

INTRODUCTION

The reign of the emperor Diocletian is often considered a breaking point in Roman history.¹ Many administrative, military, and financial reforms, which together transformed the government of the Empire, were ascribed to this emperor and his colleagues. Clearly, the administration of the Empire from Diocletian onwards differed greatly from the way the realm was administered under the Antonine emperors in the second century AD. Beginning with the murder of the last Antonine emperor Commodus, the Empire experienced a period of increasing instability, as a growing number of internal and external military threats, epidemics, and banditry pressured the imperial treasury and the existing administrative system. Modern scholars have accepted that the events of the third century AD affected imperial appointment policies and social hierarchies and foreshadowed the reforms carried through by Diocletian; yet the process by which appointments and hierarchies changed, and particularly its effects on power and status relations, has hitherto remained understudied.² For a better understanding of the transformation from the early to late Empire, however, a thorough analysis of these aspects is essential. Since a single study cannot do justice to a theme so broad and so complex, the present study aims to contribute to the ongoing debate on both Roman imperial administration and the relations between individuals involving their use of power and status within the socio-political hierarchies in the context of the history of the third century AD.

¹ See, for instance, Barnes (1982), with additions in id. (1996); Rees (2004); Demandt-Goltz (2004).

² Cf. Salway (2006), 115–116: ‘The structures of early imperial and later antique government are not in doubt but neither the precise chronology nor the trajectory of the process by which the former was transformed into the latter is entirely clear.’ Illustrative is, for instance, the excellent volume by Swain and Edwards (2004), in which many aspects (economics, culture, Christians, pagan religion, philosophy) of the transition from what we call the early to the late Empire are discussed. Contributions on the changes in administration and social structures, however, are limited to specific case studies dealing with Egypt and Italy, and hardly go into the process as a whole. Cf. Christol (1997); John-Hartmann-Gerhardt (2008), 583–789. On Diocletian as extending and systematizing changes rather than being the initiator, see Bury (1913), 127.

Aim of the Present Study

In this study, I explore administration, appointment policies and social hierarchies in the period between AD 193 to 284, in order to define changing status and power relations between the highest ranking representatives of imperial power at the central level. The appointment of the emperor Pertinax, successor of Commodus, in 193 forms the starting point of the analysis; the accession of Diocletian in 284 marks the end. As said, the year 193 inaugurated a period in which many problems challenged imperial power. These internal and external difficulties had started to manifest themselves during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, but from 193 problems accumulated and increasingly afflicted the Empire and its rulers. In the second half of the third century, the difficulties culminated in what is often described as ‘the third-century crisis’. Although it is still debated whether the events of the third century are best described as a ‘crisis’,—whereas in certain areas of the Empire there was continuity and relative peace—, it is quite clear that the range of problems finally burdened both the execution of central imperial power and existing status and power relations beyond their capacities.³ For signs of tension became apparent during the reigns of the Severi, but the strains became exacerbated from 249 onwards, so that the reorganization of imperial administration was realized, or rather formalized, under Diocletian. I therefore consider it suitable to describe the third century as a period of crisis in the sphere of imperial power, and for that reason this chronological demarcation has been chosen for this study. Whether it was this period of instability which caused a reorganization of imperial administration and changes in social structures, or whether it revealed a process which had started off before, is not always easy to assess. As will become clear, in an era as hectic as the third century, in which numerous spectacular events were happening concurrently, it is often difficult for historians to trace dynamic forces, and to distinguish causality from correlation.

³ For a recent survey of the application of the term ‘crisis’, see Liebeschuetz (2007), who argues that the word crisis is an appropriate description of what happened in the third century. Cf. De Blois (2002). Liebeschuetz cites Witschel (1999), cf. id. (2004), as the most helpful critique of the ‘crisis model’. The model was also criticized by Strobel (1993).

Power and Status—Concepts and Their Definitions

Before proceeding to delineate the relevant source material and the methodology applied, the concepts ‘power’ and ‘status’ must be defined as they are used in the context of this study.⁴

Concerning the term ‘power’, it is relevant first to emphasize that we are dealing here with *political* power. Clearly there are many different theories of power which are available to modern historians.⁵ In general, one definition in the *Oxford Dictionary of English*, as ‘the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behaviour of others or the course of events,’ suits the context of this study.⁶ This definition is closely associated with the definition of Max Weber, who described power as the capacity of an actor within a social relationship to impose his will.⁷ Taking Weber’s definition as a starting point, several political scientists in the twentieth century developed the view of power as a type of social causation, leading to the definition of various dimensions through which power was theorized.⁸

Within the scope of this development the political scientist Robert Dahl initiated the power debate in the late 1950s, describing the process

⁴ It should be noted that theoretical frameworks of power and status are applied here as a means to analyze the ancient source material. In doing so, the universality of these theories will, of course, also be tested, although that is not the main purpose of this book.

⁵ Cf. Noreña (2006), in which he complains about ancient historians’ neglect to define ‘power’, and refers to the exemplary and influential formulations of Max Weber, Michel Foucault, and Michael Mann. For the application of Mann’s theory to antiquity see now Slootjes (2009).

⁶ ‘Power’, in *ODE*², 1380. This definition can be further specified by adding the sub-sense ‘political or social authority or control, especially that exercised by a government’. Cf. also the definition given by Goldhamer-Shills (1939), 171: ‘a person may be said to have *power* to the extent that he influences the behavior of others in accordance with his own intentions’, with the addition that ‘behavior is here to be understood as both covert and overt behavior. Influence is to be understood as both an alteration of behavior and a maintenance of behavior as it was, but other than what it would have been without the intervention of the power-holder.’

