of consolidating his rule.[74] Firstly, Augustus ensured that equestrians had

[68] Note in this regard the important comment of Kautsky 1997: 49 that aristocratic empires did not have 'class conflict', but rather political disputes between aristocrats.

[69] See Chapter 2.

[70] Weber 1968: 306, defining a political status group as one that emerges 'through monopolistic appropriation of political . . . powers'. The *equites* cannot be described in these terms, although they did have political influence.

[71] Badian 1962: 224. [72] Flower 2010: 12–15.

[73] Kaldellis 2015: 22–31. See also Bang 2011, who, in a stimulating essay points out that the early Roman empire was not alone in being a state in transition, and that compromise between different aspects of government was often a feature of monarchical states.

[74] Bendix 1978: 219–20; Eisenstadt 1993: 132–4; Crone 2003: 64–6. An excellent example is the medieval ceremony of dubbing performed by emperors, kings and princes (see Duby 1980:

a clearly defined place within his *res publica*. He personally supervised the enrolment of new members, laid down strict moral and social standards, opened up new priesthoods to *equites*, and created links between the order and his own family.[75] Over the course of the first century AD, as the new monarchical *res publica* took shape, equestrian rank essentially became the gift of the emperors. The number of *equites* increased significantly, encompassing the most prestigious elites from the provinces. The imperial *ordo equester* probably numbered about 20,000–30,000 members in each generation.[76] The measures of Augustus and his successors represented a process of 'domestication', which made the *equites* – thousands of wealthy non-senatorial elites from Italy and the provinces – dependent on the emperor for honours and privileges.[77]

Secondly, Augustus and his successors not only employed equestrians as military officers, but also deployed them in a range of civilian procuratorial positions, such as financial administrators and provincial governors. This gave equestrians access to a large range of government offices that were no different to those performed by senators.[78] This meant that *equites* could now claim to serve the state *domi militiaeque* like senators. This ideology of service was enshrined in monuments and inscriptions which listed their army commands, administrative positions, priesthoods and other honours.[79] However, the number of available procuratorships was very limited. In the Augustan period there are fewer than 30 positions attested, and although the number increased to more than 180 in the mid-third century AD, this was still a very small amount compared to the size of the equestrian order.[80] Therefore, it is probable that only 600 out of 20,000–30,000 equestrians in each generation were able to hold procuratorships.[81] Competition was very fierce, and became more so the further one was rose through the hierarchy, since there were fewer senior posts available. Even one position in the imperial service was therefore a major honour, and a sign of imperial favour.[82] The *equites* who did hold procuratorships constituted an elite group within the *ordo*, which Tacitus

300–1; Barber 1995: 36). Note also the way in which the Aztec king Moteuczoma Ilhuicamina gave titles of nobility to military men, thus binding them to him (Hassig 1999: 372). This was a general historical trend across Old and New World societies.

[75] See Chapters 8, 9 and 10. [76] See Chapter 5.

[77] For the principle of 'domestication', see Elias 1982 and 1983. For its application to the Roman world, see Bang 2011: 107–8, 2013: 430; Weisweiler 2015. As Rosenstein 2009: 39–40 points out, senatorial aristocrats had to 'collaborate' with the emperors in order to receive honours from them.

[78] See Chapters 4, 6 and 7. [79] This is discussed in Chapters 6–7. [80] Pflaum 1950: 105.

[81] Bang 2011: 124. [82] See Chapters 5 and 7.

called the *equestris nobilitas* ('equestrian nobility').[83] In sociological terms they comprised a 'service aristocracy', an elite whose members receive titles and status not because of their birth, but as a result of the positions they hold within the state.[84] From the second century AD members of the equestrian order in official positions gained a range of new titles (such as *vir egregius*, 'excellent man'), which indicated that they were superior to other *equites*.[85] This process was a fundamental part of the monarchicalisation of the Roman state.[86]

The gradual evolution of the equestrian order – or more accurately, part of the order – into a 'service aristocracy' finds parallels in other pre-modern societies. As Mosca stated, 'aristocratic autocracies almost always develop into more or less bureaucratic autocracies'.[87] As these states evolved and became more bureaucratically complex, they needed a broader range of leaders and officials, which could only be drawn from the ruling class.[88] For example, the knights of medieval Europe acquired judicial and administrative roles by virtue of their social standing and prestige, which broadened their influence beyond the military sphere.[89] However, as we pointed out earlier, it is important to emphasise that the precise reasons for the evolution of service aristocracies are specific to the individual civilisations. In Rome the integration of the equestrian order into civilian government was prompted by Gaius Gracchus' laws assigning them roles as jurors in the criminal courts. This process was dramatically accelerated by Augustus' desire to appoint *equites* to administrative positions alongside senators. Indeed, Augustus' employment of *equites* in some posts, such as the newly created prefecture of Egypt, was motivated by the fact that they were not members of the senatorial aristocracy. The selection of *equites* was prompted by the belief that they would be loyal to Augustus, and would not be regarded as viable rivals for the purple.[90] In the

[83] Tac. *Agr.* 4.1.

[84] For discussion of aristocracies of service, see Mosca 1939: 60; Kautsky 1997: 127–32; Crone 2003: 67–8. Not all states were successful in forming aristocracies of service: note the failure of the 'Abbāsids to achieve this (Crone 1980: 70–1).

[85] See Chapter 7. For the practice of aristocrats demanding ever more precise status distinctions to mark themselves out from their peers, see Kautsky 1997: 213–17.

[86] On ruling ideology providing the basis for the cohesion of state functionaries, see Poulantzas 1978: 154–6; Mann 1986: 269–70.

[87] Mosca 1939: 405.

[88] See Kautsky 1997: 92–5 on the 'meritocracy' of the Chinese bureaucratic exams: most successful candidates were already elites or had elite connections. Scheidel 2009b: 19 also notes the role played by recommendations and patronage in the Chinese system in a manner similar to Rome.

[89] Barber 1995: 41–3. See also Bang and Turner 2015: 17–18 on Han China.

[90] This is explored in Chapter 4. Men of equestrian rank from the administration or officer corps would become viable candidates for the purple in the third century AD, on which see Chapters 11–12.

Republican period the expansion of the equestrian order gave wealthy non-senatorial elites a reason to be invested in the state. This principle still applied in imperial Rome, but it was intensified by a new actor, the emperor, who not only wanted these elites to be tied to the *res publica*, but also to him personally.

The combined senatorial and equestrian aristocracy of the Roman empire has sometimes been characterised as a fundamentally 'civilian' rather than 'military' elite, which represented something of a historical anomaly, paralleled in the pre-industrial world only by China.[91] The unified Chinese empire of the Qin and Han period (221 BC–AD 220) certainly saw a civilian aristocracy and its ideology take hold, in comparison to the previous periods of 'Warring States'.[92] The new social hierarchy was based on the old military model, but the ideology promoted by court intellectuals emphasised the personal virtue of the Chinese emperors and the maintenance of peace and prosperity through their rule.[93] There are some evident points of connection here with Rome, most notably the inheritance of a military social structure (the *comitia centuriata* of Rome), the virtues of the ruler (the *civilis princeps* in Roman thought), and the message of peace (*pax Romana*).[94] But it is problematic to think of the ruling elite of both empires as exclusively 'civilian'.[95] Rome's senatorial and equestrian orders were certainly not a warrior aristocracy, but the army remained an important part of their careers and representation. First and foremost, they aspired to serve the state *domi militiaeque*, in both civilian and military capacities. Army commands still carried significant cachet and prestige for the equestrians, who were drawn from the municipal elites of Italy and the empire.[96] All members of the equestrian order in the imperial period were still eligible to march in the annual

[91] Mann 1986: 270; Wickham 2005: 158. For example, see Leyser 1994: 67 on knighthood in the ninth century AD: 'There were no civilians in this lay nobility. A non-belligerent lay noble was a monster just like an armed priest.' These dynamics crossed east–west lines. For example, the Chinese aristocracy differed significantly in its ideological outlook and cultural values from the Japanese warrior caste of the Samurai, which had more in common with the knights of medieval Europe in some ways (Holcombe 1994: 56–8, 72; cf. Friday 2003: 10, emphasising the contrast between the Samurai and the Japanese civilian government more generally).

[92] For the 'great convergence', which refers to the establishment of a stable, unified monarchy in both China and Rome, see Scheidel 2009b: 17–18.

[93] Yates 1999: 33–4; Rosenstein 2009: 41–2.

[94] Mittag and Mutschler 2008: 442, in their comparison of imperial Rome and Han China, note that the development of an ideology of peace was common in societies that have reached their geographical extent.

[95] Bang and Turner 2015: 20–2 make important remarks on elites in Han China, drawing attention to military careers or aspects of martial ideology that have been undervalued by scholars.

