

THE THIRD CENTURY CRISIS IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE¹

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HISTORY retains its popularity as a subject of study not least because it offers refreshment in troubled times ; and there is a ready temptation to search the past for parallels to our own situation. The historian has to be wary of this practice, remembering a comment of Max Weber : “ It helps the narrator to make an impression on his audience when they have the feeling that his story is relevant to them (*de te narratur fabula*) and when he can end his tale with the words ‘ You have been warned! ’ (*discite moniti*). But the discussion which follows does not have this advantage. We can learn little or nothing about present day social problems from the history of the ancient world ”.² Whatever historians may say in protest, the decline of ancient civilization is still frequently held up as an example from which we should learn. In particular, mention is often made of the lowering of moral standards, to which that decline is attributed.³ To be sure, evidence can be found to support such a view. The fourth-century writer Aurelius Victor traced the onset of the crisis to the murder of Severus Alexander in 235. Henceforth civil war became endemic, he said ; the moral barriers were broken down and the direction of affairs passed to men of the lowest social origins and education : “ good men and bad alike were placed in the imperial position,

¹ A lecture delivered in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester on Wednesday, the 12th of November 1975.

² M. Weber, “ Die sozialen Gründe des Untergangs der antiken Kultur ”, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Tübingen, 1924), pp. 289–311, p. 291 (reprint of a paper originally published in *Die Wahrheit*, May 1896).

³ A letter to the editor of the *Daily Telegraph* of 18 October 1975 may serve as an example : “ We learn that the Roman Empire declined into oblivion through the dissipation and licence of its people. In other words, a preoccupation with drink, gambling, and sex. These three, with greed and envy, are endangering our nation today.”

nobles and commoners, and even a good many barbarians” (*immissique in imperium promiscue boni malique, nobiles atque ignobiles, ac barbariae multi*).¹ According to Victor, when the crisis was at its height, in 260, the emperor Gallienus was frequenting the capital’s eating-houses and cook-shops in the company of pimps and wine-dealers, and conducting a scandalous liaison with a barbarian princess.² This conduct, he goes on, provoked a further spate of civil wars, leading to Gallienus’s overthrow in 268, when, with the accession of Claudius II, the recovery slowly began. During the ensuing sixteen years Claudius, Aurelian and Probus were able to restore Rome’s fortunes vis-à-vis her external enemies, even if they could not solve the empire’s political instability. The end of fifty years of crisis, of “military anarchy”, came with the advent of Diocletian in 284 and the establishment of the tetrarchy, the rule of four men: “All of them, of course, came from Illyricum, and while they had little in the way of *humanitas* [liberal education, good breeding, refinement], nonetheless their peasant origin and their service in the army had sufficiently inured them to hardship and they were very good for the Roman state” (*His sane omnibus Illyricum patria fuit: qui, quamquam humanitatis parum, ruris tamen ac militiae miseriis imbuti satis optimi reipublicae fuere*).³

The enigmatic author of the *Historia Augusta* embroidered Victor’s account of a frivolous and decadent Gallienus, contrasted with the simple but virtuous and valiant men who

¹ Aurelius Victor, *de Caes.*, 24.9 ff. (the quotation is from 24.9). Victor, too, was humbly born, the son of an unlettered African peasant, but he had moved up the social scale by serious study (*de Caes.*, 20.5); shortly after completing his brief treatise on the emperors he was made *consularis* of Pannonia Secunda by Julian (Ammianus, 21.10.6). It is unfortunate that the occasion for his self-congratulatory remark—the accession of Severus after the overthrow of Didius Julianus—reveals the inadequacy of his research: he confuses Didius with the jurist Salvius Julianus (20.1).

² Victor, *de Caes.*, 33.1–7.

³ *Ibid.* 39.26 (for the sense of *satis* see A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and Upper Moesia* (London, 1975), p. 388 n. 138, citing the view of I. Borzsák). Cf. the eloquent comments on this passage and others like it by A. Alföldi, *A Conflict of Ideas in the Late Roman Empire. The Clash between the Senate and Valentinian I* (Oxford, 1952), 98 ff., esp. 104 f.

repaired the damage.¹ Edward Gibbon did his best to exercise restraint when drawing on that corrupt source, but in the absence of alternative information could not escape contamination: much of what he wrote on the third century is for that reason alone worthless as history, however delightful as literature. We have a clear enough picture of the state of the empire in the early principate, from Augustus to the Antonines; and the fourth century is vividly accessible in the pages of Ammianus and the Theodosian Code. But the Christian empire is a very different world from the age of the Antonines, and to explain how the changes came about one has to turn to the third century where the real problem is to discover what actually happened. The literary sources are meagre in the extreme,² and the temptation to exploit the fantasy-ridden biographies in the *Historia Augusta* is one to which too many still succumb.³ Other sources exist, but they are not easy to control: and it is here that the patient study of the Roman provinces by archaeologists who are also good historical scholars becomes so valuable. Nor will one forget the vital contribution made by numismatists and

¹ See for example *HA, Gallieni duo*, 3.6 (*libidini et voluptati se dedit*), 7.4 (*novo genere ludorum, nova specie pomparum, exquisito genere voluptatum*), 8.3 (*obstupefacto voluptatibus corde*), 16.1 (*qui natus abdomini et voluptatibus dies ac noctes vino et stupris perdidit*), etc.: *longum est eius cuncta in litteras mittere*, as the author himself conceded (18.6). The reasons for the blackening of Gallienus's memory are clear enough: his treatment of the senate (p. 276, below), and the wish to enhance the memory of the man who supplanted him, Claudius II, alleged ancestor of the house of Constantine, not to mention his attitude to the Christian church: see above all A. Alföldi, *Cambridge Ancient History*, xii (1939), 223 ff. = *Studien zur Geschichte der Weltkrise des 3. Jahrhunderts nach Christus* (Darmstadt, 1967), 416 ff., and Alföldi's other studies reprinted there, esp. 1 ff., 228 ff.

² See F. Millar, "P. Herennius Dexippus: the Greek world and the third century invasions", *J.R.S.*, lix (1969), 12–29 for a valuable insight into one of the historians whose work is preserved only in a few fragments; on pp. 14–16 he gives a useful conspectus of "patterns of Greek historiography in the second and third centuries".

³ M. I. Rostovtzeff commented nearly fifty years ago that "In no field of ancient history is so much animosity displayed in the discussion of scientific problems as in the investigation of the *Scr. Hist. Aug.*" (*The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1926), p. 613 n. 2). The animosity is now perhaps less intense, but it has not completely abated and I do not wish to add to it unnecessarily by citing recent examples of credulity.

papyrologists, whose material actually increases in volume during this period. Historical scholarship has moved a long way since Gibbon. Indeed, in some respects the situation has reached another extreme: "Anyone who sets out to solve a problem in ancient history has to spend more effort in research to discover what solutions have already been proposed than in finding a solution of his own".¹ This lament by a Swiss scholar struck me very forcibly when I read it a few weeks ago. It is printed in a bibliographical work—handbook hardly seems the right word—of mammoth proportions, of which seven instalments have so far appeared, each weighing several kilograms and containing an average of a thousand pages; three of these volumes contain a great deal that is highly relevant to my theme and copious citations of publications both unfamiliar and inaccessible.² This ought to have been enough to have deterred anyone from tackling this rather hackneyed theme again, and I must explain why I have not abandoned my attempt. One could always, of course, find an anniversary as an excuse and this would be a good time to commemorate the death of the emperor Aurelian (the greatest figure in the period of "military anarchy") and the curious circumstances of the accession of the emperor Tacitus: for this took place seventeen hundred years ago (perhaps to the day; complete precision is not yet possible).³ But adventitious considerations of this kind influenced me less than the longstanding attention paid to the third century by the History Department at Manchester University, and my own interest in the *Historia Augusta*. Besides, there are two fairly recent developments which can be viewed with equanimity by the scholar; indeed they must be accorded an unmixed welcome. In 1963 Andreas Alföldi and Johannes Straub launched a series

¹ G. Walser, "Die Severer in der Forschung 1960–1972", *ANRW* (see next note) 2.2 (1975), 614–56, p. 615 n.

² H. Temporini and W. Haase (eds.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung. I Republik. 2 Principat* (Berlin and New York, 1972 ff.), cited here as *ANRW* with volume and part numbers.