⁷ Weber (1978), 53, where he describes power as ‘the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests’ (*Macht* bedeutet jede Chance, innerhalb einer sozialen Beziehung den eigenen Willen auch gegen Widerstreben durchzusetzen, gleichviel worauf diese Chance beruht.).

⁸ Lukes (1974) came up with the term ‘dimensions’ (also ‘faces’) of power, referring to previous power theories as one-dimensional and two-dimensional views. Here, the main theories and main representatives of these views will be discussed. For a more detailed discussion of the power debate, see Lukes (2005), 1–13.

of power as follows: 'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.'⁹ Dahl furthermore associates power-as-causation with four aspects of power: 1. *base* (the resources or means that A uses to cause changes in others' behavior); 2. *amount* (some instances of power refer to greater changes in behavior than others); 3. *domain* (those persons subject to the actor's power); and 4. *scope* (the matters subject to the actor's power).¹⁰

Dahl and his followers became known as stating a pluralist model of power, finding power to be fragmented among various scopes and domains, as opposed to the concentration of power within a single elite.¹¹ The pluralist view was criticized by Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, who claim that non-decisions should also be taken into consideration while analyzing power. This critical view of pluralism includes agenda-setting by elites who worked away from public scrutiny, and introduces the notion of potential issues, which non-decision-making prevent from being actual.¹²

Steven Lukes, in his *Power: A Radical View*, adds a third dimension of power: preference-shaping.¹³ According to Lukes, both Dahl's one-dimensional, pluralist view, and the two-dimensional view of Bachrach and Baratz, are limited, first, in that they focus only on observable conflicts, whether overt or covert, and secondly, because they are too committed to behaviorism, whereas inaction can also follow from socially structured and culturally patterned collective behavior. Lukes argues that it is important to investigate the power to prevent the formation of grievances by shaping perceptions, cognitions, and preferences in such a way as to ensure the acceptance of a certain role in the existing order. In other words, in examining the concept of power, Lukes considered it

⁹ Dahl (1957), 202–203; see also Dahl (1961). Cf. Lukes (2005), 166–167, where he calls this debate the 'faces of power' debate, and sums up some other debates.

¹⁰ Summarized by McFarland in *IESBS*, s.v. Power: Political, 11936–11937; cf. Dahl (1957), 203; id. (1968), 407–409. Dahl himself calls these aspects 'dimensions of power'. To avoid confusion with the power dimensions as defined by Lukes (1974, re-issued 2005), Dahl's term has been changed here.

¹¹ Two much discussed books in the 1950s and 1960s, in which we find the Ruling Elite Model are Hunter (1953) and Mills (1956). Cf. Dahl's critique on this model in Dahl (1958).

¹² Bachrach-Baratz (1970). See Lukes (2005), 5–6, for other critics of the pluralist model of power.

¹³ Lukes (1974, re-issued 2005). For a summary of Lukes' critiques on the views of Dahl and of Bachrach and Baratz, see Lorenzi (2006).

relevant to ask ourselves: how do the powerful secure the willing compliance of those they dominate?¹⁴

Following Lukes' third dimension of power, Michel Foucault's work can be considered a fourth dimension of power.¹⁵ Yet, in summarizing Foucault's view of power it should be taken into consideration that different emphases on power occur throughout the course of his work and that it is necessary to uncouple his sociological from his philosophical view. In general, we can say that Foucault's works analyze the link between power, knowledge and truth. He claims that power presupposed freedom in the sense that power-holders are looking for ways of making people by themselves behave in other ways than they would have done otherwise. One way of doing this is by threatening with violence, but this goal can also be achieved by suggesting what the benefits of an action would be. Furthermore, Foucault outlines a form of covert power, organic within society. According to this view, political power is part of a series of societal controls and 'normalizing' influences through historical institutions and definitions—or discourses—, in which certain ideas are considered undeniable 'truths'.¹⁶ This view of power is less rigid than the other three, but also less effective in the context of this study, which aims at an empirical, socio-political rather than a discursive, philosophical analysis of power relations.¹⁷

The other three views of power discussed here, those of Dahl, Bachrach and Baratz, and Lukes, have a common underlying concept of power, a basic common core to their mention of power in the analysis of social relationships, that is that power is the capacity to make a difference. Although the two- and three-dimensional power views of Bachrach and Baratz, and Lukes respectively, clearly add to our understanding

¹⁴ Lukes (2005), 11–12. Lukes' third dimension built upon Antonio Gramsci's concept of ideology in the form of the notion of 'hegemony'. Gramsci (1971), elaborating on Marxist ideas, argued that it was 'culture' or 'ideology' that constituted 'the mode of class rule secured by consent'. Cf. Althusser (1970); Anderson (1976–1977), 42; Lukes (2005), 7.

¹⁵ Digesser (1992). Cf. Lukes (2005), 88.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Foucault (1980), 38. For Foucault's ideas on power, see also Foucault (1975); Id. (1976); Id. (2000). Habermas opposed himself to Foucault's conception of discourse as a battlefield for power relations. See Kelly (1994) on the debate.