[96] See Chapter 6.

parade in Rome, the *transvectio equitum*, a legacy of the days when the *equites* were the cavalry. This parade, as well as a range of other ceremonies, continued to emphasise the military origins of the *ordo* and the *virtus* of its members. This ideology gave the *equites* their sense of purpose, or 'immanence'.[97] The same point can be made about the senate, whose members continued to serve in military commands until the mid-third century AD. The senatorial and equestrian aristocracy of the empire cannot therefore be characterised entirely as 'civilian', as its members aspired to serve the state in whatever capacity they were required, whether that was as officers or officials.[98]

Military and Civilian Identities

The third century AD witnessed a challenge to this paradigm with the emergence of a new military elite from the ranks of the army itself. Its members were soldiers promoted directly to officer commands who became equestrians as a result of their appointments (rather than equestrian rank being a precondition for their selection in the first place).[99] These officers served alongside *equites* from the municipal elites, but came to constitute a significant force their own right in the middle decades of the third century. A series of military crises led the emperor Gallienus to appoint these officers to senior army posts in preference to senators, who effectively lost the right to command troops in battle. From the late third century AD most emperors emerged from within this military cadre, rather than the senatorial aristocracy, as martial accomplishment became a prime criterion for appointment to the imperial office. Matthews has argued that the soldiers who became generals and emperors possessed an 'alternative value system' to the existing senatorial and equestrian elites and their *domi militiaeque* ideology.[100] There were certainly social and cultural divisions between men reared in the army, on the one hand, and blue-blooded aristocrats and civilian bureaucrat elites, on the other. Comments about the boorish and uncivilised nature of Danubian emperors, such as the Tetrarchs and the Valentinians, are common in our literary sources.[101]

[97] See Chapter 8.

[98] Powis 1984: 43–62 shows how martial capabilities continued to coexist alongside other civilian markers of aristocratic ideology as pre-modern states evolved.

[99] This process is discussed in detail in Chapter 11.

[100] Matthews 2000b: 436–8; P. Brown 2000: 332–3.

[101] Tetrarchs: Victor, *Caes.* 40.12, with Lact. *DMP* 19.6 on Maximinus Daza. Valentinian I and Valens: Amm. 29.3.6, 31.14.5, with commentary of Lenski 2002: 86–8.

But there were also attempts at integration. The soldier emperors of the third and fourth centuries claimed to espouse the senatorial and equestrian *domi militiaeque* ethos.[102] These Danubian emperors ensured that their sons were sufficiently educated to be able to interact on an equal footing with the senatorial aristocracy, as shown by Valentinian I's employment of Ausonius as tutor to Gratian.[103]

Similar points can be made about the generals themselves. In the mid-fourth century AD senior military commanders were granted senatorial status, which made them part of the wider aristocratic stratum of the *viri clarissimi*.[104] Despite their origins in the camps, the generals of the later Roman empire still sought validation through civilian honours in the gift of the emperor, such as equestrian or senatorial status, the ordinary consulship, marriages and connections with established aristocrats, and the acquisition of land, wealth and power at court.[105] Nor was the process entirely one way, as the elites of the cities and senate adopted or appropriated martial virtues. Members of the curial classes continued to seek officer commands in the Roman army alongside soldiers who rose from the ranks, and senatorial aristocrats appropriated martial dress and symbols as part of their panoply of prestige.[106] Therefore, the new army elites and the existing equestrian and senatorial aristocracies adopted aspects of each other's life and *habitus*. The result was that both groups espoused civilian and military values to some degree, encouraging a sense of cohesion and preventing the rise of an absolutely separate warrior aristocracy.[107] This was a very different situation from that which prevailed in Latium during the Regal period, when Rome and its environs were dominated by warlords and their retinues.

Throughout all these changes, the *ordo equester* formally remained a constituent part of the *res publica*. But equestrian rank was now divided into a series of status grades, of which that of *eques Romanus* was the

[102] Davenport 2015a; 2016. [103] McEvoy 2013: 106–7. [104] See Chapter 12.

[105] Wickham 2005: 158; Halsall 2007: 92–3, with P. Brown 1992 and Näf 1995 on senatorial values. For a case study of a barbarian family and expressions of their identity in Roman politics, see McEvoy 2016 on the Ardaburii of the fifth century AD. See also Demandt 1980 on the connections and networks of the military elites more generally.

[106] Halsall 2007: 109–10, 350–1, 474–5, 484.

[107] The army officers of the later Roman empire were therefore quite different from the Huns (see Maenchen-Helfen 1973: 190–9). One might also compare the situation in Rome with medieval China. The ascension of military elites and their emperors under the Song, Qi, Liang and Chen dynasties did not result in the change of overall imperial ideology or aristocratic values. The new martial corps instead adopted the aristocratic lifestyles that had already been established in the Han period. See Holcombe 1994: 21, 36, 56–8, 72; Graff 2002: 90–3, 115–16, 256; Scheidel 2009b: 21–2.

lowest. Officers, administrators and curial elites sought the higher ranks of *egregius* and *perfectissimus* which offered greater privileges and immunities. This meant that although equestrian status continued to be valuable, it is doubtful that all its holders identified themselves as part of an 'equestrian order'.[108] Moreover, over the course of the fourth century AD, senatorial status was gradually extended to administrative posts, provincial governorships and military commands. After the early decades of the fifth century AD the only equestrians in the Roman world were junior bureaucrats within the imperial administration, members of honoured corporations (such as the shipmasters) and municipal elites who had not been fortunate enough to acquire the senatorial rank of *clarissimus* they craved. Equestrian status remained an important distinction for these individuals, as they were *honestiores*, who were immune from base punishments. But it did not offer the same social value as it had for the *publicani* of the late Republic or Augustus' procurators. The ceremonies that had bound and united the *ordo equester* as an order gradually ceased to take place over the late empire. In particular, the connection between equestrian rank, *virtus* and martial valour in Roman public life disappeared. This can at least in part be attributed to the militarisation of the Roman administration in general, as all functionaries were said to be pursuing their *militia*, or 'military service'. But it was also the case that the ethos of serving the *res publica* in civilian and military capacities now belonged to the united senatorial order into which the senior administrators, governors and generals had been promoted.

Monarchy and Aristocracy (Reprise)

It was only with the gradual breakdown of the western Roman empire as a distinct political organisation that the aristocracies of western Europe became more ostentatiously military, as civilian administrative opportunities declined. In fifth-century AD Gaul some aristocrats took up arms in order to defend the Roman state, attempt to usurp authority for themselves, or support the cause of the incoming barbarians.[109] The successor states that emerged from the shell of the western empire, such as the Visigothic, Burgundian and Merovingian realms, were monarchies. They were constantly on a war footing, so the ideology of kingship was firmly

[108] See Chapter 12.

[109] Halsall 2007: 494–6, 2010: 375–6. For aristocrats turning towards the German invaders, see Wickham 1984: 18–19.

based on success in war rather than personal character or civilian virtues.[110] The most important men in the social hierarchy were those who could support the kings in battle.[111] The combined civilian–military senatorial career ceased to be an option for Gallic aristocrats, since there was no longer any Roman *cursus* which took them to consulships or prefectures in the sixth century.[112] The only civilian careers were ecclesiastical ones.[113] These changes in central and southern Gaul between the late fifth and sixth centuries AD resulted in aristocratic *habitus* becoming increasingly martial in nature.[114] In the region to the north of the Loire river there also emerged a new aristocracy of service, with a distinctive militaristic ethos, dependent on the Merovingian kings. By the seventh century AD, a hereditary military nobility can be found throughout Gaul, or Francia, as it was then known.[115]

Similar reasons lay behind the militarisation of the aristocracy in Italy in the late sixth and seventh centuries AD.[116] The Italian senatorial elite had originally prospered after there had ceased to be a western Roman emperor, since their new Ostrogothic overlords maintained existing structures, and furnished the army and military elite from their own ranks.[117] However, the collapse of Ostrogothic rule and the Byzantine invasion of Italy resulted in 'the eclipse of the senatorial aristocracy and the institutions associated with it' by the seventh century AD, as Brown has shown.[118] As with post-Roman Gaul, military fiefdoms arose throughout Italy.[119] The collapse of the Roman state and its institutions resulted in the demise of its aristocratic civilian values as well. The states that replaced the empire in the west were not *res publica*e, but were unashamedly autocratic regimes ruled by warrior kings. In the Roman eastern (or 'Byzantine') empire, the continuance of the civilian institutions and ideals of the *res publica* delayed

[110] For military theology, see McCormick 1986. See also I. Wood 1994: 66–70; Halsall 2007: 489–90.

[111] The late Roman empire in the west was also on a war footing, but generals were appointed to deal with these crises. They were given senatorial rank, and thus no distinct military caste emerged.

[112] Wickham 1984: 21.

[113] Mathisen 1993: 32, 53, 89–104, 125–31, 136–9. For the local nature of administration and careers, see also I. Wood 1994: 60–1; Halsall 2007: 480–2.

[114] Wickham 2005: 174–7. For military grave goods and masculinity, see Halsall 2010: 357–81.

[115] Wickham 2005: 179–85, 194–5, 200–1. See also Fouracre 2000 on the debate about the nature of the aristocracy in post-Roman Gaul.

[116] T. S. Brown 1984; Wickham 2005: 207, 239.

[117] This picture is broadly true, though exceptions can always be found: B. Swain 2016: 215–18.

[118] T. S. Brown 1984: 46–61 (quotation at 61); Barnish 1988.

[119] T. S. Brown 1984: 83, 125. Ecclesiastical careers appear to have been less attractive to the senatorial aristocracies of Italy as opposed to those of Gaul (Barnish 1988: 138–40).

the development of a true military aristocracy.[120] The process of change in Byzantium only began in the seventh century AD, as a result of the demise of the old senatorial order, the pressures of near-constant warfare, the creation of the military themes as the basis of imperial administration, and the increasing influx of outsiders such as Armenians into the imperial service as commanders.[121] The emergence of a hereditary Byzantine military aristocracy, however, was a product of the Komnenian age, a development which went hand in hand with a renewed emphasis on the martial virtues of the emperor.[122] The reconfiguration of networks of power and patronage in this period saw the disappearance of the old senatorial elite.[123] Therefore military aristocracies, such as those that existed in the Regal period, only returned to the Mediterranean world when the successor kingdoms established themselves in western Europe and the eastern, Byzantine empire shed the structures and institutions of earlier history, becoming more of a medieval monarchy.