³ The alleged *interregnum* in the Latin sources was a misconception: see *PIR*² C 1036 (Tacitus), D 135 (Aurelian); R. Syme, *Emperors and Biography* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 137 ff.; L. Polverini, "Da Aureliano a Diocleziano", *ANRW* 2.2 (1975), 1013–35, pp. 1018 ff.

of *Historia Augusta Colloquia*¹ to elucidate the problems of that maddening² work in which Gibbon immersed himself with such unfortunate results. Some of the fruits of the *Colloquia* may be barren or bitter-sweet, and not all are to the taste of some scholars. But many have already derived sustenance from the writings of Sir Ronald Syme,³ which may be described as offshoots of the *Colloquia*. Secondly, there is the series founded by Graham Webster and the late Donald Dudley, *The Provinces of the Roman Empire*. The first volume, on Britain, appeared in 1967, followed by three splendid works on the Danubian and Balkan lands.⁴ This marks a real turning point in the study of the Roman empire, not least of the third century A.D. But my purpose on the present occasion is not to review recent scholarship on the period⁵; still less is it to make moral judgements about the collapse of classical culture. I can only offer some observations on the causes of the third century crisis, which may well seem banal enough to the specialist. Inevitably, in the space available, I must be selective and may thus appear to be emphasizing one factor unduly at the expense of many others.

The years 235–284 are characterized above all by the frequent

¹ Published as *Antiquitas, Reihe 4, Beiträge zur Historia-Augusta-Forschung*, unter Mitwirkung von Johannes Straub herausgegeben von Andreas Alföldi. The *Colloquia* will eventually, it is hoped, lead to an historical commentary on the *Historia Augusta*.

² Note the comment of F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford, 1964), p. 124: "The problem of the *Historia Augusta* is one into which sane men refrain from entering".

³ Particularly *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta* (Oxford, 1968); *Emperors and Biography. Studies in the Historia Augusta* (Oxford, 1971); *The Historia Augusta: a call for clarity* (Bonn, 1971).

⁴ S. Frere, *Britannia. A history of Roman Britain* (London, 1967); J. J. Wilkes, *Dalmatia* (London, 1969); G. Alföldy, *Noricum* (London, 1974); A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and Upper Moesia. A history of the Middle Danube Provinces of the Roman Empire* (London, 1974).

⁵ Note the valuable survey by G. Walser and T. Pekáry, *Die Krise des römischen Reiches* (Berlin, 1962); there is now of course the *ANRW* (p. 256, n. 2 above), with particularly valuable contributions by X. Lorient, "Les premières années de la grande crise du III^e siècle: de l'avènement de Maximin le Thrace (235) à la mort de Gordien III", 2.2, 657–787; id., "Chronologie du règne de Philippe l'Arabe (244–9 après J.-C.)", ib. 788–97; M. Christol, "Les règnes de Valérien et de Gallien (253–68): travaux d'ensemble, questions chronologiques", b. 803–27; and L. Polverini (p. 256 n. 3, above).

changes of emperor.¹ There were some twenty "legitimate" rulers, and the longest reign, that of Gallienus, lasted only eight years, from 260 to 268 (although he had been co-emperor with Valerian from 253 to 260). But Gallienus never controlled the whole empire: his reign marked a peak for usurpations; and well over a dozen major usurpers may be singled out during the period, one of whom, the Gallic emperor Postumus, lasted longer than Gallienus did himself. Two, perhaps three, died of disease²; the remainder met a violent death, mostly at the hands of their own men, although two succumbed to the enemy, Decius dying a hero's death against the Goths and Valerian meeting a cruel and squalid fate in Persian captivity.³ This illustrates sufficiently vividly the political instability of the period and underlines Rome's military weakness. Certainly, her external enemies were now more dangerous. The long Danubian wars of Marcus Aurelius in the 170s had revealed that the northern frontiers were vulnerable.⁴ After the peace of 180 stability had prevailed for a generation, but the Germans had clearly learned from their experiences: new peoples and new groupings appeared, Goths, Franks and Alamanni. All three, and others, invaded the empire in the third century and were to remain a constant danger.⁵ Meanwhile the eastern frontier

¹ Of course, Herodian, writing in the mid-third century, characterizes the period from 180-240 (or perhaps he meant 180-250, cf. 2.15.7) as one of tremendous upheavals, above all in the exceptional number of rulers, in contrast to the preceding two centuries. Cf. C. R. Whittaker, Loeb edition (2 vols., London, 1969), ad loc., and G. Alföldy, "Zeitgeschichte und Krisenempfindung bei Herodian", *Hermes*, xcix (1971), 429-49.

² Claudius II died of disease (*PIR*² A 1626), Tacitus perhaps from fever (C 1036, but cf. L. Polverini, *ANRW*, 2.2, 1024 and n. 38), Carus from disease or a thunderbolt (A 1475). X. Lorient, *ANRW* 2.2, 770-4, argues that the account of the death of Gordian III in Zonaras and several other Byzantine epitomators, that he died of wounds inflicted by the enemy at the battle of Mesiche, rather than by Roman treachery, may be correct.

³ See now on the fate of Valerian B. H. Stolte, "The Roman emperor Valerian and Sapor I, King of Persia", *Rivista storica dell'antichità*, i (1971), 157-62.

⁴ See now G. Alföldy, *Noricum* (1974), pp. 143 ff.; A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and Upper Moesia* (1974), pp. 183 ff.

⁵ See generally A. Alföldy, *CAH*, xii. 138 ff. = *Studien zur Geschichte der Weltkrise*, pp. 312 ff.; E. Demougeot, *La formation d'Europe et les invasions barbares*, 1: *Des origines germaniques à l'avènement de Dioclétien* (Paris, 1969).

had also come under much greater pressure. The Parthians¹ had never posed a serious threat but at intervals they had been given a serious pounding by Rome; in the 190s they had been deprived of northern Mesopotamia. Doubtless the Romans had over-reacted: in the 220s the ramshackle Parthian realm collapsed, to be replaced by a revived Persian monarchy. The greatest Sassanid ruler of the third century, Sapor, reigned for over thirty years, from 241 to c. 272: this alone gave Persia a great advantage over Rome. Sapor inflicted repeated defeats on successive emperors (of which his own triumphant account is now known).² The period was also marked by inflation on a colossal scale: by the 270s the imperial coinage had been debased out of all recognition. Much work still needs to be done on the details, but the overall picture is clear enough: far more coinage was being produced without any increase in the supply of precious metal.³ All sections of society were deeply affected by these circumstances. In the meantime, the Christian Church, in the face of persecution engendered by the crisis, was increasing in strength.⁴

The symptoms are well enough known. Rome's enemies had apparently become stronger,⁵ but her armed forces were barely able to cope, particularly since their energies were so

¹ See now M. A. R. Colledge, *The Parthians* (London, 1967).

² A. Maricq, "Res gestae divi Saporis", *Syria*, xxxv (1958), 295-360; R. N. Frye, "Parthia and Sasanid Persia", in F. Millar et al., *The Roman Empire and its Neighbours* (London, 1967), pp. 249-69, provides a useful survey.

³ See now J.-P. Callu, "Approches numismatiques de l'histoire du IIIe siècle (238 à 311)", *ANRW* 2.2, 594-613; M. H. Crawford, "Finance, coinage and money from the Severans to Constantine", *ib.* 560-93, who stresses that inflation did not really begin until the reign of Severus Alexander.

⁴ See now especially G. Alföldy, "The crisis of the third century as seen by contemporaries", *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, xv (1974), 89-111 = "Historisches Bewusstsein während der Krise des 3. Jahrhunderts" in G. Alföldy et al., *Krisen in der Antike. Bewusstsein und Bewältigung* (Düsseldorf, 1975), pp. 112-32; *id.*, "Der heilige Cyprian und die Krise des römischen Reiches", *Historia*, xxii (1973), 479-501; *id.*, *Römische Sozialgeschichte* (Wiesbaden, 1975), pp. 139-64.

⁵ P. A. Brunt, "Reflections on British and Roman imperialism", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vii (1964-5), 267-88, comments (p. 276) that the barbarians' "success is mysterious. They do not seem to have been more numerous than in the past". Whether or not they were more numerous (statistics are naturally lacking), more of them seem to have combined to fight against Rome than had been the case before. Note *HA M.Ant.* 22., 1: *gentes omnes ab Illyrici limite usque in Galliam conspiraverant.*

frequently diverted by civil war. Nor was the economy of the empire able to bear the strain imposed by continuous warfare.¹ Yet during the period of more than two hundred years from the time of Caesar to the early third century Rome had not only managed to keep external enemies at bay but had even extended the territories of the empire.² How had things changed?

It may be a truism to observe that the seeds of this crisis were sown in the second century B.C. But the fundamental problem of the principate—the problem which brought it into existence—was the control of the army. This situation had been created in 107 B.C.³ and the problem was never really solved. “Soldiers had begun in the days of Marius and Sulla to assist generals to carry out political plans. One is reminded of the rôle of the New Model Army during the English Civil War and afterwards. Caesar, like Cromwell, could control his troops; for his successors—his ‘major-generals’, one is almost tempted to call them—it proved, after his death, an impossible task. Only a centralized despotism could tame Roman armies and remove them from politics; and it was as a despot—however he might disguise despotism with republican catchwords—that Augustus, the adopted son of Julius, kept them tamed.”⁴ But even Augustus did not achieve a permanent solution.