¹⁷ Foucault's concern was with 'with structural relationships, institutions, strategies and techniques rather than with concrete policies and the actual people they involve.' Lukes (2005), 89. Cf. Garland (1990), 138: 'His (i.e. Foucault's, IM) special focus is always upon the way these power relations are organized [...] rather than upon the groups and individuals who dominate or are dominated as a consequence.'

of the concept of power and will be referred to in this study where applicable, these notions are in fact developments of Dahl's basic one-dimensional view. Since Dahl's view of power, with its definition of four power aspects that are observable in the available source material on the third century AD, serves well as a practical point of departure for the interpretation of the data, it is his theory which will be used in this study as the central basis of the analysis of shifting power relations within the socio-political elite between AD 193 and 284.

If we apply the concept of 'power' to the administration of the Roman Empire, at the top of administration of course stood the emperor, who had absolute power. However, he deployed imperial power for the most part indirectly, imperial officials being used to execute his power throughout the Empire. All these men, whose delegated *imperium* associated them with the emperor, also shared in imperial power. A relevant matter in this context is awareness of power. A person's awareness of his own power, and the awareness others have of his power, largely define a person's position within society. Awareness links power to the other concept dealt with in this study: status.

In general terms, status can be described as a person's 'relative social or professional position'.¹⁸ In the context of this study, we are dealing with *social* status, i.e. the prestige attached to one's position in a social hierarchy.¹⁹ Both sociologists and anthropologists have since long been concerned with questions of status and social stratification. Max Weber defined status position as 'the effective claim to social esteem in terms of positive or negative privileges'.²⁰ According to Weber, status is typically based on a special life-style and expressed through and maintained by exclusionary practices such as marriage, conventions and customs, and

¹⁸ 'Status', in *ODE*², 1728.

¹⁹ In sociology, two meanings have been given to the word 'status'. It either refers to 'the position that a person occupies in the social structure, such as teacher or priest', or it refers to 'a form of social stratification in which social positions are ranked and organized by legal, political, and cultural criteria into status groups' (*DoS*, s.v. Status). The anthropologist Linton (1936) introduced the former sense, the idea of status as a position in a social structure, distinguishing it from the notion of social role, which is the behavior expected of people in a status, encompassing all culturally prescribed rights and duties inherent in social positions. Cf. *DSS* s.v. Status, 464; *IESBS*, s.v. Social Psychology of Status and Role, 15091. Obviously, in the present study, which focuses on social hierarchies, the latter meaning of status as a form of social stratification is applied. On status and social stratification see also Turner (1988) and Scott (1996) on the wider issues.

²⁰ Weber (1978), 305: 'Ständische Lage soll heißen eine typisch wirksam in Anspruch genommene positive oder negative Privilegierung in der sozialen Schätzung'.

common living arrangements. A set of persons with a common status position form a status group which enjoys a common esteem and certain status monopolies over the resources of the group.²¹ Weber's concept of status group described communities whose prestige derives from cultural rather than economic or political factors, and was thus based on ideas of proper lifestyles. People in these communities are supposed to associate with people of like status; people outside these communities were looked at as inferiors.²²

In his theory, Weber furthermore drew a distinction between achieved status and ascribed status. He defined achieved status as a social position based on individual merits or accomplishments, acquired by a person during his or her lifetime as a result of the exercise of knowledge, ability and skills, and achieved through education, career, marital status or other forms of social distinction. Ascribed status, by contrast, is an individual's inherited social position, fixed at birth and based on gender, age, ethnic group and family background. It should be noted, however, that the distinction between achievement and ascription is by no means absolute.²³

In the late 1970s, Pierre Bourdieu followed up on the dimension of social stratification defined by Weber emphasizing the role of 'cultural capital' in the negotiation of class positions. Bourdieu claimed that social

²¹ In his work, Weber developed the line of analysis of Henry Maine (1861) that law and society developed 'from status to contract'. According to this thesis, individuals in the ancient world were tightly bound to traditional groups by status, while in the modern world individuals are autonomous agents, free to make contracts with whomever they choose. Weber acknowledged that status groups were more visible in preindustrial societies, where exclusive culture differences and practices could be more strictly controlled. In modern sociology, Weber's distinction between status society and class society became less sharp as both the concepts class and status came to be used interchangeably 'to measure subjective evaluations of positions in a system of social stratification' (*DoS*, s.v. Status).

²² Weber's theory of stratification is an example of conflict theory, in which society is seen as an arena in which people compete for power, wealth, and prestige. In the 1940s and 1950s, the structural functionalism theory, aspects of which were inspired by the ideas of Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim, argued to interpret society as a structure with interrelated parts, constituent elements such as traditions and institutions, 'organs' working toward a proper functioning of the 'body' as a whole. Cf. Urry (2000), 23. In the 1960s, functionalism was criticized for being static and unable to account for social change. By the 1980s, functionalism was largely replaced by more conflict-oriented approaches, and later by 'structuralism', 'poststructuralism' and finally by middle-range theory, an approach integrating theory and empirical research. See, for instance, Slattery (2003), on these developments.