A New Equestrian Order

The memory of Roman institutions continued to exercise a powerful hold on the European imagination. For example, in the twelfth century AD Arnold of Brescia was part of a movement called the Roman Commune, which wished to revive the Roman *res publica* together with its senate and equestrian order as part of an attempt to break the power of the Papacy.[124] But the Roman concept of the equestrian order also played an influential role in shaping the identity of medieval knights, who were envisioned as a discrete *ordo* within the social hierarchy. Knights were distinguished by the their own ceremonies, such as the ritual of dubbing, and status symbols, like the belt (*cingulum*).[125] The association between knights and the *ordo equester* actually stemmed from religious discourse. The medieval Christian Church conceived of society in terms of *ordines*, which it

[120] For the Byzantine state as a *res publica*, see Kaldellis 2015.
[121] Haldon 1990: 388–97, 2004: 213–15; Wickham 2005: 236–9.
[122] Kazhdan and Wharton Epstein 1985: 62–70, 110–16. See also Cheynet 2006: 5; Haldon 2009: 192.
[123] Haldon 2004: 225–6 notes that all senators were directly appointed by the emperor by the ninth century AD, which put an end to the 'hereditary clarissimate'.
[124] Bumke 1977: 110–11. Luscombe and Evans 1988: 314–15 draw attention to the larger intellectual and cultural significance of this movement.
[125] Barber 1995: 26–37. On the ceremonies, see also Leyser 1994: 57; Kaeuper 2009: 146.

inherited from the Roman world.[126] Christian intellectuals encouraged the notion that knights were an *ordo* serving Christ, which gave a theological justification to their professional pursuit of warfare.[127] The ritual of dubbing, through which men became knights, was transformed into a sacred ceremony, which was referred to as an 'ordination', akin to that of priests.[128] The new equestrian order (*ordo equestris* in Medieval Latin) of knights therefore had God's blessing to participate in military campaigns to preserve Christendom, most notably the Crusades.[129] The association with the Roman equestrian order was encouraged by medieval monarchs, who themselves wished to appropriate the legacy of the Roman emperors.[130] The emergence of a mounted warrior aristocracy in medieval Europe should of course be attributed to basic historical and sociological trends which we have already described, such as the association between elites and horseback riding, and the cohesion of such cavalry elites around monarchs. But their ideological sense of purpose, or immanence, was directly indebted to Rome and the memory of the *ordo equester*.

Structure of the Book

This book is divided into four parts. In Part I, after a brief foray through the age of the kings, we focus on the Roman Republic. Chapter 1, 'Riding for Rome', analyses the beginnings of equestrians as the cavalry of Rome, and the importance of courage and valour on horseback to the formation of aristocratic identity. We then move on to explore how equestrians came to form their own order as a constituent part of the *res publica*, separate from both the senate and the people. In Chapter 2, 'Cicero's Equestrian Order', we view the events of the first century BC through the eyes of Marcus Tullius Cicero, whose letters, speeches and treatises form the bulk of our evidence for equestrians in the late Republic. This chapter examines how Cicero's own portrait of the equestrian order, and the jurors, *publicani* and businessmen in its ranks, reflects contemporary uncertainty about the place of the new order within the Roman state. Chapter 3, 'Questions of Status', largely covers the same time period as Chapter 2, but from a slightly different perspective. In this chapter we analyse the new status symbols that came to define membership of the equestrian order, such as the census qualification, gold ring, reserved seats in the theatre, and the narrow-

[126] Duby 1980: 295. [127] Morris 1978; Kaeuper 2009: 55, 137–45.
[128] Chenu 1968: 225–6; Duby 1980: 295–7. [129] Luscombe and Evans 1988: 308–9.
[130] Jackson 1990: 104 on knighthood and the imperial ambitions of Frederick Barbarossa.

striped tunic. The significance of equestrian status is discussed not only from the perspective of Romans of established backgrounds, but also from the viewpoint of new entrants into the order.

Part II focuses on the institutional changes to the equestrian order in the monarchical *res publica*. Chapter 4, 'Pathways to the Principate', shows how the coming of monarchy under Augustus gave equestrians new opportunities to serve the state that had not existed under the Republic. In Chapter 5, 'An Imperial Order', the focus turns to equestrian status itself, and the way in which it came to be regarded as an imperial benefaction over the course of the first century AD. We study how equestrian rank was expressed throughout the provinces, as well as its inherent value to Roman citizens in regions as diverse as North Africa and Asia Minor. Chapters 6 and 7 form a linked pair: '*Cursus* and *Vita* (I): Officers' and '*Cursus* and *Vita* (II): Administrators'. These chapters analyse how the imperial system established by Augustus and augmented by his successors enabled equestrians to spend their lives serving the state in officer commands and administrative posts, rising through the ranks to the great prefectures at the imperial court itself. The evolution of an equestrian career structure was articulated in the public sphere by the large numbers of honorific and funerary monuments which featured inscriptions recording posts and honours bequeathed by the emperor. The new government hierarchy enabled equestrians to have careers in the army and administration similar to those pursued by senators, which resulted in the emergence of a service elite among the *ordo equester* at large. But not all equestrians desired long careers, and instead were content with one or two posts, or even an honorific title, which functioned as a mark of imperial favour.

Part III, 'Equestrians on Display', is devoted to three studies of the performative, cultural and religious aspects of the equestrian order, focusing mainly on the imperial period, but integrating material from the Republic as well. Chapter 8, 'Ceremonies and Consensus', looks at how equestrian status was articulated at a collective level, through parades and public displays, as well as its associations with the emperor and his family. In Chapter 9 we move to the theatre, arena and circus in 'Spectators and Performers'. Here we examine exactly why so many members of the equestrian order wished to perform on stage or fight as gladiators, and how the state tried to regulate this behaviour. This is paired with an analysis of the equestrian privilege of sitting in the first fourteen rows of the theatre, and how this functioned as a mark of social status in Rome and the provinces. Then, in Chapter 10, 'Religion and the *Res Publica*', the focus turns to the official priesthoods reserved for equestrians in Rome and its

sacred periphery, in particular at cult sites in Latium. We show how these religious offices offered equestrians different, but complementary, honours and dignity to the military and administrative commands.

Part IV takes us into the late empire, and the equestrian order's final transition. Chapter 11, 'Governors and Generals', focuses on the transformation of the Roman army and administration in the third century AD, and particularly the ways in which equestrians came to replace senators as military commanders and provincial administrators. The chapter also examines the rise of new men into the equestrian order from the ranks of the army. Chapter 12, 'The Last *Equites Romani*', analyses the fragmentation of equestrian status, as traditional qualifications for the order were discarded, and the order itself transformed into a series of official status grades. Equestrians who served in the army and the administration emerged anew as senators, while equestrian status itself assumed a quite different place in the social hierarchy. The longevity of the equestrian order across more than a thousand years of Roman history can be attributed to the fact that it gave honour and dignity to wealthy elites who were not senators, but still desired a place within the *res publica* at large. This connection gained greater impetus in the monarchical state, as the emperors assumed the prerogative of bestowing equestrian status, creating a way of rewarding the cream of the provincial aristocracy and integrating them into the imperial system.

PART I

The Republic

1 | Riding for Rome

Introduction: Uncle Pliny's History

C. Plinius Secundus (or Pliny the Elder, as he is better known) is widely remembered today as the most prominent victim of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, which destroyed Pompeii, Herculaneum and surrounding areas in AD 79. As prefect of the imperial fleet stationed at Misenum, Pliny mounted a heroic rescue effort, only to die of asphyxiation on the beach at Stabiae. The tale of the eruption and Pliny's unfortunate demise are memorably described in two letters written some years later by his rather bookish nephew, Pliny the Younger. These letters continue to be read in classrooms at schools and universities today.[1] Yet there is much more to Pliny the Elder's eventful life than his famous death. He was a prodigious author, penning works on cavalry combat; Rome's German Wars; a history continuing the account of Aufidius Bassus; and his surviving magnum opus, the thirty-seven-book *Natural History*, a compendium of essential facts and figures about the world in which he lived.[2] This vast output emerged during the course of his career in the Roman imperial army and administration, as a military officer, cavalry commander and imperial procurator.[3] Such positions were only open to Pliny because he was a member of the equestrian order.

No Roman ever wrote a history of the equestrian order (that we know of), but Pliny the Elder came closest. In Book 33 of his *Natural History*, Pliny turned to the subject of metals. As part of his discussion of gold, he embarked on a history of the *anulus aureus*, which was worn by equestrians in the early imperial period as a symbol of their privileged status within the Roman social hierarchy.[4] This led Pliny in turn to write a potted history of the equestrian order, covering essential topics such as the beginnings of Rome's cavalry, the judicial roles of equestrians, the right to wear the gold

[1] Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 6.16, 6.20. [2] For Pliny the Elder's *History*, see now Levick 2013.
[3] Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 3.5 provides a memorable portrait of his uncle.
[4] Pliny the Elder, *NH* 33.18.

ring, and the changing names of the *equites*.[5] But this was no straightforward chronological account, for Pliny's focus remained very much on gold, luxury and their corruptive and corrosive effects. The formation of the *ordo equester* and the use of the gold ring as a status symbol was just one aspect of this larger point.[6] Pliny omitted key developments and pieces of legislation which were necessary to provide a coherent history. This has caused significant frustration to modern historians trying to chart the evolution of the *ordo equester*.[7] But although Pliny's account lacks the precise chronological pointers and specific details we might wish for, it does provide an authentic sense of the way in which equestrian status was continuously being redefined, shaped and challenged at both an individual and collective level in the Roman world.