¹ M. H. Crawford, *ANRW*, 2.2, 591 f., asks the question why, when there was a standing army, war should be a great deal more expensive than peace. His answer is that “army units were under strength in time of peace” and that the extra expenditure was created by the need to pay the extra men recruited. This may have been one factor at times, but I cannot accept that army units were regularly kept below strength except during campaigns. On the other hand, major wars frequently required the creation of additional units, *auxilia* as well as legions. But it ought to be obvious that vast sums would be required during campaigns for equipment (arms, armour, *matériel* of all kinds), road and bridge building, repair of enemy damage, remounts etc., cf. e.g. Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.71.2, 2.5.3. On the effects of the increased costs, see p. 278 f. below.

² See A. R. Birley, “Roman frontiers and Roman frontier policy: some reflections on Roman imperialism”, *Transactions of the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland*, N.S. 3 (1974), 13–25.

³ By Marius’s creation of a client army. See J. Harmand, *L’armée et le soldat à Rome de 107 à 50 avant notre ère* (Paris, 1967); E. Gabba, *Esercito e società della tarda repubblica romana* (Florence, 1973), pp. 1 ff, 47 ff.

⁴ C. E. Stevens, “Crossing the Rubicon”, *History Today*, ii (1952), 373–8, reprinted in A. Birley (ed.), *Universal Rome* (Edinburgh 1967), pp. 20–30. The quotation is from p. 378 (=29).

Cassius Dio, writing in the early third century,¹ put into the mouth of Caesar a speech before the senate after the African campaign of 46 B.C. Caesar urged the senators not to “fear the soldiers or regard them as anything but the custodians of my empire, which is yours as well. That they should be supported [τρέφεσθαι, i.e. paid] is necessary for many reasons: but they will be supported *for* you, not *against* you. . . This is why higher taxes than usual are being levied at the moment: to restrain the mutinous elements and deter those that have conquered from becoming mutinous, by giving them an adequate living wage. . . We are always in need of arms, since without them it is impossible for us, the inhabitants of so great a city and the possessors of such an extensive empire, to live in security; and abundant finances are extremely advantageous in this matter as in others. But none of you should suspect that I will harm any of the rich or establish new taxes; I shall be satisfied with the present revenues and shall be more anxious to contribute in some way to your prosperity than to wrong any man on account of his money”.² Caesar may or may not have proclaimed his intention not to soak the rich to pay the troops—Dio was writing for a third century audience and it suited his purpose to make Caesar say this.³ At all events, Caesar’s murder threw

¹ F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (1964), pp. 28–31, 193 f., adopts an arbitrary chronology of the composition of Dio’s history, which is in conflict with Dio’s own account (72.23.1–5 is the key passage): see e.g. G. W. Bowersock, review of Millar, *Gnomon*, xxxvii (1965), 470 ff.; A. J. Graham, “The division of Britain”, *J.R.S.*, lvi (1966), 92–107, p. 92 n. 11; A. R. Birley, *Septimius Severus. The African Emperor* (London, 1971), pp. 8 f., n. 1. If one takes Dio’s own account literally, and assumes (which may be illegitimate) that he wrote at a constant speed, he would have written book 43 in A.D. 218 (and the crucial book 52 in 219). The question certainly deserves further study.

² Dio 43. 18. 1–2, 4–5.

³ Millar, *op. cit.* (in n. 1 above), p. 80 f. concludes that “not only the content but the occasion was fabricated by Dio”, but sees it as little more than an example of the “political thought of the Hellenistic and Roman age, [which] was largely reduced to pious exhortation to rulers to preserve the lives, dignity, and property of the upper classes. . . Dio’s sentiments in the speech were applicable to any age, but perhaps particularly to that of Severus and Caracalla”—they would have especial relevance *after* Caracalla (see p. 272 f. below), whereas on Millar’s chronology book 43 would have been composed in 213. Cf. also E. Gabba, “Progetti di riforme economiche et fiscali in uno storico dell’età dei Severi”, *Studi in onore di Amintore Fanfani*, i (Milan, 1962), 39–68, p. 67 n. 80.

the issue open again. The events that followed the Ides of March showed that only a Caesar commanded support from veterans and legionaries, and Caesar's heir solidified this support when he marched on Rome in the summer of 43 B.C., with eight legions.¹ A delegation of four hundred soldiers appeared before the senate. The senators temporized and one soldier fetched his sword, "touched it and said: 'If you will not give Caesar the consulship, this will'".² When Octavian arrived, he duly got his consulship, and the soldiers got their money: 2,500 *denarii* a man, more than ten times the annual pay.³

The enormous donative of August 43 B.C. was the capital investment on which the principate was founded. Octavian was to become Augustus and men were encouraged to forget the years of anarchy. Even so, he did not succeed easily. Only two years later the situation in Italy was menacing: the proscriptions had simply raised the stakes and the men were far from satisfied with their pay and bounties and land-grants. "The veterans gathered in Rome in great numbers", but instead of addressing their grievances to the senate and people held an assembly of their own on the capitol and passed a resolution that they themselves should adjudicate between the feuding generals. Octavian's rivals made fun of the veterans, calling them a *senatus caligatus*, a "senate in hob-nailed boots".⁴ (Dio and his contemporaries will not have found much amusement in the story: it was too near the bone.)⁵

When the Civil Wars were over, Augustus eventually managed

¹ Dio 46. 42.4-43.4; cf. Suetonius, *Divus Augustus*, 26.1.

² Appian, *B.C.*, 3.12, 88; he was joined by three more legions outside the city (*ib.* 3.13, 92).

³ Dio 46. 46.1-7; Appian, *B.C.*, 3.13, 94. See the comment by G. R. Watson, *The Roman Soldier* (London, 1969), p. 113; A. Alföldi, "Der Einmarsch Octavians in Rom, August 43 v. Chr.", *Hermes*, lxxxvi (1958), 480-96; R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford, 1939), pp. 97-186 remains the classic account of the events from March 44 to August 43 B.C.

⁴ Dio 48.12.1-3. A century and a half after Dio wrote, the orator Symmachus spoke approvingly of the manner in which Valentinian I had been chosen emperor: *emeritum bellis virum castrensis senatus adscivit*; the army was *digna plane comitia tanti imperii principatu* (*or.* 1.9, p. 320 Seeck). See A. Alföldi, *A Conflict of Ideas* (p. 254 n. 3 above), pp. 105 f.

⁵ See p. 272 f., below.

to pay the men off, settling them in twenty eight colonies in Italy and scores of others all over the empire, providing them with land and with cash grants.¹ Before he died, in spite of extreme reluctance on the part of the senate, he set up a military treasury, the *aerarium militare*, funded principally by a 5 per cent. estate duty, the *vicesima hereditatum*. Thus the *praemia militiae* were assured for the future.² Events very nearly wrecked the new stability. The last eight years of his life were dominated by a military crisis. First, the Pannonian revolt of 6–9 threatened to undo his major achievement, the consolidation of the land-link between east and west. Had it not been suppressed, the empire would have split into two.³ Within days of the victory came news of disaster: three legions wiped out in the forests of Germany.⁴ At his death, the empire was

¹ *Res Gestae*, 3.3, 15.3, 16.1–2.

² *Res Gestae*, 17.2: *in aerarium militare, quod ex consilio meo constitutum est ex quo praemia darentur militibus qui vicena aut plura stipendia emeruissent, HS milliens et septingentiens ex patrimonio meo detuli*. Augustus here mentions only his own contribution; kings and certain communities also made donations, Dio 55.25.3; and Agrippa Postumus's confiscated property was assigned to it (ib. 55.32.5). Dio's whole account, 55.24.9–25.6, stresses Augustus's difficulty in securing agreement from the senate. The *vicesima*, paid only by Roman citizens, was highly unpopular, and was only accepted when, in A.D. 13, Augustus threatened to impose a property tax in its place. Suetonius, *Divus Augustus*, 49.2, perhaps indicates that other taxes were involved (*vectigalibus novis*). Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.78.2, shows that a 1 per cent. sales tax was also used to fund this treasury; this tax was halved in A.D. 17 when the annexation of Cappadocia provided extra revenue (ib. 2.42.6), perhaps raised again in 31 (Dio 58.16.2), and abolished in 38 (id. 59.9.7). The *vicesima* continued in existence (p. 273 below). Augustus refers only to *praemia* and Dio is generally regarded as being mistaken when he says in 55.24.9 that the intention in A.D. 5–6 was to provide a source for pay as well as bounties (*καὶ τὴν τροφήν καὶ τὰ γέρα*). But in the absence of further information it might be preferable to conclude that by the time that Dio was writing the arrangements had changed. Of course, he admitted elsewhere that he could not distinguish the different sources of imperial finance (53.22.3 ff.). But Suetonius's account, for that matter, could be taken to refer to pay as well as bounties: *quidquid autem ubique militum esset, ad certam stipendiorum praemiorumque formulam adstrinxit ... utque perpetuo ac sine difficultate sumptus ad tuendos eos prosequendosque suppeteret, aerarium militare cum novis vectigalibus constituit* (49.2).