²³ Cf. *DoS*, s.v. Achieved status.

classes of a society have a habit of distinction: they want to distance themselves from other, lower, social groups by their aesthetic taste, their choices in, for instance, education, foods, clothing and music.²⁴ Bourdieu argues that this aesthetic taste was internalized at an early age, guiding young people towards their appropriate social positions. He introduced the sociological concept of cultural capital, referring to non-financial social property such as educational or intellectual assets. Bourdieu's cultural capital 'acts as a social relation within a system of exchange that includes the accumulated cultural knowledge that confers power and status.'²⁵ Bourdieu claims that economic capital (wealth) and social capital (social network), although achieved cumulatively over time, largely depend upon social origin and cultural capital.²⁶

In Roman society, status was largely connected with social rank. The separate strata of Roman society were not static: individuals could move up the social ladder if they had enough money or sufficient military or administrative skills. In this sense, Weber's achieved and ascribed status can be deduced from the ancient sources. Success stories of soldiers from the auxiliary units and freedmen who eventually gained Roman citizenship and/or wealth are ample, but for the purpose of this study the advancement of military cadre officers into the equestrian order and the entry of *equites* into the senatorial order are most significant.²⁷ Noble birth was an important criterion for admittance into the senate, but as leading families regularly died out or fell into disgrace, the community had to be constantly regenerated from below.²⁸ Upward advancement could take one or even several generations: a freed slave could not hold office, but his son or grandson could, for instance, obtain a local magistracy and gain access to the equestrian or senatorial order for future generations. Although it is hard to quantify the extent of social mobility accurately, it was a reality within Roman social structure, even if only for a small minority.

Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, determining one's role in the social hierarchy, is somewhat related to the concept of *paideia* (Gr. παι-

²⁴ Bourdieu (1984). Cf. Bourdieu (1989), 19–20.

²⁵ Barker (2004), 37.

²⁶ Bourdieu (1984), *passim*.

²⁷ A *primuspilus* (or *primipilus*), the highest ranking centurion of a legion, for instance, was as a rule accepted into the equestrian order immediately after serving in this rank for a year, thus attracting further opportunities for advancement. See *DNP*, s.v. *primuspilus*; cf. s.v. *centurio*; Dobson (1978).

²⁸ Hopkins (1978); Burton and Hopkins in Hopkins (1983), 120–200.

δεία, Lat. *humanitas*) in antiquity, which refers to both the process of raising and educating and to the result, the education, of the elite. In the later republic, as Rome's contacts with the Greek-speaking world grew, the Romans assumed a predominantly Greek pattern of education, encompassing theoretical and practical upbringing and cultural training in the widest sense.²⁹ The traditional elite of the Roman Empire, especially the group of born senators, regarded *paideia* as an essential asset of any elite member of society. *Paideia* connected the members of the senatorial elite to each other and guaranteed cultural homogeneity between them, defining the upper-class status group: anyone who lacked the appropriate *paideia* was considered inferior by the senatorial elite.³⁰ Inevitably, the rise of a new military elite in the third century shook up the traditional elite and coerced—or, as this study aims to demonstrate, enabled—, this elite to redefine its position within the socio-political hierarchies.

Like power, status was thus multi-dimensional: factors such as birth, age, gender, education, experience, ability, wealth, lifestyle and legal condition defined a person's status profile. When a person scores highly on some status criteria but not on others, this inconsistency in status evaluation is called status dissonance by sociologists.³¹ A social upstart like Trimalchio, who appears in Petronius' *Satyricon*, for instance, may have been just as wealthy as any senator, but could never become a senator.³² Status dissonance exposes the difficulty of status evaluation: it was a relative process. How people saw each other and reacted to one another would have depended significantly on their own status, for status varied enormously depending on the observer and on the place. Or, to

²⁹ Aristocratic Roman families often employed Greek-speaking tutors to teach their children both Greek and Latin; competence in both languages remained a feature of an upper-class education until the fifth century AD. Besides elementary reading and writing, the education of children of wealthy families included an advanced study of both language and poetry and occasionally philosophy, and a rhetorical training. On education in ancient Rome, see Bonner (1977). Cf. on the ideal of *paideia* in the Roman world, Harris (1989), *passim*.

³⁰ On the link between politics and *paideia*, see Brown (1992), 35–70. Although Brown focuses on the period between AD 300 and AD 450, most of his arguments on the importance attached to *paideia* by the Roman upper-class apply to the third century as well. Cf. the grammarian Lollianus' petition (dated ca. 258–259), quoted by Brown at p. 35 (note 1), in which Lollianus addresses the emperors Gallienus and Valerianus, praising their *paideia*.

³¹ Hopkins (1978), 108–111. Cf. Weaver (1978), who describes the case of slaves and freedmen who served the emperor: they had access to power and influence, but never lost their stigma of servitude.

³² Petronius, *Satyricon* 26–41; 47–79.

put it in other words: the status accorded to a person ‘depends on the value hierarchy held by the individual making the status judgment, and the individual’s knowledge of the characteristics of the person judged.’³³

Thus, the observation of status in the ancient source material is more problematic than the observation of power.³⁴ Whereas status evaluation of individuals in antiquity is highly problematic, conclusions about the status of the *ordines* can be drawn.³⁵ As will become clear in this study, status is undeniably linked to power: changes in one of Dahl’s four aspects of power, sooner or later led to changes in status relations between power-holders.

Representatives of Imperial Power

Roman imperial power at the central level was mediated by men belonging to the upper strata of Roman society. This situation has famously been schematically illustrated by Alföldy through a social pyramid with the emperor at the top, surrounded by senators and equestrians, the privileged classes who shared in power and prestige and filled the most important and honorific governmental posts.³⁶

As is obviously well-known, in republican times, the senate had been the traditional ruling body of Rome which provided governing magistrates. In imperial times, the senate continued to play a role in government, although service to the state increasingly meant service to the emperor.³⁷ In the first three centuries AD the senate had about six hundred members whose entry into the *ordo* depended first on a minimum value of one million sesterces and second on election to key offices. In principle the senate was responsible for the election of new members, yet in fact election was by the emperor, who could also appoint his own nom-

³³ Goldhamer-Shills (1939), 181, cf. 179. Cf. Purcell (1983), 126; Garnsey-Saller (1987), 118; Hope (2000), 149–150; see Hope (2000), 144–146, for a detailed discussion of Trimalchio’s position within Roman social structure.

