PART SIX

THE THIRD CENTURY AD
In this paper I would like to discuss the impact of Roman armed forces on the rise of crises in the Roman Empire in the third century AD.¹ In my view the first half of this century—and more specifically the two decades from 230 to about 250—may be characterized as a period of increasing regional troubles that ripened into a series of crises, which beset the Roman Empire in the period 251 to 284. There were great regional differences. Dacia, some neighbouring Danube lands, and the Agri Decumates, for example, had a bad time, but other territories were still relatively prosperous, in spite of fiscal pressures. In 1999 Witschel demonstrated that until the third quarter of the third century regions like Italy, Gaul, Britain, Spain, and Northern-Africa maintained their traditional infrastructures, their density of population and their prosperity.²

The traditional view is that the third century is an age of omnipresent warfare, which resulted in the rise of military power in the Roman Empire and in military demands that were an important cause of third century troubles, which affected the whole Empire.³ However,

¹ I owe thanks to Merton College, Oxford, where I prepared much of this paper during Hilary Term, 2004.