³ J. J. Wilkes, *Dalmatia* (1969), pp. 62 ff.; A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and Upper Moesia* (1974), pp. 37 ff.

⁴ Velleius 2.117: *intra quinque consummati tanti operis dies, funestae ex Germania epistulae*.

desperately short of both manpower and money.¹ The legions on the Rhine and in Illyricum mutinied, demanding more pay²—the élite praetorian guard had recently (it would seem) had an increase which widened the differentials in their favour.³ The new emperor was patient and cunning and somehow he pacified them without granting their request. No pay rise was granted for seventy years, until the 80s.⁴ But before then the legions had shown their hand again. After Nero's suicide in 68, several armies sought to put their own man in power. The long year 69,⁵ the year of the four emperors, was a terrible reminder of what might happen at any time: soldiers casting off their discipline and taking the initiative.⁶ Vespasian, the victor, was proclaimed by the Syrian and Egyptian legions; but it was the Danubian legions which won the war for him.⁷

The upheaval passed, and discipline was restored.⁸ But the precariousness of the new order created by Augustus had been revealed,⁹ and all round the empire, on both sides of the frontier, native peoples had risen in rebellion.¹⁰ Tacitus takes the opportunity, describing the suppression of the revolt in the Rhineland, to put in the mouth of the Roman commander Petillius Cerialis what is perhaps the most famous justification of Roman imperialism.¹¹ One sentence in particular is relevant here: "there can be no peace without arms, no arms without

¹ Pliny, *N.H.*, 7.149: *iuncta deinde tot mala: inopia stipendii, rebellio Illyrici, servitiorum dilectus, iuventutis penuria*, etc.

² Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.16–49, etc. Pay was only one of several grievances.

³ G. R. Watson, *The Roman Soldier* (London, 1969), p. 98.

⁴ By Domitian in 83, Dio 67.3.5; Suetonius, *Domitian*, 7.3.

⁵ Tacitus, *Dialogus*, 17.3; see now K. Wellesley, *The Long Year A.D. 69* (London, 1975).

⁶ Cf. e.g. Tacitus, *Hist.*, 1.25.1 (*suscepere duo manipulares imperii populi Romani transferendum et transtulerunt*), 38.3 (*nullo tribunorum centurionumve adhortante, sibi quisque dux et instigator*), 46.1 (*omnia deinde arbitrio militum acta: praetorii praefectos sibi ipsi legere*), etc.

⁷ Cf. E. Ritterling, "Legio", *RE*, xii (1924), 1266, etc.

⁸ Suetonius, *Divus Vespasianus*, 8.1–3.

⁹ As Tacitus puts it, *Hist.*, 1.4.2: *evulgato imperii arcano, posse principem alibi quam Romae fieri*. Perhaps this had long been an open secret, but now the *vulgus*, and all the soldiers, had had its implications made plain.

¹⁰ E.g. the Roxolani (*Hist.*, 1.79), Brigantes (ib. 3.45), Germans and Dacians (ib. 3.46) and others (ib. 3.47–8), Garamantes (ib. 4.50).

¹¹ *Hist.*, 4.73–4.

pay and no pay without taxation" (*neque quies gentium sine armis, neque arma sine stipendiis neque stipendia sine tributis haberi queunt*), Cerialis told his audience of Gallic rebels.¹ Vespasian increased the *tributa*, doubling them in some cases²; but the imperial finances needed careful nursing and legionary pay was not increased for over a decade, and then only by one third, from 225 to 300 *denarii* a year.³ If one compares this with the private income of a senator, derived from rents,⁴ or with the salary of a proconsul of Africa,⁵ the figure may appear derisory. But ex-legionaries were distinctly among the better off members of society and had other privileges; nor did they have to rely solely on their pay and savings.⁶ There were the bounties on discharge and from time to time donatives and booty when victories were won—hence wars of conquest were popular with the troops.⁷

But the time came when expansion stopped. Augustus himself had apparently decided shortly before his death that extension of the empire had gone on long enough.⁸ On the

¹ *Hist.*, 4.74.1. Cf. Dio, 52.6.1 and 52.28 f. on new ideas for financing the army discussed in detail by E. Gabba, *Studi Fanfani* (p. 261 n. 3 above), pp. 39 ff.

² Suetonius *D. Vesp.*, 16.1. Note that Vespasian's generosity with the citizenship (on which see A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship* (2nd edn., Oxford, 1973), pp. 251 ff., 360 ff.) had financial implications, of which the emperor cannot have been unaware: a steady increase in the numbers of citizens, e.g. in Spain from the curial class by the grant of Latin rights (Pliny, *NH.*, 3.30), would have benefited the *vicesima* and hence the *aerarium militare* (p. 263 and n. 2 above).
³ P. 264 and n. 4 above.

⁴ R. P. Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire. Quantitative Studies* (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 17–32.

⁵ Dio, 78.22.5 (A.D. 217): 250,000 *denarii*. The proconsul would have enjoyed this salary for one year only, of course.

⁶ Cf. R. Macmullen, *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), esp. pp. 99 ff.; G. R. Watson, *The Roman Soldier* (1969), pp. 89 ff., 147 ff.; P. Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 245 ff.

⁷ Cf. G. Walser, "Der Putsch des Saturninus gegen Domitian", *Provincialia. Festschrift für Rudolf Laur-Belart* (Basel, 1968), pp. 497–507, esp. 498 f., 506 n. 53.

⁸ Note especially Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.11.7: *addideratque consilium coercendi intra terminos imperii*. Cf. C. M. Wells, *The German Policy of Augustus: an examination of the archaeological evidence* (Oxford, 1972); A. R. Birley, "Roman frontiers and Roman frontier policy", *Trans. Archit. & Arch. Soc. Durham & Northumberland*, iii (1974), 13–15.

accession of Hadrian this policy was taken to its logical conclusion with the erection of permanent frontier barriers, of which the one between the Solway Firth and Wallsend is only the best known example.¹ What is more, the disposition of the armed forces in the frontier regions now became permanent.² During the period from Augustus to Trajan legions had been moved from province to province and from fortress to fortress as the situation demanded, with bewildering rapidity on occasion.³ This applied particularly to the Rhine and Danube armies, but even in Britain there were considerable changes in the legionary garrison in the years 43–122.⁴ Thereafter the legions II Augusta, XX Valeria Victrix, and VI Victrix remained in their bases at Caerleon, Chester and York. Of the legions which survived Hadrian's reign into the mid-third century only V Macedonica was transferred to a new base, moving from Lower Moesia to Dacia in the 160s.⁵ Legions were moved from the northern to the eastern front in the 160s and up and down the northern rivers during the 170s; but they returned to base when the wars were over. In the 190s and the third century only detachments were drawn off for campaigns, leaving considerable elements of the legion at the fortress.⁶ Not surprisingly the

¹ *HA Hadrianus*, 11.2: *Ergo conversis regio more militibus Britanniam petit, in qua multa correxit murumque per octoginta milia passuum primus duxit, qui barbaros Romanosque divideret*; 12.6: *per ea tempora et alias frequenter in plurimis locis, in quibus barbari non fluminibus sed limitibus dividuntur, stipitibus magnis in modum muralis saepis funditus iactis atque conexis barbaros separavit*. Cf. now generally, J. C. Mann, "The frontiers of the principate", *ANRW* 2.1, 508–33. A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and U. Moesia* (1974), p. 109, attributes the Hadrianic frontier policy in the Middle Danube region to Trajan. There may be much truth in this; but I am convinced that the symbolic significance of Hadrian's continuous frontier barriers was very marked and represented a major shift of emphasis; cf. my comments in *Trans. Archit. & Arch. Soc. Durham & Northumberland*, iii (1974), 15–17.

² E. Ritterling, *RE*, xii (1924), 1293.

³ Cf. A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and U. Moesia* (1974), p. 85.

⁴ See now W. Eck, "Zum Ende der legio IX Hispana", *Chiron*, ii (1972), 459–62, with new evidence to support E. Birley's arguments, "The fate of the Ninth legion", in R. M. Butler (ed.), *Soldier and Civilian in Roman Yorkshire* (Leicester, 1971), pp. 71–80, that this legion survived, after transfer from Britain, until the mid-second century.

⁵ E. Ritterling, *RE*, xii (1924), 1293, 1301; (1925), 1518–19.