³⁴ Cf. Finley (1985), 51, who admits that status itself is a vague word and an imprecise concept.

³⁵ Hopkins (1978) 105–107. Cf. Hope (2000), 126: ‘... the definition of an individual’s status involved complex and sometimes contradictory and contested factors, which could be compounded by the geographic and chronological breadth of the Empire. It is thus often impossible to provide a finite definition of an individual’s status.’

³⁶ Alföldy (1988), 106. The *decuriones* who also belonged to the upper strata according to Alföldy’s pyramid are not mentioned here, as they mediated imperial power at the local instead of the central level.

³⁷ Alföldy (1988), 102; cf. Talbert (1984).

inees. The senate was not a hereditary body, but many sons of senators followed their father's footsteps, and the privileges of the office endured for three generations.³⁸ Senators were deployed in all kind of spheres: they held civil-administrative, military, legal, and financial positions. In some posts, for instance provincial governorships, various kinds of duties were combined. It should be taken into account that the senate had its own internal hierarchy. Successful senators could reach the prestigious office of consul. Even more successful were those senators who continued their careers after the consulate. Those who held a second consulship or shared their consulate with the emperor as their colleague, and those who were appointed to govern the provinces of Africa and Asia as *proconsules*, or were made responsible for the capital as *praefectus urbi*, reached the pinnacle of the senatorial *cursus honorum*, and can surely be counted as the top layer of the senatorial class.

The second order was of course the equestrian one, which was considerably larger than the senatorial order. As with the senatorial order, membership of the equestrian order depended on a man's wealth; from Augustus onwards, the minimum property requirement was 400,000 sesterces. The formal method of entry was by imperial grant. Many wealthy provincials qualified for membership, but only a minority actually pursued a political or military career. Like senators, *equites* could hold all kind of posts, but during the Principate differentiation between financial-legal careers and military careers gradually emerged. The most successful *equites* reached the posts of *praefectus annonae* (responsible for the corn supply of Rome), *praefectus Aegypti* (governor of Egypt), and *praefectus praetorio* (commanding the praetorian cohorts), which formed the summit of the equestrian career.

In the Augustan era, Roman citizens residing in Rome and Italy monopolized all high positions in central government, while wealthy provincials settled for local offices. The privileged position of those based in the Italic peninsula which was the original basis of the Empire, however, gradually became less important to the emperors than the political and administrative unification of the Empire. By the third century, leading provincials from all corners of the Empire competed for traditional Roman honors and were steadily assimilated into the Roman higher orders.³⁹ This process is demonstrated well by the origins of the emperors: the first emperors were Romans; by the end of the first century an

³⁸ *Digesta* 23, 2, 44.

³⁹ See especially Halfmann (1979).

emperor born in Spain reached the imperial throne; by the end of the second century the Empire had an emperor born in Africa; and a few decades later a man born in Syria ruled the Empire.

Again, we should not forget the diversity inherent within this upper section of the hypothetical pyramid. Even within the *ordines*, heterogeneity should be taken into account.⁴⁰ Therefore, I have focused on the highest layers within the upper strata of Roman society, the group which formed the political elite of the Empire: the emperors themselves, the senatorial nucleus, and high equestrians who served as senior military officers in the army and as senior civil administrators. Senators who did not reach the consulship, and lower equestrian specialized administrators in the provinces are not included.⁴¹ This choice is motivated, first by the crucial functions of this top elite in the third-century's developing administrative system, second by the emphasis on the political elite in the available evidence, and finally by the socio-political events in the early fourth century: under the emperor Constantine, the equestrian and senatorial orders were fused into one new expanded order of *clarissimi*. As before, entry into this highest order was based upon a combination of hereditary expectation, property requirement, and actual tenure of key offices or imperial grant. How certain events of the third century diminished the distinctions between the high equestrians and senators and foreshadowed this fusion will become clear in this study.

Source Material

The available source material for this study can be divided into three main categories: 1. 'memorial epigraphy';⁴² 2. historiographic evidence; 3. administrative documents and writings.

The largest corpus of evidence consists of memorial inscriptions. Such epigraphic texts recorded names of officials, their functions, and often part or even the whole of their *cursus honorum*. These inscriptions were entrusted to non-perishable material, such as stone or bronze, and were

⁴⁰ Cf. Hope (2000), 137.

⁴¹ Imperial slaves and freedmen, whose influence corresponded primarily to their respective proximity to the center of power, the emperor and his family, are excluded as well, as their power was based on informal authority and as there are hardly any objective sources available which can clarify the impact of their influence.