Unlike the senate and the people, the equestrian order was not a constituent element of the Roman state at the very beginning of its history, but only emerged as a 'third part' (*tertium corpus*) of the *res publica* in the late second century BC.[8] The order's origins in the Regal period and the early Republic, as recounted by Pliny and other Roman authors, were largely invented in the second century BC as a way of providing the equestrian order and its members with antiquity and tradition to match their new corporate identity. The aim of this chapter is to analyse how the mounted warrior elites of the Regal period transformed into a cavalry aristocracy of *equites* in the early Republic, and how the *equites* then fragmented into distinct senatorial and equestrian orders. This process will involve continuous sifting of the literary sources in order to try and distinguish invented traditions from historical reality.

Aristocrats on Horseback

The Romans believed that their city had been ruled by seven kings between the mid-eighth century and the late sixth century BC. The first of these was Romulus (r. 753–716 BC), who had a squadron of 300 skilled horsemen, called the *Celeres* ('swift ones').[9] According to Pliny the Elder, these cavalrymen were the forerunners of the equestrian order.[10] There were

[5] Pliny the Elder, *NH* 33.18–36. [6] Wallace-Hadrill 1990a: 91. [7] Brunt 1988: 515–16.

[8] Pliny the Elder, *NH* 33.33. For the formation of the equestrians into an *ordo*, see the last section of this chapter and Chapter 3.

[9] All regnal dates for the kings are traditional, and it would be unwise to place too much faith in them.

[10] Pliny the Elder, *NH* 33.35.

various stories in circulation regarding the origins of this name. It was said either to derive from their rapid speed (the Latin adjective *celer* means 'swift'); the Greek word κέλης ('riding steed'); or the cavalry's commanding officer, a man named Celer, who had been responsible for murdering Remus on the orders of Romulus.[11] Pliny was not alone in arguing that the *Celeres* were the distant ancestors of *equites Romani*, indicating a general willingness of later Romans to believe that the *ordo* could be traced back to the foundation of the city of Rome itself.[12] In Livy's history, *From the Foundation of the City*, the cavalry is said to have been composed of three centuries, each with 100 riders. These were named the *Ramnenses*, the *Titienses* and the *Luceres* after the three original tribes.[13] The number of cavalry centuries was said to have been doubled to six by one of Romulus' successors, Tarquinius Priscus (r. 616–578 BC), in order to combat the threat from the Sabines.[14] The most radical expansion and organisation of the army was attributed to the king Servius Tullius (r. 578–534 BC). He was the traditional creator of the 'Servian Constitution', which divided all Roman citizens into 193 centuries for military service based on their property.[15] This also formed the basis for the *comitia centuriata*, in which all Roman citizens met to pass legislation, judge capital cases, and declare peace and war. In this assembly there were eighteen centuries of *equites*, a title that Pliny tells us came from their ownership of *militares equi* ('military horses').[16] These stories, which attributed specific developments to individual kings, served a purpose in explaining the origins of political and military institutions to Romans of the late Republic and early empire. But their historicity is highly suspect.

What then can we say about Rome's early history, and the place of the cavalry within the state? Archaic Rome was certainly ruled by kings, even if we do not accept that all the traditional seven kings were genuine historical figures (there may indeed have been many more than seven).[17] The aristocratic elites of Latium and Etruria were a warrior group, which

[11] Servius s.v. *Aen.* 11.603. For the different traditions about Celer himself, see Wiseman 1995b: 9–10.

[12] *Celeres* and *equites*: Pomp. *Dig.* 1.2.2.15, 2.15.9; Festus 48 L, as well as Servius in the preceding note. Some authorities described the *Celeres* as a bodyguard: Livy 1.15.8; Plut. *Rom.* 26.2; Dion. Hal. 2.13, 2.29, 4.71, 4.75.

[13] Livy 1.15.3. The names are Etruscan in origin (Ogilvie 1970: 80).

[14] Festus 452 L; Livy 1.36.2, 7–8; Cic. *Rep.* 2.36.

[15] See Cornell 1995: 179–81; Lintott 1999: 55–63.

[16] Pliny the Elder, *NH* 33.29. Within this group of eighteen, the older centuries were known as *sex suffragia* ('six voting groups') – allegedly from the time of Tarquinius Priscus onwards – because they played a privileged role in the voting process (Cic. *Rep.* 2.39).

[17] Cornell 1995: 119–20, 140.

derived status and prestige from their martial achievements.[18] Archaeological and artistic evidence from burials dated to the seventh century BC reveal both the existence of cavalrymen and the use of chariots, though the latter seem to have been used in displays of prestige rather than ridden in battle.[19] These mounted warrior elites were organised in clan groups. Although the clans originated in specific city-states, they were also highly mobile, competing with other groups for influence throughout the region at large, as Cornell and Armstrong have shown.[20] The aristocratic clans indigenous to Rome itself have been styled 'proto-patricians', the forerunners of the noble families of the Republican age, by modern historians.[21] But Roman kingship was not hereditary, and it was usually held by men who were not native to the city.[22] Therefore the *rex* was selected from among the wider regional aristocracy, rather than the 'proto-patricians'. The primary responsibilities of the *rex* fell into the spheres of justice, religion and warfare. He therefore controlled Rome's 'foreign policy', supported by his own clan group, which constituted the army.[23] These mobile aristocratic clans are attested throughout the sixth and into the fifth century BC, and thus straddle the traditional division between the Regal and Republican periods marked by the 'expulsion of the kings' in 509 BC.[24] The real break seems to have been the demise of the *rex*, after which he was replaced by magistrates known as praetors. This was a post for which leaders of aristocratic clans could compete via election.[25] Over the course of the fifth century BC the warrior elites became increasingly Rome-focused rather than trans-regional, a change that marked their transition into the patriciate of the Roman social order.[26]

Where does this leave the cavalry? Alföldi argued that Romulus' *Celeres* were identical with the patrician aristocracy of Regal Rome.[27] We need to nuance this argument in the light of the evidence for a mobile, regional mounted aristocracy in Latium and the fact that the warlords competed for the kingship of Rome. The consolidation of the Roman patriciate only

[18] Frederiksen 1968: 15–16; D'Agostino 1990: 71–5, 81.

[19] For discussion of the evidence and its limitations, see Frederiksen 1968: 15–16; D'Agostino 1990: 69–71; Cornell 1995: 81–2; Barker and Rasmussen 1998: 260–1; J. Armstrong 2016: 69–70.

[20] Cornell 1995: 143–50; J. Armstrong 2016: 53–4, 57–8, 70–1.

[21] J. Armstrong 2016: 54, 96–7. On the early patriciate, see Cornell 1995: 142–3; Richard 1995: 110–11.

[22] Cornell 1995: 141–3; Rawlings 1998: 104–7; J. Armstrong 2016: 60–1, 86–93.

[23] J. Armstrong 2016: 59, 73.

[24] Cornell 1995: 144–5; Rawlings 1998: 110–12; J. Armstrong 2016: 71, 130–1, 134–46.

[25] J. Armstrong 2016: 129–36, 172–6.

[26] J. Armstrong 2016: 54, 73, 84, 134–5, 148.

[27] Alföldi 1952: 87–92, 1968: 450–2. The view is followed by Alföldy 1984: 7 in his standard work on Roman social organisation.

happened over several centuries. The *Celeres* themselves are clearly fictional, much like Romulus and the other myths of early Rome.[28] However, the motivations that lie behind the myths are just as interesting as the reality. The tradition that made the *Celeres* the ancestors of the *equites Romani* probably took root in the late second century BC, when the equestrian order became its own *ordo* distinct from the senate. As part of this process, stories were created to give the equestrians their own part to play in early Roman history.[29] If the *equites Romani* were truly to be regarded as the 'third part' in the *res publica*, as Pliny the Elder stated, then they had to be there at the very beginning, alongside the senate and the people, riding for Romulus.