⁶ E. Ritterling, *RE*, xii (1924), 1297 ff.

foundation of veteran colonies also came to an end with Hadrian's accession.¹ The time-expired legionaries preferred to settle in the communities which grew up close to their base, rather than be sent elsewhere; and by the same token the new recruits seem largely to have been found in the frontier districts.²

For the prosperous classes in the heartland of the empire this was an admirable situation. As far as most of them were concerned, the Roman army had become invisible. The defences of the empire were "many months and years journey" from the city of Rome, said Aelius Aristides, with some exaggeration.³ Hadrian's policy may not have endeared him to some sections of the senatorial order, but the abandonment of wars of conquest was clearly welcomed and approved in the Greek east.⁴

The army was unquestionably the largest item in the imperial budget,⁵ however primitive the financial planning may have been. The soldiers were the only large body of wage-earners, some 400,000 or more in a population of about fifty million.⁶ Attempts have been made to calculate the total annual expenditure on the army, without any great hope of accuracy since the pay of some officers is unknown and a varying number of legionaries were paid above the basic rates.⁷ But in the period from 9–40,

¹ E. Kornemann, "Coloniae", *RE*, iv (1900), 511–88, col. 566.; A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and U. Moesia* (1974), pp. 117 ff.; G. R. Watson, *The Roman Soldier* (1969), p. 148.

² This process had already begun, and was a gradual one: G. Forni, *Il reclutamento delle legioni da Augusto a Diocleziano* (Milan, 1953); id., "Estrazione etnica e sociale delle legioni nei primi tre secoli dell'impero", *ANRW*, 2.1, 339–91, esp. 362 ff.

³ Aelius Aristides, *or. Rom.*, 80 Keil.

⁴ Cf. Birley, *Trans. Archit. & Arch. Soc. Durham & Northumberland*, iii. 15 ff.

⁵ See M. H. Crawford, *ANRW*, 2.2, 561, with n. 4.

⁶ For the number of auxiliary units in the mid-second century see the figures of E. Birley, "Septimius Severus and the Roman army", *Epigraphische Studien*, viii (1969), 63–82, p. 72: 270 quingenary cohorts, 39 milliary cohorts, 90 quingenary and 9 milliary *alae*, a total of 218,000 men (if the quingenary cohorts are estimated at 500 and the milliary at 1,000 men); together with 28 legions (168,000 men, allowing 6,000 to each) and the urban units (11,000) a total of 397,000 is produced—excluding the fleets and the ethnic units (the so-called *numeri*), for which see now M. Speidel, "The rise of ethnic units in the Roman imperial army", *ANRW*, 2.3, 202–31.

⁷ R. Macmullen, *Roman Social Relations* (New Haven, 1974), p. 94, following B. Dobson, "Legionary centurion or equestrian officer? A comparison of pay and prospects", *Ancient Society*, iii (1972), 193–207, attempts a calculation.

when there were twenty-five of them,¹ the legions must have cost at least 50 million *denarii* a year. Thereafter the number of legions increased, to reach thirty by the end of the first century and thirty-three by the end of the second, while the basic pay had gone up from 225 to 300 *denarii* a year c. 83 and from 300 to 450 c. 193.² By that time the legions must have been costing at least 110 million *denarii* a year. These figures of course exclude the cost of the *auxilia*, who were paid at a much lower rate, but for whom the total cost must have been considerable.³

The military treasury established in the year 6 was principally funded by a tax to which Roman citizens alone were liable. But our information suggests that the *aerarium militare* only provided bounties for the citizen troops, not their regular pay.⁴ Pay, *stipendia*, depended on *tributa*. The implication is important. The bulk of the legions and the auxiliary forces, stationed for the most part in close proximity to them, were in the remote frontier areas. Of the late Antonine establishment of thirty legions, one each was stationed in Spain, Africa and Egypt; there were three in Palestine and Arabia; three in Syria; two in Cappadocia; and the remaining nineteen were all in the north—three in Britain, four on the Rhine and twelve in the Danubian lands.⁵ In military terms this no doubt made sense. It was vital, as Augustus recognized, that the empire should control the Danube and its western tributaries the Drau and the Save; and Trajan extended Roman control across the Lower Danube into Transylvania. Only by guaranteeing the land link between northern Italy and the Balkans could Rome be sure of maintaining her authority over the east—and Asia Minor had been since the late second century B.C. a key source of revenue.⁶

¹ E. Ritterling, *RE*, xii (1924), 1244 ff.

² G. R. Watson, *The Roman Soldier* (1969), p. 91.

³ M. Speidel, "The pay of the *auxilia*", *JRS*, lxiii (1973), 141–7, argues that their pay was higher than generally reckoned, e.g. by G. R. Watson, *The Roman Soldier* (1969), pp. 99–101. ⁴ See p. 263 above.

⁵ Note that the reign of Domitian saw the beginning of a marked change in the distribution of legions, with the main weight moving from Rhine to Danube, a process completed by the time of Hadrian: E. Ritterling, *RE*, xii (1924), 1275 f.

⁶ The Rhine and Danube were of course vital communications arteries, and it was not least for this reason that the legions were stationed along them rather than in the hinterland.

Hence some two thirds of the Roman army was stationed in regions that were, by the standards of the Mediterranean world, poor and unproductive.¹ The British, German and Danubian provinces can only have contributed a small proportion, in tribute, to the cost of their military establishment. Apart from pay and bounties, there were also the capital expenditure and cost of maintenance for the elaborate installations that these forces required.² To be sure, the army provided its own labour and many of the materials were generally at hand. But what was lacking had to be provided and paid for. In the meantime, the soldiers and veterans and their families had money to spend; not surprisingly, there came into being in the frontier districts an immense number of flourishing towns and villages: Carlisle, Chester and York, Vienna, Budapest and Belgrade, are some well-known examples.³

Tranquillity reigned on most of the frontiers during the long reigns of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius. Then serious warfare began again. In the 160s there was an eastern war and while it was being fought the Marcomannic war, or war of many nations,⁴ was brewing up on the northern frontiers. The

¹ Cf. Dio, 49.36.2, Strabo, 7.5.4, C315, on Pannonia.

² Cf. A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and U. Moesia* (1974), p. 109.

³ Aelius Aristides, *or. Rom.*, 81 Keil. Cf. E. Birley, "Hadrianic frontier policy", *Carnuntina*, ed. E. Swoboda (= *Römische Forschungen in Niederösterreich*, 3, 1956), pp. 25-33. See now also G. D. B. Jones and N. F. Higham, "Frontier, forts and farmers: Cumbrian aerial survey 1974-5", *Archaeological Journal*, cxxxii (1975), for new light on the density of settlement south of the western end of Hadrian's Wall. E. Gren, *Kleinasien und Ostbalkan in der wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Uppsala-Leipzig, 1941), esp. pp. 89 ff. stressed the major importance of the army in the economic development of the Danubian provinces. Cf. p. 147 f.: "Das bedeutet, dass das Kapital in die Grenzprovinzen strömte, ganz besonders an die Donaugrenze, wo die grösste Verbände standen. . . Die unmittelbare Folge war ein vermehrter Wohlstand in den Grenzprovinzen. Die Gebiete waren doch keineswegs die natürliche Produktionszentren des Reiches und ihre Lage was äusserst ausgesetzt." R. Macmullen, *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire* (1967), pp. 89 f. criticizes Gren on the grounds that he fails to show a connection between the presence of the soldiers and the prosperity, but concedes that "much of Gren's main thesis, despite its drawbacks, is convincing".

⁴ *HA, M.Ant.*, 12.13: *dum Parthicum bellum genitur, natum est Marcomanicum*; 22.1: *gentes omnes ab Illyrici limite usque in Galliam conspiraverant*; 22.7: *bello Germanico sive Marcomannico immo plurimarum gentium*.

empire was invaded and throughout the 170s Rome struggled to evict the Germans and their allies.¹ Marcus Aurelius, ill-fitted to cope with such a situation, was obliged to spend years at the front. But, as Cassius Dio appreciatively records, “although he was compelled to make extraordinary expenditures, he burdened no one by exactions of money”.² When the first wave of invasion was driven back, “although a mighty conflict and a brilliant victory had taken place, nonetheless when the emperor was asked by the soldiers for a donative he did not give them one: ‘Whatever they might get over and above their regular pay would be squeezed from the blood of their parents and kinsmen’”.³ It must be noted that although troops from other sectors of the empire had been sent in⁴ and two new legions had been raised in Italy,⁵ the majority of the men, the Danubian legionaries, could hardly have been expected to have kith and kin in the wealthy provinces that provided most of Rome’s revenue. Later in the reign when further funds were desperately needed, Marcus Aurelius auctioned imperial treasures, rather than resort to new taxes.⁶

The reign of his son Commodus, who made peace with the Germans,⁷ provided the empire with a breathing space of a kind, although the armies were in a dangerously restless mood and the self-confidence and unity of the governing class was to be shattered.⁸ The senatorial order experienced a reign of terror that revived memories of the Julio-Claudian and

¹ A. R. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius* (London, 1966), pp. 201 ff.; A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and U. Moesia* (1974), pp. 183 ff.