⁴² This designation is based on Eck (2002a), 134. Cf. Eck (2009), in which he argues against the term *cursus honorum* inscriptions.

explicitly meant to be seen by the public in order to state a person's socio-political position. Funerary inscriptions, honorary inscriptions, building inscriptions, dedications to divinities, military diplomas, and milestone inscriptions fall into this category. Recovered in a variety of contexts, they were displayed on behalf of all senior representatives of imperial power. Inasmuch as they represent all social layers examined in this study, and were intended to reflect officials' socio-political rank, they provide valuable evidence for this study.⁴³ Some remarks, however, should be made on the Roman epigraphic habit. As MacMullen has noted in his outline of the contours of this epigraphic habit in both Latin West and Greek East, the number of inscriptions grew steadily over the first and second centuries AD, with a peak around the turn of the second and third centuries, but decreasing sharply after the reign of Caracalla.⁴⁴ Although several scholars have tried to explain the peak, as well as the third-century decline and local differences, none of these explanations so far have been fully satisfactory. As has been recently argued, it is more probable that 'a variety of mundane and interconnected forces—economic, demographic, and social, as well as physiological, and perhaps political—gradually shaped the prevailing cultural practice in different localities.'⁴⁵ When viewed from our perspective, the Empire-wide epigraphic behaviors may seem regular and uniform, but this view is likely to be deceptive. Yet, although the third-century decline in the number of inscriptions cannot be univocally explained, it is a trend which any researcher dealing with the third century should bear in mind.

The historiographic evidence has its own merits and complications. For the period under discussion, there are two contemporary ancient authors: Cassius Dio and Herodianus. Dio was a senator from Bithynia who lived from mid-second century until circa AD 229. The 80 books of his *Roman History*, written in Greek, narrate the sequence of historical events from the foundation of Rome until the year AD 229. Large parts of his work have only survived as epitomes by the Byzantine monks Xiphilinus and Zonaras.⁴⁶ When using Dio's work as a source, one should

⁴³ Cf. Eck (2002a), 134. See also Meyer (1990), 83, who refers to epitaphs as status-indicators. Cf. the anthropologist Cannon (1989), 437–438.

⁴⁴ MacMullen (1982), 233–246; id. (1986), 237–238; cf. Mrozek (1973), 113–118; id. (1988), 61–64; Roueché (1989), 19–20; Meyer (1990), 74–96; for an overview, see Bodel (2001), 6–10.

⁴⁵ Bodel (2001), 7. On pp. 6–7, Bodel gives a summary of current explanations with further references.

⁴⁶ Millar (1964), 1–4; cf. Barnes (1984); De Blois (1998–1999).

remember that he was a senator of Greek origin, who combined fondness of the Graeco-Roman culture with the conservative ideals of the Roman senatorial elite. How he treats individual emperors' reigns reflects the values and interests of a senator, and whether an emperor was labeled as good or bad depended on senatorial expectations.⁴⁷ Having completed a successful senatorial career under the Severan emperors, Dio evaluated the rise of those he regarded as uncultured upstarts negatively.⁴⁸

The second contemporary author is Herodianus, a native of Asia Minor who lived from circa AD 175 to 255, and who probably was (the son of) an imperial freedman. His *History of the Empire after Marcus* (*Ab excessu divi Marci*), encompassing eight books written in Greek, covers the events from the death of Marcus Aurelius in AD 180 to Gordianus III's accession in AD 238. He seems to have been a subordinate official in Rome and Asia Minor in the early third century AD.⁴⁹ Herodianus' work has survived completely. Like Dio, Herodianus displays affinity with Graeco-Roman culture and traditions, but not from a senator's perspective. His work shows a tendency to moralize, often resorts to rhetoric, and is not always reliable in reproducing facts.⁵⁰ He seems to have used the work of Dio as a direct source for his own historical work.⁵¹ The works of Dio and Herodianus are valuable sources as they could draw on contemporary knowledge, yet a certain degree of subjectivity, especially toward uneducated social upstarts, should be taken into account. Moreover, since the historians did not have access to comprehensive information on imperial administration, certain matters are not recorded by them.⁵²

Unfortunately, no contemporary work of history covers the entire Empire between 238 and 284. The only rather detailed reports on parts of that period are the *vitae* in the *Historia Augusta*. This work, composed in Latin, consists of a collection of imperial biographies describing the lives of the emperors from Hadrianus (AD 117–138) up to Numerianus

⁴⁷ De Blois (1998), 3405–3415; De Blois (1998–1999).

⁴⁸ Cassius Dio was *praetor* in 194 (Dio 73, 12, 2); *consul suffectus* ca. 204/205; *curator* of Pergamum and Smyrna ca. 217/218; *proconsul Africae* ca. 222; *legatus Augusti pro praetore* of Dalmatia and later of Pannonia Superior under Severus Alexander; and ultimately *consul II ordinarius* in 229. On his career, see PIR² C 492; Leunissen (1989); Thomasson (1996), 87–88, no. 119; De Blois (1998–1999), 268, note 3 with further references.

⁴⁹ Alföldy (1989a).

⁵⁰ On Herodianus and his work, see Alföldy (1989a); De Blois (1998), 3415–3431; Sidebottom (1998); Zimmermann (1999), esp. 285–319.

⁵¹ Kolb (1972), 159–161.