The same point can be made about the *comitia centuriata*, which was attributed to the king Servius Tullius. Most scholars now agree that such a schematic organisation of Roman society is likely to have been the result of slow change over time, rather than the initiative of one *rex*.[30] We have already remarked that the fifth century BC saw warrior elites becoming more settled in Rome itself. As part of this process, landowning became a more important source of wealth and prestige, transforming the mobile clan groups into a landed aristocracy.[31] This transformation was paralleled by what Armstrong has called the formation of a 'community-based' army at Rome (as opposed to the *rex*'s personal army).[32] The notion of a timocratic military hierarchy therefore probably dates from the end of the fifth century BC, when Rome began to pay its soldiers for the first time.[33] In this army, the new wealthy landed aristocracy constituted the cavalry.[34] The status symbols that later came to be associated with the equestrian order, such as the *trabea* and the *anulus aureus*, were originally patrician or senatorial attributes – that is, they were the emblems of the new landed aristocracy.[35] This interpretation preserves Alföldi's association between the patricians and the cavalry, but moves it from the Regal period to the early Republic, the point at which a stable aristocratic group actually emerged in Rome. The precise composition of the various centuries in the *comitia centuriata*, as described by Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, must relate to the assembly of the middle Republic in the

[28] Cf. Hill 1938. [29] Ogilvie 1970: 83. [30] Cornell 1995: 181; J. Armstrong 2016: 80–1.
[31] J. Armstrong 2016: 153–63. [32] J. Armstrong 2016: 163–4.
[33] Cornell 1995: 187–90. It should be noted, however, that there was as yet no Roman coinage, which meant that the troops were paid in 'uncoined metal' (Burnett 2012: 298).
[34] Hill 1952: 5; Grieve 1987: 308–11. Cf. the more sceptical Cornell 1995: 250–1, who does not believe that the patricians were the cavalry.
[35] Alföldi 1952: 13–72 is fundamental. See also Hill 1952: 215; Nicolet 1974: 139–43; Kolb 1977b: 246–7; Oakley 2005a: 636–7.

fourth and third centuries BC.[36] The creation of the assembly was later ascribed to Servius Tullius because of the Roman habit of associating their significant political and religious institutions with specific kings and their characters.[37]

In reality, the transition from the Regal period to the Republic was much less sudden than the 'expulsion of the kings' in 509 BC might suggest. The concept of a definitive break in this year emerged from the ideology of the new *res publica*, in which the state belonged to all Roman citizens and individual and collective *libertas* was championed.[38] Instead the change was much more gradual. The sixth and fifth centuries BC witnessed the transformation of a mobile, mounted warrior elite ruled by one of their peers as a *rex*, to a landed aristocracy whose members competed with each other for election to the highest magistracies. In the new *res publica* the citizen body was its army, with the inevitable corollary that the wealthiest citizens served on horseback. This division was enshrined in the timocratic *comitia centuriata*, which gradually evolved over time before reaching the developed stage described by Livy and Dionysius some time in the fourth or third century BC. In this assembly, which represented both army and state, the most privileged members were the wealthy aristocrats called *equites*.

The Equestrian Census

The enrolment of Roman citizens in the *comitia centuriata* was the responsibility of two senior magistrates, known as the censors.[39] During the census, conducted every five years, the censors distributed all male citizens aged seventeen and over into classes according to their property qualification.[40] There were eighteen centuries of the *equites*, who were chosen from the wealthiest members of the state. They were expected to enlist as cavalrymen for ten years, which was also the minimum service requirement for all citizens who intended to embark on a public career.[41] The precise amount of the property qualification that enabled citizens to serve as *equites* in the Republican period remains uncertain. We are largely dependent on later accounts. Dionysius of Halicarnassus wrote that

[36] Nicolet 1974: 18–19; Cornell 1995: 179–81; Lintott 1999: 55–60; Forsythe 2005: 111.
[37] Beard, North and Price 1998: 3–4, 60–1. [38] Mouritsen 2001: 11–12; Hammer 2014: 53.
[39] The office of censor was instituted in 443 BC, according to Livy 4.8.3; Dion. Hal. 2.62. At some unspecified point the census began to be taken every five years (Lintott 1999: 115–17).
[40] Nicolet 1974: 73–5; McCall 2002: 8. [41] Polyb. 6.19.1–4.

Romans in the equestrian centuries were selected 'from those who possessed the greatest census rating and were of noble birth' (ἐκ τῶν ἐχόντων τὸ μέγιστον τίμημα καὶ κατὰ γένος ἐπιφανῶν), while Cicero likewise stated that they possessed 'greatest census rating' (*census maximo*).[42] The highest census rating on record is the 100,000 *asses* of the first infantry class, the *prima classis*. The classification of citizens according to *asses* cannot predate the introduction of coinage at Rome in the third century BC, though this certainly does not preclude earlier timocratic divisions on the basis of wealth, since Rome used uncoined metal prior to this point.[43] The statements of Cicero and Dionysius would seem to suggest that the *equites* in the early third century BC required the same property qualification as the *prima classis*.[44] The privilege of being selected as a member of the equestrian centuries was therefore dependent on other factors in addition to wealth alone. In choosing Roman citizens for this honour, the censors took into account their physical fitness for military service, their character and moral suitability.[45] The censors are known to have exercised significant care in enrolling or expelling citizens from the centuries, and did not use these powers indiscriminately or without reason.[46]

Over time, however, the census qualification for *equites* increased so that it was set above the level of the *prima classis*.[47] This higher level was probably introduced by the time of the Second Punic War at the end of the third century BC.[48] The change might be connected to the reorganisation of the Roman coinage system that accompanied the introduction of the *denarius* in 211 BC.[49] The evidence for the raising of the qualification comes from Polybius, who penned his account of the composition of the Roman army in the second century BC. He stated that the cavalry for each legion was selected by the censor 'according to wealth' (πλουτίνδην), implying that by this time there was a higher standard for *equites* above that required by the infantry in the *classes*.[50] Livy's account of the events of 214 BC, when citizens had to provide slaves to serve as rowers in the

[42] Dion. Hal. 4.18.1; Cic. *Rep.* 2.39. Livy 1.43.8 has the vague statement that they were selected 'from among the leading men of the state' (*ex primoribus civitatis*).

[43] For this process, and the reasons behind it, see Burnett 2012.

[44] Hill 1939, 1952: 8; Walbank 1956: 700; Rathbone 1993: 149 n. 25.

[45] Livy 4.8.2–3; Polyb. 6.20.9. See also Hill 1952: 34; Lintott 1999: 119. The first description of the censors enrolling *equites* dates to 312 BC (Diod. Sic. 20.36.5), though this could hardly be the first time it had taken place (Hill 1952: 37). For the censors' moral powers, see Astin 1988.

[46] Astin 1988: 26–8.

[47] Rosenstein 2008: 7 n. 33.

[48] Nicolet 1974: 47–68.

[49] For the *denarius*, see Woytek 2012: 315–16.

[50] Polyb. 6.20.9; Gabba 1976: 126–8, though strangely he does not believe that this applied to the *equites equo publico*, only the *equites equo suo*. They surely must have had the same rating, as noted by Nicolet 1974: 54–5.

Roman fleet, provides an indication of the potential amount of the higher equestrian census. At this moment of national crisis, citizens rated by the censors as possessing 100,000 *asses* were required to furnish three slaves for the fleet, those with more than 300,000 *asses* had to provide five, men with more than 1 million *asses*, seven, and senators, eight.[51] We need not necessarily assume that these figures matched specific property qualifications, since the senate may simply have imposed these levels on an ad hoc basis.[52] But they do show that citizens could be easily divided at higher levels above the 100,000 *asses* required for membership of the *prima classis*.

Can we get any closer to determining the precise level of the equestrian census? The most familiar figure is the near-canonical 400,000 sesterces qualification, which first appears in one of Horace's *Epistles*, dated to 20/19 BC.[53] Rathbone has noted that this census rating is only ever described in sesterces, which indicates that this specific level probably post-dated 141 BC.[54] That year saw the Romans re-tariff their coinage, which devalued the *as* as a unit of currency, and the administration henceforth switched to calculating 'state payments and official assessments of value' from *asses* to sesterces.[55] Crawford has therefore proposed that this change saw the equestrian census qualification switch from 400,000 *asses* (pre-reform) to 400,000 sesterces (post-reform).[56] Horace's reference to the 400,000 sesterces certainly implies that it was a commonly accepted figure for some time, and dates at least as far back as the *lex Roscia* of 67 BC.[57] We cannot be sure, however, whether it was instituted at an earlier period, either at the time of the reform of 141 BC or some other date before 67 BC.[58] Nor can we conclusively state that the census level did not change multiple times. What we can say is that the *equites* initially possessed the same census rating as the infantry in the *prima classis*, but it was subsequently raised above the level of the *pedites*, probably by the time of the Second Punic War. The census figure

[51] Livy 24.11.7–8.

[52] It has been suggested that 1 million *asses* was the qualification for *equites* based on the Livy passage (Nicolet 1974: 63–6; Wiseman 1971: 66; Gabba 1976: 125–8; McCall 2002: 3–5), but this cannot be the case (Brunt 1971: 700; Crawford 1985: 149). See Rathbone 1993: 149 n. 25 for other situations in which taxes were imposed at levels that do not match up with census ratings.

[53] The figure of 400,000 sesterces appears in Hor. *Epist.* 1.57–9 (R. Mayer 1994: 10–11). This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

[54] Rathbone 1993: 149 n. 25.

[55] Woytek 2012: 320. For the reasons behind this re-tariffing, see Kay 2014: 103–4.

[56] Crawford 1985: 147–51. See also Briscoe 2008: 287.

[57] This is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Cf. Brunt 1988: 146; Kay 2014: 12, 287, who assume that the *lex Roscia* of 67 BC set the census level at 400,000 sesterces.

[58] Rathbone 1993: 149 n. 25 suggests 129 BC, the year in which the *equites* were separated from the senators, as a date for its introduction.

was converted from *asses* to sesterces after the coinage re-tariffing of 141/140 BC. By the time of the late first century BC, the level was set at 400,000 sesterces.