² Dio, 71.32.3.

³ Dio, 71.3.3.

⁴ E.g. part of XII Fulminata may have been on the Danube in 173 (Dio, 71.8.10 (Xiphilinus)), cf. A. R. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius* (1966), pp. 237 ff.; part of III Augusta was there in the 170s: Dessau, *ILS*, 2747, cf. H.-G. Pflaum, *Les carrières procuratoriennes équestres sous le Haut Empire romain* (Paris, 1961), no. 198.

⁵ II and III Italicae: cf. J. C. Mann, “The raising of new legions during the principate”, *Hermes*, xci (1963), 483–9.

⁶ Zonaras 12.1 = *Exc. Salm.*, 117; *HA M.Ant.*, 17.4–6; Eutropius, 8.13.

⁷ See now G. Alföldy, “Der Friedensschluss des Kaisers Commodus mit den Germanen”, *Historia*, xx (1971), 84–109.

⁸ See generally F. Grosso, *La lotta politica al tempo di Commodo* (Turin, 1964); A. R. Birley, *Septimius Severus* (1971), pp. 131 ff. Dio regarded the change from Marcus to Commodus as the end of an age of gold and the beginning of an age of iron—and rusty iron at that (71.36.4).

Domitianic periods.¹ Commodus was assassinated and replaced by Pertinax, one of the heroes of the Danubian wars, a self-made man of humble origin who was no doubt thought best fitted to combine respect for the senate's prerogative with a firm hand in military matters.² He soon showed his intentions by suspending payments to the northern tribes, as Dio approvingly records.³ This is revealing: here was another drain on the empire's resources, in the same direction, to the north. Complete figures are lacking, but there were clearly lengthy periods when barbarian peoples beyond Rome's frontiers received annual grants. Whether these are viewed as Danegeld or as subsidies to underdeveloped nations, they must have been expensive.⁴ Pertinax found a nearly bankrupt treasury; but his tighthandedness and firm discipline caused his downfall within

¹ For the senate Commodus was *hostis deorum carnifex senatus, hostis deorum parricida senatus: hostis deorum hostis senatus* (*HA Comm. Ant.*, 18.4), to quote the celebrated *adclamatio* after his murder.

² A. R. Birley, "The coups d'état of the year 193", *Bonner Jahrbücher*, lxi (1969), 247-80; id., *Septimius Severus* (1971), pp. 106 ff.; G. Alföldy, "P. Helvius Pertinax und M. Valerius Maximianus", *Situla*, xiv/xv (1974), 199-215.

³ Dio, 73.6.1.

⁴ Herodian, 1.6.8-9 refers to Commodus' payments. The practice was long-standing. Note Tacitus, *Germania*, 42: (on the eastern Germans) *raro armis nostris, saepius pecunia iuvantur*. The following list does not claim to be comprehensive. Domitian: Dio 67.6.5, 67.7.4 (Dacians); 67.10.5 (Cherusci). Trajan disapproved of the payments to the Dacians (68.6.1), but must have made regular payments to the Sarmatian Roxolani, which Hadrian had to continue, after some trouble 117 (*HA Had.*, 7.8: *cum rege Roxalanorum, qui de imminutis stipendiis querebatur, cognito negotio pacem composuit*). Marcus Aurelius made payments to some of the northern peoples: Dio, 71.11.1, 19.1. For Commodus, see above. Under Severus, the British governor Virius Lupus had to buy off the Maeatae: Dio, 74.5.4. Caracalla paid large sums to the Cenni: Dio, 77.14.2, and Elbe Germans, ib. 3 and largesses to "barbarians" are mentioned 78.3.5; while Macrinus claimed that the amount paid to the barbarians was equal to the soldiers' pay: 78.17.3. An annual payment to Armenia is mentioned: 78.27.4. Macrinus himself paid an indemnity to Parthia of 50 million *denarii*: 78.27.1. Severus Alexander: Herodian 6.7.9. Philostratus, a contemporary of Severus and Caracalla, tells the story of Apollonius' meeting with the Indian king who preferred peace to war and paid the barbarians to prevent them invading: *V. Apoll.*, 2.26. See for comment J. Klose, *Roms Klientel-Randstaaten am Rhein und an der Donau. Beiträge zu ihrer Geschichte und rechtlichen Stellung im 1. und 2. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Breslau, 1934), who distinguishes between payments made to allow individual peoples to maintain their independence vis-à-vis their neighbours and payments made to buy peace for Rome; he sees a change

three months. There followed the notorious auction of the empire in the barracks of the guard.¹ The higher bidder, Didius Julianus, was unacceptable to the legions and civil war began. Septimius Severus, who won, was the candidate of the Danubian armies.² The armed forces as a whole were rewarded handsomely: legionary pay was increased, probably by 50 per cent.,³ and various privileges were granted to all soldiers⁴; but the Danubian legionaries were given something extra. The guard that had overthrown Pertinax was punished with dismissal by his avenger and replaced by a force twice the size and no longer recruited mainly from Italy. The new guard was drawn principally from the Danubian lands, being manned by Pannonians, Dalmatians, and Thracians.⁵ Under the principate the unity of the widely dispersed army had been maintained not least by seconding praetorian guardsmen to tours of duty in the legions: after a spell as legionary centurion they would return to Rome to be centurions in the guard and the other Rome units; then go as chief centurions to a legion; then, back at Rome, they became tribunes in the Rome garrison. The change of manpower in the guard after the year 193 must have had an effect throughout the imperial army.⁶

As Severus lay dying at York he advised his sons to be generous to the soldiers and ignore everyone else.⁷ Caracalla needed no second bidding. "He loved spending on the soldiers", as Dio bitterly observed, "and he had them around him in great numbers, alleging excuse after excuse and war after war; he made it his task to strip, loot, and wear down the

to the second category from 180. There is doubtless much truth in this comment. But the financial implications are unaffected by the motives for the payments.

¹ Gibbon's account of this transaction in chapter five of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is justly celebrated.

² A. R. Birley, *Septimius Severus* (1971), pp. 155 ff.

³ G. R. Watson, *The Roman Soldier* (1969), p. 91.

⁴ E. Birley, *Epigr. Stud.*, viii (1969), 63 f.

⁵ M. Durry, *Les cohortes prétoriennes* (Paris, 1938), pp. 81-87, 247 ff.; E. Birley, *Roman Britain and the Roman Army* (Kendal, 1953), pp. 118 ff.

⁶ B. Dobson and D. J. Breeze, "The Rome cohorts and the legionary centurionate", *Epigr. Stud.*, viii (1969), 100 ff.; B. Dobson, "The significance of the centurion and primipilaris in the Roman army and administration", *ANRW*, 2.1, 392-434.

⁷ Dio, 76.15.2.

rest of the human race, not least the senators".¹ Army pay was substantially increased again, and no doubt to fund the by now enormously increased *praemia militiae*, the 5 per cent. death duties were doubled. At the same time, to widen the scope of the tax, all free inhabitants of the empire were made Roman citizens and exemptions were abolished.² "The emperor himself kept on spending money on the soldiers (and on wild beasts and horses)", Dio goes on. "In fact, he often used to say: 'No one except me ought to have money, so that I can hand it out to the soldiers'. His mother Julia reproached him for spending vast sums on them, and said that 'There is no revenue left for us any more, whether legitimate or illegitimate'. 'Cheer up, mother', he replied, pointing to his sword, 'so long as we have this, the money will not run out'".³

But the money did run out. Caracalla was murdered within a few years and his successor tried in vain to stem the tide.⁴ Then, in turn, two Syrian youths, the sons of Caracalla's cousins, were found to revive the Severan dynasty. But they and their backers had an uphill task. The great lawyer Ulpian was murdered by the praetorian guards not long after taking office as prefect.⁵ A few years later Cassius Dio avoided a similar fate by keeping away from Rome for most of his second consulship: the guardsmen were after his blood, for he had tried to impose discipline on their friends and kinsmen in Pannonia.⁶

In some ways it did not matter very much who the emperor was.⁷ But when there was fighting to be done, the armies

¹ Dio, 77.9.1.

² Dio, 77.9.4-5. There is an enormous literature on the Edict of Caracalla. On the issue relevant here, the financial aspects, note J. F. Gilliam, "The minimum subject to the *vicesima hereditatum*", *American Journal of Philology*, lxxii (1952), 397-405, showing that quite modest estates were liable to the duty.

³ Dio, 77.10.4.

⁴ Dio, 78.12.2-7 (fragmentary), 17.3, 18.5, 28.1-3, 36 (but note 27.1, 34.2-3, for large payments by Macrinus).