⁵² Cf. Dio 53, 19.

and Carinus (AD 282–284/285). Although the names of six authors are mentioned, it is nowadays generally assumed that the *Historia Augusta* was composed by a single author at the end of the fourth century AD.⁵³ Although some thirty biographies have survived, those of the emperors between 244 and 253 have been lost, the biographies of the Valeriani are only fragmentary, and those of the Gallieni are incomplete. The history of the second and third centuries is generally perceived from the perspective of the non-Christian, senatorial aristocracy of the city of Rome, and the emperors are assessed in terms of their behavior toward that class.⁵⁴ The historical value of the individual *vitae* varies considerably, for valid information is combined with anecdotes, obvious inventions and forgeries. Up until the Severan period, the work seems to follow a reliable source, probably the work of Marius Maximus, who wrote biographies from Traianus to Elagabalus which did not survive, and who is quoted several times.⁵⁵ Herodianus' work was drawn upon for the *vitae* from Clodius Albinus to Maximus and Balbinus, and Dio is not named but was probably also used.⁵⁶ The biographies of the soldier emperors and of the usurpers are unreliable: they contain many invented documentary texts, forged letters, anachronisms and even references to usurpers whose very existence remains in question.⁵⁷ However, even these more unreliable parts of the *Historia Augusta* contain information on emperors and administrators which is confirmed by other sources. Details mentioned only in the *Historia Augusta* should thus always be viewed with scepticism, but should not be rejected beforehand.⁵⁸

The accounts of Cassius Dio, Herodianus and the author of the *Historia Augusta* are complemented by several authors, who were rather brief in their discussion of the period AD 193 to 284. One was the fourth-century author Aurelius Victor, who wrote the *Historiae Abbreviatae*, also known as the *Liber de Caesaribus*, describing the emperors from Augustus to Constantius II. Like Dio and the author of the *Historia Augusta*, a senatorial perspective informs Victor's history, as he focuses

⁵³ Syme (1986), 211; 219; following Dessau (1889), 337–392, who was the first to reject the information on the authors contained in the work itself.

⁵⁴ Johne (1976).

⁵⁵ On Marius Maximus, see Birley (1997b).

⁵⁶ Kolb (1972), 159–161.

⁵⁷ Syme (1971), 54–77, who refers to these lives as secondary *vitae*; and more recently Brandt (2006), 11–24.

⁵⁸ One biography, the *Vita Severi Alexandri*, is more of an ideological 'mirror of princes' than a piece of historiography. See Bertrand-Dagenbach (1990).

on the moral decline of the senatorial class and criticizes the dominant role of the military.⁵⁹ The *Epitome de Caesaribus*, a summary of the *Liber de Caesaribus*, was falsely ascribed to Aurelius Victor as well, but this has been refuted.⁶⁰ Brief accounts on the history of the third century can also be found in the works of the late Roman historians Eutropius, Festus, and the Byzantine authors Zosimus and, as mentioned above, Zonaras.⁶¹

The majority of the administrative documents, like for instance *codicilli*, have not survived, as they were not meant to be public and were written on perishable materials.⁶² From Egypt, of course, we have a considerable number of papyri, some of which contain information on the administration of the Empire and/or the names of administrators.⁶³ Very specific information on administration can also be derived from the legal writings in the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, a collection of fundamental works in jurisprudence issued by order of the Byzantine emperor Iustinianus I.⁶⁴ This corpus includes, beside the *Novellae* (new laws that were passed after AD 534, most of which were officially issued in Greek), three other major units of Roman law: the *Codex Iustinianus* (a collection of imperial constitutions from Hadrianus to Iustinianus), the *Institutiones* (an introductory legal text book with binding legal force) and the *Digesta* (a compilation of old writings of jurists mainly from the second and third centuries, which constituted an important part of Iustinianus' codification). They were edited by a commission ordered by Iustinianus. As with any type of sources, the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* also needs to be used with caution. It should be noted that the reproduction of old texts in the Justinianic codifications is debated among scholars. Although the existence of interpolations is, of course, undeniable, it remains unclear to what degree textual amendments were made by Justinianic compilers. Nowadays it

⁵⁹ Cf. Aur. Vict., *Liber de Caes.* 37, 7; 40, 13.

⁶⁰ On Aurelius Victor and his work, see Bird (1984).

⁶¹ On these authors and their work, see, for instance, Paschoud (1971–1989); Baldwin (1978); Ridley (1982); Bird (1988); Bleckmann (1992); Kettenhofen (1993). Other (fragmentary) sources can be added to this list, for instance the letters of Cyprianus (Alföldy 1973), fragments of Dexippus (Martin 2006), Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the *Oraculum Sibyllinum* 13 (Potter 1990), and the so-called *Res Gestae Divi Saporis* written in Middle Persian, Parthian and Greek (Kettenhofen 1982; Frye 1984). Most of these additional sources are collected in Hartmann (2008a), with further references.

⁶² Cf. Eck (2002a), 132.

⁶³ On third-century papyri, see De Jong (2006).

⁶⁴ The name *Corpus Iuris Civilis* was not used in antiquity. It occurs for the first time in 1583 as the title of the first one-volume collected edition of the *corpus iuris* provided by Dionysius Gothofredus. On the Justinianic codifications, see Kunkel (1973), 163–176; cf. Zwälve (2004), 85–138.

is assumed that the 'licence of Justinian's legislative committees to make substantive amendments in the laws was very limited. For each individual dogmatic case they needed the emperor's special permission.'⁶⁵ Furthermore, it is argued that the names of the lawyers were inserted into the new compilation with meticulous care as a matter of reverence.⁶⁶ In light of this, it still seems sensible to use the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* as a base of evidence, except when there are clear indications that specific postdated interpolations were made.