Although wealthy and privileged, the *equites* in the eighteen centuries were not expected to pay for their own horses. Instead, each man was provided with a horse at state expense, described as an *equus publicus*.[59] According to tradition, these *equites equo publico*, as they were known, were each allocated 10,000 *asses* from the treasury to purchase a horse (an amount called the *aes equestre*), as well as a further 2,000 for its upkeep (the *aes hordiarium*).[60] The funds for this support came from a tax on widows and orphans.[61] As befitted their high standing, the eighteen centuries of *equites equo publico* initially had the privilege of voting first in the centuriate assembly, before even the *prima classis*, though this had changed by the third century BC.[62] Something that was not altered, even as Rome's territory expanded throughout Italy, was the number of *equites equo publico* selected by the censors. This remained fixed at 1,800 throughout the Republican period (one hundred *equites* for each of the eighteen centuries).[63] Three hundred of these *equites equo publico* were initially assigned to each of the first four legions.[64] This soon proved to be insufficient, and so from 403 BC all Roman citizens who possessed the necessary property qualification were permitted to serve in the cavalry, though they had to provide and maintain their steeds themselves (and thus were known as *equites equo suo*, 'cavalry on their own horse') and were not enrolled in the equestrian centuries in the *comitia centuriata*.[65] The *equites equo suo* eventually came to outnumber the *equites equo publico* quite considerably. By 225 BC, during the Second Punic War, Rome and Campania had a total 23,000 men qualified to serve in the cavalry as *equites*, but only 1,800 of these would have been officially enrolled in the equestrian centuries as

[59] The original 300 *equites* received two horses each, but this changed at some unknown point (Momigliano 1966: 17).

[60] Livy 1.43.9, discussed by Hill 1952: 11–12; Nicolet 1974: 36–7; Ogilvie 1970: 171–2. The *aes equestre* was still granted in the time of Cato the Elder (Hill 1943).

[61] Livy 1.43.9 (widows only); Cic. *Rep.* 2.36.1 (widows and orphans).

[62] Livy 1.43.9; Ogilvie 1970: 173. In the late third century BC this role was given to one of the centuries of the first class selected by lot, known as the *centuria praerogativa* (Momigliano 1966: 18; Grieve 1987: 313–17). The *sex suffragia* then voted after the first class, but before the second class (Cic. *Phil.* 2.82–3; Livy 43.16.14).

[63] Livy 1.43.8; Dion. Hal. 4.18.1; L. R. Taylor 1966: 85–6. Cf. Nicolet 1974: 113–19, proposing that there were 2,400 *equites* in the centuries.

[64] Polyb. 6.20.9.

[65] McCall 2002: 2–3. Livy 5.7.4–13 dates the introduction of the *equites equo suo* to 403 BC, during the war with Veii (supported by Ogilvie 1970: 642; cf. Nicolet 1974: 54–5). Rosenstein 2008: 7 suggests there was a lesser qualification for cavalry service *equo suo*.

equites equo publico.[66] The increase in the number of Romans who could serve as cavalry enabled a greater proportion of wealthy citizens to participate in the state at an elite level, and receive recognition for their efforts. The disparity in numbers between the *equites equo publico* and the *equites equo suo* demonstrates the prestige that the public horse bestowed on its holders. However, both groups were considered to be, and were commonly referred to, as *equites*.[67] They constituted an aristocracy united by military service to the *res publica*.

The Composition and Cohesion of the *Equites*

The *equites* encompassed both senators and non-senatorial citizens within their numbers until 129 BC. All senators were *equites equo publico*, retaining both their public horse and place in the eighteen centuries.[68] This was because the *comitia centuriata* and the senate were fundamentally two separate political institutions, the *comitia* being an assembly made up of all citizens, while the senate was an advisory council.[69] This meant that 300 of the available 1,800 available positions in the equestrian centuries were always occupied by senators.[70] The remaining *equites equo publico* were either senators' sons or other male relations, such as cousins or nephews, or wealthy citizens with no senatorial relatives.[71] The wider group of *equites equo suo* would have been more heterogeneous in origin, though they were still wealthy, since they had to meet the equestrian property qualification. This means that there was no firm dichotomy between senators and

[66] Polyb. 2.24. On the accuracy of the historian Polybius' figures for the composition of the Roman army during the Second Punic War, see the comments of Walbank 1956: 196–9.

[67] Stein 1927: 5–6.

[68] A point explicitly made in Cic. *Rep.* 4.2. See the discussion of Nicolet 1974: 75–83. The censors selected senators in accordance with *lex Ovinia*, passed in the late fourth century BC, the terms of which are unfortunately obscure (Cornell 1995: 369–70; Lintott 1999: 68–72). The quaestorship did not confer membership of the senate until the Sullan reform (Lintott 1999: 136).

[69] For the senate's powers, see Lintott 1999: 65–8.

[70] Stone 2005: 75–6 argues that the 300 senators constituted three centuries of the *sex suffragia*.

[71] The precise numerical breakdown of these groups is uncertain, though of course senators could account for no more than 300 of the 1,800 *equites equo publico*. It is the number of senatorial relations and those with no senatorial connections whatsoever that remains elusive. Hill 1952: 46 estimated that about half the *equites equo publico* were not related to senators, which seems a fair approximation. These three groups are naturally a simplification of complex social networks, as Nicolet 1974: 253–69 observed in his discussion of senatorial and equestrian relationships. But they are nevertheless important for conceptualising the changes that occurred later.

equites: senators were *equites*. They were united by the ethos of serving the *res publica* in whatever capacity they were asked to do so, *domi militiaeque*. This literally means 'at home and on campaign', and encapsulates the variety of civilian and military roles that senators were expected to fill either as magistrates, pro-magistrates or in their capacity as citizens.[72]

It is important to emphasise this point because Livy's history is quite misleading on the matter, describing the *ordo equester* as if it constituted a separate and defined group between the *ordo senatorius* and the *populus Romanus* even in the early and middle Republic. Livy's first use of the term appears in his account of the year 440 BC, in which he labelled Spurius Maelius a wealthy man from 'from the equestrian order' (*ex equestri ordine*).[73] Such an expression is anachronistic for the mid-fifth century BC, and Livy's account is shaped by his own conception of the separate equestrian order as it was in the Augustan age, when the *princeps* gave new emphasis to the position of equestrians within the *res publica*.[74] In Livy's version of the events of 403 BC, during which citizens volunteered to serve in the cavalry on their own horses for the first time, he writes how the senators paternalistically lavished praise on the *equites* and the people.[75] Even more striking is Livy's account of the year 210 BC, when a plan to provide money for the fleet is hailed by each constituent part of the state: 'the equestrian order followed the consensus of the senate, the plebs that of the equestrian order' (*hunc consensum senatus equester ordo est secutus, equestris ordinis plebs*).[76] Anyone familiar with the language of Augustan and Tiberian honorific decrees can see the influence of later, imperial political discourse at work here.[77] No Roman of the third century BC would have conceived of an equestrian order, let alone one that was distinct from the senate.

What we instead find in the early Republic is a united cavalry aristocracy of *equites*, who constituted a Weberian occupational status group, defined by their official function.[78] Such groups typically give meaning to their position through honours, status symbols and ideology, as discussed in the Introduction to this book. The Roman aristocracy was defined by

[72] Sall. *Cat.* 9.1–3 traces a connection between this ideology of service and the functioning of the *res publica*. For the senatorial career, see Rosenstein 2007, 2009: 35–9. On the expression *domi militiaeque* and its meaning, see further Drogula 2015: 47–56, and Humm 2015: 346 on its frequent use in Livy.

[73] Livy 4.13.1.

[74] Hill 1952: 45–6; Nicolet 1974: 163–7; Oakley 2005a: 636–8; Briscoe 2012: 439. Cf. the more optimistic conclusions of Hill 1930, defending, *inter alia*, the characterisation of Maelius.

[75] Livy 5.7.5–13. On the use of political language in this section, see Ogilvie 1970: 643.

[76] Livy 26.36.12. [77] This will be discussed in Chapter 8. [78] Weber 1968: 306.

equestrian *virtus* – an essentially untranslatable word that meant 'courage' or 'valour', but also represented the sum total of what it meant to be a Roman man (a *vir*).[79] Rome placed great emphasis on celebrating the achievements and victories of its cavalry in the fifth and fourth centuries BC. Traditionally, the first of these was the Battle of Lake Regillus, fought either in 499 or 496 BC, in which Rome secured victory over the Latin League thanks to the miraculous appearance of the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux, at a crucial moment.[80] To honour their contribution to the battle, the Temple of Castor and Pollux (sometimes known as the Temple of the Castores) was erected on the south side of the Roman forum, where it was formally consecrated in 484 BC.[81] The Dioscuri became the patron deities of Rome's cavalry, and featured prominently on coinage, the only mounted warriors to be so honoured.[82] According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, an annual parade of the Roman cavalry (called the *transvectio equitum*) was instituted shortly after the Battle of Lake Regillus. The *equites equo publico* paraded through Rome wearing the *trabea* (a short red or purple toga) and riding on white horses distinguished by ceremonial bosses, called *phalerae*.[83] The *transvectio* represented a celebration of the wealthiest and most distinguished citizens in the *res publica* as a coherent social group.[84] The date for this celebration was 15 July, which was the day of the victory at Lake Regillus and the festival of Castor and Pollux.[85] However, there was also a second tradition, which features in Livy, Valerius Maximus and Pseudo-Aurelius Victor, which ascribed the institution of the *transvectio* to the censor Q. Fabius Maximus Rullianus in 304 BC.[86] As a way of reconciling these different stories, it has been plausibly argued that Rullianus did not invent the ceremony, but transformed the parade from a celebration for the Roman cavalry to one exclusively for the *equites equo publico*.[87] This may have been a reaction to the growing numbers of citizens

[79] See the important discussions of Massa-Pairault 1995; McCall 2002: 6–9; McDonnell 2006: 154–8, 185–95, 248–58.

[80] Dion. Hal. 6.13.1–4; Plut. *Cor.* 3.2–4; Cic. *De Nat. Deorum* 2.6; Livy 2.19–20 (omitting the appearance of the Dioscuri); Nicolet 1974: 19–20. The parade is discussed in further detail in Chapters 5 and 8.