⁵ Dio, 80.2.2-4; the date of Ulpian's death was 223 or 224, see J. Modrzejewski and T. Zawadski, "La date de la mort d'Ulpian et la préfecture du prétoire au début du règne d'Alexandre Sévère", *Revue historique de droit français et étranger*, xlv (1967), 565-611.

⁶ Dio, 80.4.1-5.2.

⁷ R. Syme, *Classical Review*, liii (1939), 79 commented that "the significance of the individual ruler declines steadily" during the Antonine period.

demanded convincing leadership. The Syrian emperors were conspicuously unfitted to defend the empire. It is surely in no way surprising that Severus Alexander was replaced by a man of Danubian origins who had risen from the ranks, C. Julius Verus Maximinus.¹ The author of the *Historia Augusta*, after letting himself go on the extravagances of the pampered Elagabalus and expatiating longwindedly on the virtuous conduct of Alexander, was ready for a contrast when he got to Maximinus. The man is portrayed as a barbarian monster.² The truth was less startling or discreditable.³ The change in the social origins of the emperors, stressed by Victor, reflected a general process: the gradual turning away of the senatorial order from its old rôle in the command of Roman legions. The Marcomannic wars had taken a heavy toll; many new men had been taken into the senate.⁴ But before these new elements had had time to be absorbed into the governing class, the reign of Commodus and the civil wars of 193–7 had their effects. As a result senators were doubtless less eager to canvass for office: the risks of incurring suspicion, or indeed, the risk of being forced to become the figurehead of a rebellion, were real ones.⁵ At the same time, the emperors, after what had happened in 193–7, were reluctant to put senators in command of large armies. The subdivision of provinces was one solution, which probably made high command seem less attractive in any case.⁶ Whereas Julius Agricola, for example, had commanded four legions in

¹ See above all R. Syme, *Emperors and Biography* (1971), pp. 179 ff.

² *HA Maximini duo* 1.5 (*barbaro etiam patre et matre genitus*), 2.2 (*ferus moribus*), 9.2 (*neque enim fuit crudelius animal in terris*), 10.1, 11.6 (*ferarum more*), 15.6 (*tristissima belua*), 15.8 (*illam beluam*), 17.1 (*homo natura ferus sic exarsit, ut non hominem sed beluam putares*), etc.

³ R. Syme, *Emperors and Biography* (1971), esp. pp. 185 f., pointing out that only one Latin source (*epitome de Caes.*, 25.1) calls him *Thrax*, a label which it would be preferable to abandon.

⁴ *HA M. Ant.*, 22.7: *et multi nobiles bello Germanico... interierunt*; 10.3: *multos ex amicis in senatum adlegit cum aediliciis aut praetoriis dignitatibus*.

⁵ Cf. Dio, 72.9.2a, *HA Comm.*, 8.4, *Pert.*, 3.6 (it was bad enough in Rome: *ib.* 6.4–5).

⁶ E. Ritterling, *RE*, xii (1924), 1309: “fortan [from Severus and Caracalla] hat keine Provinz mehr als zwei Legionen ständige Besatzung”; besides this, the tenure of office was generally short, cf. G. Barbieri, *L'Albo senatorio da Settimio Severo a Carino* (Rome, 1952), pp. 554 f.

Britain in the Flavian period, in the third century there were two British governors, who shared three legions—and the man who commanded the northern province only had one of these.¹ The senators were ever more frequently replaced by equestrian officials; and these men themselves, unlike the *equites* who had served the emperors in the first two centuries, were increasingly recruited from the military men who had risen from the ranks.²

Tacitus, writing in the reign of Trajan, describes a mutiny of the praetorian guard soon after Otho's accession in A.D. 69. The emperor, conscious that the men were capable of anything and that the senatorial class was rigid with fear, is portrayed making a subtle speech, soothing and flattering the guardsmen, but warning them of the dangers of indiscipline and of continuing their hostility towards the senate: for, "just as you can become senators, so senators can become emperors".³ By the year 238 that intermediate stage was no longer necessary. Guardsmen could become emperors. The interests of the most powerful body of legionaries and of the guard had been made one by Septimius Severus. Whatever the details of Mamiminus' career, he was a true representative of the Danubian soldiery.⁴ To be sure, one third-century emperor, Decius, was a man from the Danube lands who was a senator.⁵ A handful of men from this region had been taken into the *amplissimus ordo*.⁶ But only a handful were likely to be found, since the economic conditions favourable to the creation of large estates, and hence to the emergence of men equipped by their wealth to enter the senate, did not prevail in the Danubian and Balkan lands.⁷ But—it

¹ A. R. Birley, "The Roman governors of Britain", *Epigraphische Studien* iv (1967), 63–102, p. 78 f.

² Cf. H.-G. Pflaum, *Les carrières procuratoriennes* (1961), no. 317.

³ *Historiae*, 1.84.4: *nam ut ex vobis senatores, ita ex senatoribus principes nascuntur*. The distorted version of this sentiment in the exaggeratedly pro-senatorial *Historia Augusta* is worth noting, *Clod. Alb.*, 13.10: *senatus imperet, provincias dividat, senatus nos consules faciat. et quid dico senatus? vos ipsi et patres vestri: eritis enim ipsi senatores* (speech of Albinus to the British legions).

⁴ R. Syme, *Emperors and Biography* (1971), pp. 186 ff.

⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 195 ff.; X. Lorient, *ANRW*, 2.2, 697 f.

⁶ Notably M. Valerius Maximianus: *AE*, 1956, 124, Diana Veteranorum.

⁷ At least until the third century; A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and U. Moesia* (1974), pp. 169 ff., 242 ff., and not in the frontier area (*ib.* 239).

must be reiterated—it was now too late in any case. The community of interest of the senatorial order had been dissolved, likewise the carefully nurtured unity of spirit between emperor and senate. From the beginning of the third century it had become clear that the road to power and influence was no longer to be sought by climbing the ladder of senatorial office. The so-called “Edict” of Gallienus, excluding senators from military service, was not a revolutionary step.¹

Maximinus' entire reign was spent in the north : one season on the Rhine, then in the Danubian lands, with unremitting campaigning against Rome's old northern enemies.² To raise funds, he resorted to an increasingly tough fiscal policy, which affected all classes and all regions.³ Even in Thrace, a celebrated inscription shows that some villagers had petitioned the emperor when all other appeals had failed : they were being ruined by the exactions of the soldiery.⁴ Significantly, the people of Scaptopara were able to pass their *libellus* safely into the hands of the emperor's *a libellis* by the agency of a native of the place, who happened to be a praetorian guardsman.⁵ Elsewhere such useful channels of influence would be lacking. In Africa the behaviour of a procurator provoked an uprising and the elevation of a rival emperor, the aged proconsul Gordianus.⁶ Gordian and his son were speedily swept aside by the governor of Numidia and proconsular Africa was ravaged by the victorious legion, III Augusta. But after a series of dramatic events in Rome and northern Italy Maximinus was overthrown ; and by midsummer old Gordian's grandson was installed as emperor.⁷ The reign of Maximinus had been a portent : the real possessors of power had put one of themselves at their head. By a colossal effort of will and with a considerable element of good fortune, an alliance of the lands of ancient culture and prosperity had

¹ B. Malcus, “Notes sur la révolution du système administratif romain au III^e siècle”, *Opuscula Romana*, vii (1969), 213–37.

² X. Lorient, *ANRW*, 2.2, 674 ff.

³ Herodian, 7.3.1 ff. ; X. Lorient, *ANRW*, 2.2, 681 ff.

⁴ *IGBulg.*, 4. 2236.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Herodian, 7.4.1 ff.