The Merits and Limitations of Prosopography

This study is largely based on prosopographical research. Prosopography aims at gaining evidence about patterns of relationships through the investigation of individual persons, their offices, honors, ancestry, marriages and other connections. All the source material described above contains prosopographical data, information which contributes to the identification of persons, their interrelations, and the outline of their careers, albeit not to the same extent.⁶⁷ Prosopography offers both merits and limitations as a research method. Consequently, it has both been defended and criticized by scholars.⁶⁸ The use of prosopographical material for elucidating the imperial decision process and the innermost politics of the Roman Empire, for instance, has been rejected.⁶⁹ However, the positive contribution of prosopography 'to our knowledge of every important aspect of the government and administration, and very many important aspects of the society, of the Roman world is beyond question.'⁷⁰ As long as one keeps in mind that prosopographical information does not tell the complete story, and as long as conclusions derived from prosopography are checked against and supplemented with

⁶⁵ Lokin (1995), 271. Cf. Watson (1994).

⁶⁶ Lokin (1995), 264.

⁶⁷ In general inscriptions contain more detailed prosopographical data than a literary source such as Herodianus.

⁶⁸ Syme, (1968), 145: 'One uses what one has, and there is work to be done'. Contra Toynbee (1965), 327: 'Able and active minds, reduced to a starvation-diet of knowledge, have fallen greedily upon the additional fare that the 'prosopographical' approach to Roman history offers'. Cf. Graham (1974), 136–157; Burton and Hopkins in Hopkins (1983), 156 note 49; and Eck (2002a), 131–152, esp. 133–136. On the merits and potential of prosopography as a tool of research, see also Cameron (2003), *passim*.

⁶⁹ Graham (1974), 155.

⁷⁰ Graham (1974), 138.

contemporary literature and documents, prosopography remains a legitimate research method in most scholars' estimates.⁷¹

A study like this would never have been possible without existing studies in which prosopographical material is readily available. The *Prosopographia Imperii Romani* (PIR) and the first volume of the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (PLRE), edited by Jones, Martindale and Morris, are invaluable, as is Thomasson's *Laterculi Praesidum* (LP) which lists senatorial and equestrian governors of the provinces of the Roman Empire from Augustus to Diocletian. Also essential are prosopographical studies by Christol and Leunissen.⁷² Other publications focus on specific reigns, regions, positions or careers.⁷³ For the present study I have profited greatly from the findings and the prosopographical data collected by these scholars.

Structure of the Book

The structure of this book follows the structure of the upper strata of Roman society, as the chapters are arranged according to the social ranks of the representatives of imperial power at the central level. The first chapter focuses on the emperors and the development of the imperial office in the third century. Chapter 2 deals with the impact of third-century events on the senatorial elite. Chapter 3 illustrates the changing position of high equestrians in general, and the power and status of the third-century praetorian prefects in particular. Finally, in Chapter 4, case studies on military officers under Septimius Severus and Gallienus will shed light on the changing composition of the military set, and the changing relationship between emperors and their senior officers.

The development of emperorship is a topic which has received abundant attention in recent studies. Chapter 1 of this study provides a summary of current ideas on the transformation of emperorship in the course of the third century. Concurrently, the history and problems of the third century are introduced, as well as themes which will be dealt with in sub-

⁷¹ Graham (1974), 137–139; Eck (2002a), 136.

⁷² Leunissen (1989); Christol (1986); id. (1997).

⁷³ To name a few: Howe (1942); Barbieri (1952); Pflaum (1960–1966); Crook (1975); Devijver (1976–1980); De Blois (1976); Dobson (1978); Dietz (1980); Birley (1988); Thomasson (1996); Körner (2002); Kreucher (2003). Many articles in various periodicals can be added to this list.

sequent chapters. The chapter attempts to measure the extent to which third-century events affected the power and status of the emperor.

When discussing the position of senators in the third century, most scholars emphasize the changes and the negative effects for senators in general. Several factors, however, indicate that there was at least some continuity in senatorial power and status. Chapter 2 tracks members of the senatorial order who were able to ensure continuity for themselves, and the 'strategies' by which they could safeguard or even develop their position. Through a detailed prosopographic analysis, a senatorial nucleus will be defined. Then, several families within this nucleus will provide examples illustrating the position of senatorial elite families throughout the third century. This will generate some conclusions about how imperial appointment policies affected the traditional senatorial elite in the third century and how crises impacted their status and power.

Chapter 3 discusses the position of high equestrians in the third century. To speak of a rise of the *equites* in the third century is problematic, as the *ordo* consisted of a large number of members and had a highly heterogeneous character. A further complicating factor was that the *equester ordo* of the first and second centuries was a completely different group of people than the equestrian order of the late third century. Therefore, Chapter 3 will start by sorting out in detail which equestrians saw their power increase in the third century and in which spheres, and to what extent this influenced their status. The second part of this chapter, a case study on the praetorian prefects, serves to further display and illustrate the developing position of high equestrians. As will become clear in this chapter, the changing composition of the set of high equestrian officers cannot be dissociated from their changing position between 193 and 284.

Chapter 4 deals with the position of senior military officers, a group in which both senators and equestrians played roles. Several factors indicate that men who exercised military power increasingly influenced the course of events in the third century, and secured and even strengthened their own positions. Two cases clarify the development in the status and power of senior military officers: the military set under Septimius Severus at the beginning of the period under discussion, and high-ranking military officers under Gallienus, in the third quarter of the third century. These two cases represent two crucial moments in third-century history, and are chosen because of the combination of the internal similarities and distinctions.

Finally, by analyzing the various senior power-holders involved in Roman imperial administration at the central level by social rank, this book sets out to clarify some notions on the development of power and status relations between the second and fourth centuries.