[81] Livy 2.24.5 gives the date of the dedication as 15 July, though other authorities (such as Ovid, *Fasti* 1.705–6) give 27 January.

[82] Forsythe 2005: 186; McDonnell 2006: 249–50. Archaeological evidence attests wider veneration of the Dioscuri throughout Latium (Massa-Pairault 1995: 46–7).

[83] Mommsen 1887–8: III, 513; Kolb 1977b: 246–7.

[84] Nicolet 1974: 44–5; Massa-Pairault 1995: 58; McDonnell 2006: 187–8.

[85] Dion. Hal. 6.13.4; Weinstock 1937a: 15.

[86] Livy 9.46.15; Val. Max. 2.2.9; Ps.-Aur. Vict. *Vir. ill.* 32.3.

[87] Weinstock 1937a: 7–18, 1937b: 2182; McDonnell 2006: 187–8; Sumi 2009: 130. This may have been given added impetus by the reorganisation of Rome's cavalry during the Samnite Wars of the mid-fourth century BC (Oakley 2005a: 644–5).

serving as *equites equo suo*, thus forming an attempt to delineate more precisely the prestige of the eighteen centuries and their members.

In addition to these collective ceremonies, equestrian *virtus* was also celebrated on an individual level in the fourth century BC. There are a number of stories of aristocratic Romans excelling in single combat on horseback from this period. In particular, from the 340s BC onwards all such accounts of monomachy included mounted combatants.[88] One of the most memorable tales featured T. Manlius Torquatus, the son of the consul of the same name, who disobeyed his father's command to hold the ranks against the Latin enemy, and engaged in single combat.[89] His act of insubordination was prompted by a challenge from the Tusculan warrior Geminus Maecius, who offered to show him 'how superior a Latin cavalryman was to a Roman' (*quantum eques Latinus Romano praestet*).[90] In a display of equestrian skill, Torquatus managed to spear Maecius' steed between the ears, unseating his opponent and flinging him to the ground. The elder Manlius Torquatus subsequently had his son executed for disobeying orders, sending a message to all Romans who would seek to break ranks. This story shows that Manlius and other young men derived great pride from their horsemanship, which formed part of their socialisation into the aristocracy.

Young men must have spent considerable time practising the combat skills that would allow them to excel in feats of equestrian *virtus*. McDonnell has argued that the increasing wealth, resources and slaves acquired by Rome in this period allowed the aristocratic youth the time and space to devote to such tasks.[91] It is surely no coincidence that honorific statues of Roman generals on horseback, commemorating equestrian *virtus* in monumental form, were first dedicated in the fourth century BC.[92] In 338 BC, equestrian representations of the consuls C. Maenius and L. Furius Camillus were erected in the Roman forum as a way to paying tribute to their successful victories against the Latin League.[93] As Livy pointed out, such monuments were not common in Rome before this time.[94] But they were soon joined by an equestrian statue in front of the

[88] McCall 2002: 84–5; McDonnell 2006: 189–93. Oakley 1985: 397 argues that such duels occurred on a yearly basis.

[89] Livy 8.7.1–22; Oakley 1985: 394 discusses this and other versions of the story.

[90] Livy 8.7.7.

[91] McDonnell 2006: 193–5.

[92] The statue of Cloelia, purportedly erected in 506 BC, is probably not historical (Livy 2.13.11, with the comments of Ogilvie 1970: 268).

[93] As Oakley 1998: 535 notes, the final defeat of the Latin League merited this new type of honour.

[94] Livy 8.13.9. There has been some debate about the historicity of these statues: Wallace-Hadrill 1990b: 172 regards them as 'annalistic fantasy', but they are accepted by other scholars, notably Tanner 2000: 29; Oakley 1998: 533–5; Oakley 2005b: 575; McDonnell 2006: 155–6.

Temple of Castor and Pollux, honouring Q. Marcius Tremulus (consul of 306 BC) for his defeat of the Hernici.[95] Pliny the Elder wrote that the custom of dedicating equestrian statues was borrowed from the Greeks, who erected them to honour sporting heroes in horseback and chariot racing.[96] The decision to use this style of monument to commemorate military victories was a Roman innovation, which demonstrates the importance of the cavalry to the continuance of the *res publica*.[97] Equestrian *virtus* represented one of the fundamental qualities of the Roman aristocracy, providing these wealthy elites with a cohesive *raison d'être*.

Political Conflict and Status Differentiation

The unity of the *equites* started to fragment in the middle Republic. Senators had always been distinguished from other *equites* by virtue of their membership of the *curia*, and senatorial magistrates even more so through holding high office, but this does not seem to have resulted in any serious problems or divisions in the fifth or fourth centuries BC. However, the differences in status between senatorial and non-senatorial *equites*, both within the equestrian centuries and among the *equites* at large, became more pronounced in the middle Republic. The greater differences between these groups stemmed from a series of interrelated developments in the third and second centuries BC. Firstly, there were disputes between senators and non-senators over commercial and trading interests and the letting of public tax contracts. This was not because the non-senatorial *equites* had any revolutionary or innovative political agenda which promoted conflict: they did not, and could not, institute any form of policy. But they did oppose any measures that would affect their interests in the commercial sphere.[98] Secondly, the senators wished to delineate their superior status within the *equites* at large, a status which not only derived from membership of the *curia*, but also their eligibility for magistracies and the associated commands that came with them. They could truly claim to serve the *res publica* in all fields of excellence *domi militiaeque*. Roman citizens with the equestrian census qualification remained fundamentally the same types of people that they

[95] Livy 9.43.22; Cic. *Phil*. 6.13; Pliny the Elder, *NH* 34.23. [96] Pliny the Elder, *NH* 34.19–20.
[97] Massa-Pairault 1995: 50; McDonnell 2006: 154–6; Spencer 2007: 93. For other Roman adaptations of Greek commemorative forms, see Wallace-Hadrill 1990b.
[98] See Badian 1962: 224; Meier 1966: 65–9.

had been in the early Republic, but the differences within the *equites* soon became more apparent.[99]

(i) Trade and Taxes

The first issue that merits consideration is the disparity between senatorial and non-senatorial *equites* in the financial and trading arena. The expansion of Rome's territorial empire in the third century BC, not to mention its increasing political influence throughout the Mediterranean, brought with it new commercial opportunities.[100] But legislation passed in 218 BC, shortly before the outbreak of the Hannibalic War, dramatically limited the capacity of senators to take advantage of these prospects. In this year, Q. Claudius, tribune of the plebs, secured the passage of the *lex Claudia*, which forbade senators or their sons from owning a ship capable of carrying more than 300 amphorae.[101] It is difficult to discover the motivations behind such a specific law. Livy presented it as a moral measure, designed to uphold the traditional view that the only respectable way for senators to earn money was through land owning and agriculture.[102] Involvement in trade was frowned on, unless one was dealing with the profits of one's own estate.[103] A ship of 300 amphorae could transport surplus wine, olive oil and other products for local markets, but would not provide a solid basis for significant commercial operations.[104] The fact that larger ships were specifically forbidden by the *lex Claudia* suggests that senators were already making profits from such ventures by the time the law was passed in the late third century BC.[105]

The senators would have had competition from non-senatorial *equites* and other wealthy citizens who also possessed extensive land holdings in

[99] This argument is indebted to the classic account of Brunt 1988: 144–50 on the late Republic, as the fundamental principles remain relevant to the earlier period.

[100] Badian 1972: 11–47; D'Arms 1981: 33–4; Kay 2014: 8–18. Gruen 1984: 302–3 discusses Romans and Italians involved in the Greek east from the early third century BC.

[101] Livy 21.63.2–4. Three hundred amphorae represents c. 7,700 litres of wine or 5,985 kg of grain per ship (Rosenstein 2008: 16 n. 75).

[102] This is plausible since moral reasons lay behind many Roman laws that were ineffective in practice. See D'Arms 1981: 31; Gruen 1984: 300–1.

[103] The *locus classicus* is Cato, *De Agr.* pref. 1–4. For the ideological issues, see Badian 1972: 50–3; D'Arms 1981: 20–31; Rosenstein 2008: 18–19. Money lending was also technically frowned upon, but it did not stop senators and *equites* in both the Republican and imperial periods (Andreau 1999a: 12–14).

[104] Wiseman 1971: 79.

[105] D'Arms 1981: 33; Gruen 1984: 307.

Italy and wished to sell their goods on the market.[106] There must have been intense rivalry between these sellers, since, as Rosenstein has recently shown, land owning in and of itself was not a lucrative business.[107] It is plausible, therefore, that this competition for a share of the market (not mentioned by Livy) meant that non-senators, both those who were *equites* and other wealthy individuals, lobbied Q. Claudius to introduce a law that would curtail the business efforts of their senatorial rivals.[108] The measure was understandably unpopular among the senate. According to Livy, only the consul C. Flaminius supported Claudius' proposal.[109] Of course, the *lex Claudia* did not actually prevent senators from engaging in trade and other commercial activities, since they continued to pursue such interests through relatives, agents and middlemen (including *equites*).[110] Cicero spoke of the law falling into abeyance by the first century BC, though the ideological thinking that underpinned it did not, and the law was reinstituted by Iulius Caesar in 59 BC.[111] These considerations do not undermine the fact that the *lex Claudia* was a piece of legislation that exposed a key point of difference between senators and their sons and other non-senatorial *equites*.[112] This enables us to understand how the interests of these groups might coalesce on some occasions, but diverge on others.