⁷ X. Lorient, *ANRW*, 2.2, 688 ff., esp. 720 ff. (for the chronology).

removed him. For another eleven years men from the Greek east reigned¹—and their principal military activities were in the east. The advent of Decius in 249 marked the beginning of a long period during which the Danubian forces struggled to reimpose their nominee on the throne.² During the 250s and 260s Italians reigned again, but against repeated attempts to overthrow them.³ It may not be fanciful to suggest that one reason why Gallienus was able to retain support for as long as he did from the Danubian and Balkan lands was the origin of his wife, Cornelia Salinina Chrysogone, a native of Salonae in Dalmatia.⁴ However this may be, Gallienus did succumb: from 268 onwards the Danubian soldiery were able to control the empire for over a century.⁵

Naturally I do not believe that a process such as may be observed in the third century can ever be explained in terms of a single cause. Nonetheless, I would argue that the economic imbalance created by the frontier policy of which Hadrian's Wall is the most potent symbol, was the major factor in bringing

¹ The origin of Philip is undisputed: he was a native of the Roman province of Arabia (*PIR*² J 461). There seems to be general acceptance of the view that the Gordians originated in Asia Minor, put forward by A. R. Birley, "The origins of Gordian I", in M. G. Jarrett and B. Dobson (eds.), *Britain and Rome. Essays presented to Eric Birley* (Kendal, 1966), pp. 56–60, cf. the bibliography in X. Loriot, *ANRW*, 2.2, 694 ff. However, J. Gagé, "Programme d'italicité et de nostalgie d'hellénisme autour de Gallien et Salonine. Quelques problèmes de la 'paidéia' impériale au IIIe siècle", *ANRW*, 2.2, 828–852, is sceptical: "nous ne croyons pas qu'il soit tout à fait raisonnable de ramener ces grands patrons des bourgeoisies italiennes et africaines à une origine cappadoce" (p. 832: but no reference is given to any discussion of the question). The attempt by K. D. Grasby, "The age, ancestry, and career of Gordian I", *Classical Quarterly*, xxv (1975), 123–30, to discard Herodian's evidence (7.5.2) for Gordian's age is unconvincing not least because he is unaware of *AE*, 1971. 475 (Caesarea Maritima) confirming that Gordian II had been consul: see now X. Loriot, "Un milliaire de Gordien II découvert près de Césarée de Palestine et l'extension aux provinces de l'insurrection de 238 après J.-C.", *Bull. de la Soc. Nat. des Antiquaires de France*, 1972, 90–93.

² R. Syme, *Emperors and Biography* (1971), pp. 193 ff.

³ M. Christol, *ANRW*, 2.2. 804 ff.

⁴ See G. Alföldy, "Senatoren in der römischen Provinz Dalmatien", *Epigraphische Studien*, v (1968), 99–144, pp. 127–30, 144.

⁵ Cf. Mamertinus, *Pan. Lat.*, 2 (10) 2.2: *quis enim dubitat quin multis iam saeculis. . . Italia quidem sit gentium domina gloriae vetustate, sed Pannonia virtute?*

about that process of decline, and that many of the other causes to which it has been attributed were generated by that frontier policy.¹

The creation of an empire made a standing army inevitable, and the army had to be paid for. Political considerations and military requirements caused Augustus to distribute the army away from the Mediterranean heartland of the empire. The upper classes realized only too clearly that their own survival depended on the maintenance of firm discipline, and were allowed to continue their traditional rôle as legionary and army commanders, in the service of the emperors. Although the mutinies of A.D. 14 and the civil war of A.D. 68–69 showed the fragility of the system, it appeared to recover. But in the second century the renunciation of further expansion led to the permanent stationing of the empire's forces along the frontiers, and recruitment was largely from these same regions. As long as peace was maintained, the burden of taxation required to pay the troops may have been tolerable. But it is important to recognize that this system resulted in a transfer of resources

¹ This view was stated briefly in *Trans. Durham & Northumberland*, N.S. 3 (1974), 24 f., and owes much to A. Mócsy, "Die Expansionsfrage im I. und II. Jh. und die Ertragsfähigkeit der Grenzprovinzen", *Annales Univ. Scient. Budapestinensis*, Sec. Hist. 5 (1963), 3–13, and to E. Gren, *Kleinasien und Ostbalkān* (1941), (p. 269 n. 3 above). I have also benefited, through the author's courtesy, from being able to consult the typescript of Professor Mócsy's paper to the San Francisco Congress of History, 1975, "Der Limes und die Provinzen". My friend Prof. Géza Alföldy reminds me that the urban upper classes were already in economic difficulties before the wars of M. Aurelius, e.g. in Spain, where stagnation or even a decline in the economy may be observed in the first half of the second century. In my view this may have been unwittingly brought about by the drain of revenue to the northern frontiers which had already begun. It is astonishing that A. Deman, "Matériaux et réflexions pour servir à une étude du développement et du sous-développement dans les provinces de l'empire romain", *ANRW* 2.3, pp. 3–83, and J.-H. Michel, "L'insuffisance des investissements: Signe ou cause de sous-développement dans deux provinces romaines (l'Espagne et l'Afrique du Nord)", *ibid.* 84–94, fail to recognize, when they contrast Spain and N. Africa with Gaul, that the latter's prosperity was enormously enhanced by the spending power of the Rhine armies; Spain and N. Africa, with only one legion apiece, did not benefit from the only kind of investment that took place (after the colonizing programme was completed), yet even so F. Millar can justifiably remark (*The Roman Empire and its Neighbours* (1967) p. 170 f.) that "The prosperity of Roman Africa was largely the product of the work of the Roman army".

from the productive to the unproductive regions of the empire.¹ The armies of Britain and the Rhine were, no doubt, financed mainly by the wealthy Gallic provinces, which would benefit in return, because of their favourable river-transport system, from supplying the troops. Britain itself and the Rhine provinces, in the meantime prospered—but much of the prosperity remained in the hands of veterans. On the other hand, the hinterland of the Danubian armies was not rich enough to provide the revenue needed to maintain the much larger military establishment there. The richer provinces of the Mediterranean—Bithynia, Asia, Egypt and Africa—must, effectively, have paid for the defence of the northeastern sector of the frontier. When the costs mounted, it was they that noticed the difference²; and the spending power of the Danubian soldiers could not be pumped back into the economy. Instead, it stayed in the Danube area, attracting a considerable immigrant population,³ but largely remaining in the hands of the soldiers themselves, the veterans, and their families, who formed a solid and united group.⁴ The wealth that was put into the frontier lands naturally made the empire seem much more attractive to the barbarians across the frontiers, and determined attempts were made by them to obtain a share in this prosperity. The evidence shows that barbarian tribes beyond the frontier were intent on securing peaceful admission to the empire in the second century, or even asking Rome to annexe their territory.⁵ For the most part they had to be content with money payments.⁶ These, together with the more settled way of life imposed on them by Roman supervision, made Rome's barbarian neighbours more prosperous,

¹ M. H. Crawford, *ANRW*, 2.2, 568; and cf. p. 269 n. 3 above.

² See above on the events of the year 238. One may compare what happened in the 80s soon after Domitian had increased legionary pay: "many of the subject peoples revolted when taxes were forcibly collected, including the Nasamones" [in Africa], Dio, 67.4.6; or ca. 372, when Valentinian's exactions in Africa to pay for his northern campaigns provoked the rising of Firmus, Zosimus, 4.16.1 ff.

³ A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and U. Moesia* (1974), esp. pp. 227 ff.

⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 242 f.

⁵ Appian, *proem.*, 7.

⁶ P. 271 and n. 4 above.

and thus, in their turn, a target for their wilder cousins beyond. It was these more distant peoples, such as the Lombards and Vandals, who created the disturbances of the 160s which led to the Marcomannic wars.¹

If the governing class had remained united, and the Roman army had continued to be heterogeneous, divorced from the native population among which it was garrisoned, and regularly liable to be transferred to new bases, the situation that has been described might have been avoided. Militarily, an army kept further back from the frontiers might have been more effectively deployed in emergencies, while the soldiers' pay should have been spent in the communities whose taxes provided it, keeping their economy bouyant and better able to respond to a crisis, both economically and psychologically.² As it was, the concentration of so high a proportion of the army in the Danube area and the recruitment of the same men into the praetorian guard from the early third century meant that within a generation from the new guard's formation these men demanded power themselves. From the 160s their own homeland had been under continuous pressure. The Danubian provinces had been badly afflicted in the 170s and they were determined to ensure that it did not happen again. It was natural that these men worked for the unity of the empire: they depended on the Mediterranean world to finance them.³

In the mid-third century the much maligned Gallienus began the creation of a new mobile field army.⁴ If militarily effective, from the political and economic point of view it had come too late. The men from the Danube were already dominating the officer corps and Gallienus could hardly supplement them much from elsewhere. Meanwhile, the depreciation of the currency, made necessary by the constant increases in pay and recurrent donatives, had resulted in the reversion to a non-

¹ A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and U. Moesia* (1974), pp. 185 ff.

² It is difficult to see how F. Millar, *The Roman Empire and its Neighbours* (1967), p. 181, can describe the general economic decline of the third century as "still mysterious". See pp. 259 n. 3, 260 n. 1, 271 n. 4 above.

³ A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and U. Moesia* (1974), pp. 210 f.

⁴ A. Alföldi, *CAH*, 12, 208 ff. = *Studien zur Geschichte der Weltkrise* (1967), pp. 394 ff.; cf. M. Christol, *ANRW*, 2.2, 822 n. 96.

monetary economy.¹ Hence the field army of Gallienus and his successors was not contributing to the economy. The men were no longer being paid in cash.

¹ M. H. Crawford, *ANRW*, 2.2, 570 f. Note that the *annona militaris*, often said to have been instituted by Septimius Severus, did not become regular till later : see now G. Rickman, *Roman Granaries and Store Buildings* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 278 ff.