At the end of the third century BC, about the same time as the passing of the *lex Claudia*, a group of individuals known as *publicani* makes its first appearance in the annals of Livy, though they must have existed well before this.[113] The *publicani* were contractors employed to carry out services concerned with the *publica* ('public property') of the Roman state.[114] The censors were responsible for letting out the contracts, which could include supplying the army or navy, constructing or maintaining public buildings, and collecting taxes and customs duties.[115] The more obscure contracts included the feeding of the sacred geese on the Capitoline, the

[106] For land holding as the basis of equestrian wealth, see Nicolet 1974: 285–311; Brunt 1988: 163. For non-senatorial *equites* and other businessmen as competition for senators, see Rosenstein 2008: 5, 20.

[107] Rosenstein 2008: 18–24.

[108] Hill 1952: 88; Yavetz 1962: 339–42; Nicolet 1980: 80–1; D'Arms 1981: 31–3.

[109] Livy 21.63.4. Yavetz 1962: 341 regarded Flaminius as the real mastermind behind the *lex Claudia*.

[110] Wiseman 1971: 77–82; Shatzman 1975: 99–103; D'Arms 1981: 34–47.

[111] Cic. II *Verr.* 5.45; *Dig.* 50.5.3 (Scaevola).

[112] The interpretation of Hill 1952: 51 that these non-senatorial *equites* constituted a 'middle class' is anachronistic, though there is much else of value in his analysis.

[113] Badian 1972: 16; Gruen 1984: 299–300. Livy's first references to *publicani* are dated to the period of the Second Punic War (e.g. Livy 23.48.9–11, 25.1.2–4, 25.3.8–5.1).

[114] Badian 1972: 15–16; Nicolet 1974: 320–1.

[115] Polyb. 6.17.2; Brunt 1988: 149–50.

paving of fountain bases, and the cleaning of Rome's sewers.[116] *Publicani* could be organised into corporations, called *societates* in Latin, but contracts were also let on an individual basis.[117] Many *publicani* were either *equites equo publico* or *equites equo suo*, and they thus constituted a prominent and vocal group within the wealthy members of the centuriate assembly.[118] When we first meet the *publicani* in 215 BC, they are being enlisted by the senate to help supply the army in Spain with clothes, food and other necessary items in a period of crisis.[119] Three *societates*, comprising nineteen individuals, bid for the right to supply the army, but insisted that they should be excused their military service during the period of their contracts, and prescribed that the *res publica* would be responsible for any losses they suffered.[120] This episode illustrates the dependency of the Roman state on the *publicani*. But the relationship extended both ways. All contracts were let by the censors and administered by the senate, so the *publicani* relied on senatorial support for their continued employment.[121] This point is explicitly made by Polybius in his discussion of the division of power in the Roman constitution, which worked precisely because of the interdependency of the consuls, senate and people.[122] When he wrote about how 'the people' (ὁ δῆμος) relied on the senate, his discussion exclusively focused on the letting of public contracts.[123] This means that in this context Polybius did not have the entire *populus Romanus* in mind when he referred to 'the people', but rather the wealthiest non-senatorial citizens.[124]

When the interests of senatorial and non-senatorial *equites* did not align over the letting of public contracts, political conflict could occur, because the *publicani* and other equestrian businessmen resisted any attempt to curtail their financial activities in the provinces.[125] The events of the censorship of Ti. Sempronius Gracchus and C. Claudius Pulcher in 169 BC provide evidence for such fault-lines. Gracchus and Pulcher were

[116] Livy 5.23.7, with Badian 1972: 16 (Juno's temple and its geese); Livy 39.44.4–5 (paving and sewers).

[117] For the importance of individual *publicani*, see J. S. Richardson 1976 and Erdkamp 1995.

[118] Nicolet 1974: 318–20. [119] Livy 23.48.4–12. [120] Livy 23.49.1–3.

[121] The censors let the public contracts, but the senate was also involved in their administration (Walbank 1956: 694–5; Lintott 1999: 119–20).

[122] Polyb. 6.11.1–18.8, with discussion in Walbank 1956: 673–97. [123] Polyb. 6.17.1–6.

[124] For Walbank 1956: 692, 'the people' are the *publicani*, for Brunt 1988: 148, they are the *equites*. Nicolet's 1980: 213 description of them as 'the rich' may be the most appropriate, because of the difficulty in ascertaining how many *publicani* were *equites*, and vice versa.

[125] Brunt 1988: 148–9. Senators were forbidden to act as *publicani* (Nicolet 1974: 327–31), though former publicans could become senators (see the list in Wiseman 1971: 197–8).

very stringent in their review of the equestrian centuries, depriving many *equites* of their public horses. Livy says that the censors 'offended the equestrian order' (*equestrem ordinem offendissent*) by this measure, but then compounded their injury by decreeing that the *publicani* who had been granted contracts by their predecessors were ineligible to bid again.[126] Livy's account is misleading in its use of the term *ordo equester,* and in equating the *publicani* with the *ordo*.[127] However, if we regard the offended parties as non-senatorial *equites*, the situation becomes more understandable, since this group included both *publicani* and associates of *publicani*.[128] In response to the censors' actions, the *publicani* recruited a tribune, P. Rutilius, to propose a law that the contracts let by Gracchus and Pulcher should be declared null and void; Rutilius also moved that the two men should be put on trial. When voting began, eight out of the first twelve centuries of *equites equo publico*, along with a number of those in the *prima classis*, voted to condemn Pulcher.[129] This is surely an indication of the number of *publicani*, their associates and sympathisers within the equestrian centuries and in the first class of the *comitia centuriata* (which would have included the *equites equo suo*). In response to this outrage, in 167 BC the senate decided not to annexe the kingdom of Macedonia as Roman territory in order to explicitly deny the *publicani* any contracts for the mines or the timber in the forests.[130] This demonstrates that the senate acknowledged that they depended on the *publicani* for administrative and economic purposes, but were not about to be held hostage by them. The affair exposed the divisions within the upper echelons of Roman society, and especially between senatorial and non-senatorial *equites*.[131] This was not in any sense class struggle between aristocrats and a 'middle class', but a political clash between different

[126] Livy 43.16.1–2. Their predecessors were Q. Fulvius Flaccus and A. Postumius Albinus, censors in 174 BC, but we do not know the circumstances surrounding their letting of the contracts (Badian 1972: 39–40).

[127] Nicolet 1974: 318–19; Briscoe 2012: 439.

[128] See Nicolet 1974: 344–6 for a list of equestrian *publicani*, but most of the evidence comes from the first century BC.

[129] Livy 43.16.3–14. See also Cic. *Rep.* 6.2; Val. Max. 6.5.3. Only twelve of the eighteen centuries are mentioned at this stage in the voting, because the *sex suffragia* now voted after the first class (Briscoe 2012: 445).

[130] Livy 45.18.3–5; Badian 1972: 40–1; Gruen 1984: 306; Brunt 1988: 150. It has been suggested that the senate's reaction may be anachronistic and more appropriate for the first century BC (J. S. Richardson 1976: 143–4; Briscoe 2012: 659–60), but I do not see why this should be the case.

[131] Of course, the fact that four centuries of *equites equo publico* did not vote to indict Pulcher shows that there was no direct equation between equestrians and the *publicani*.

elite groups over how best to distribute the rewards and profits of Rome's expanding empire.[132]

What is striking about the disputes over the letting of public contracts is that such conflicts were not sustained year in year out. Clashes only occurred when the *publicani* had grievances. At other times, the system worked as Polybius laid out, and *publicani* certainly had supporters within the senatorial ranks, as the events of 184 BC demonstrate. In that year the censors M. Porcius Cato and L. Valerius Flaccus had decided to let out contracts at rates that would not provide sufficiently large profit margins for the *publicani*.[133] In response, the *publicani* entreated the senate to ask the censors to reconsider, and found a senatorial advocate, T. Flamininus, who spoke on their behalf in the *curia*.[134] The *publicani* and *equites* therefore did not function as a pressure group that proposed policies of their own. Instead, as Badian and Meier have shown, they were primarily reactive, intervening only when their position was threatened.[135] Their chief political concern in the middle Republic was to ensure that their opportunities for profit were not curtailed, so they could benefit from Rome's new empire.

(ii) Status Symbols

The senatorial *equites* were distinguished from other *equites* by their membership of the *curia*, their election to civilian magistracies, and their employment in the military commands attached to these magistracies.[136] Their service to Rome as administrators of justice and generals in the field meant that senators possessed a coherent group identity and *raison d'être*. This distinguished them from other *equites* who held officer posts in the army but did not stand for magistracies. The middle Republic saw the introduction of new privileges that highlighted the status and prestige of these senators, explicitly distinguishing them from other non-senatorial *equites* in the public sphere, as Rawson and Wiseman have shown.[137] The first of these privileges was ceremonial. For example, only senators dined at state expense during the *ludi Romani* and *ludi Plebeii*, the games staged in honour of the Capitoline triad. A new senatorial priestly college,

[132] This is discussed in the Introduction.

[133] Livy 39.44.7–8, as interpreted by Briscoe 2012: 367.

[134] Plut. *Cato Maior* 19.2, *Flam.* 19.3. As Gruen 1984: 305 points out, Cato had strong senatorial support, and Flamininus may have been motivated by personal animosities (Astin 1978: 85).

[135] Badian 1962: 224; Meier 1966: 65–9, 94.

[136] See Rosenstein 2007 on this configuration of the senatorial career.

[137] E. Rawson 1971: 16–17; Wiseman 1971: 68.