

## Introduction: The Decision-Making Elite

When Marcus Aurelius died in A.D. 180, his son, the new emperor Commodus, had to decide what to do about the war on the Danube frontier. The circumstances surrounding the decision are recorded in detail only by the unreliable Herodian;<sup>1</sup> however, the purpose here is not to evaluate the ultimate accuracy of Herodian's account, but to determine whether Commodus' decision seems plausible in light of other ancient sources—and, as we shall see, it does. Commodus talks over the options with the “friends” who had accompanied his father on the expedition. They urge him not to abandon the war:

To leave the war unfinished, besides being dishonorable (*ἀπρεπές*), is also dangerous (*ἐπισηφάλης*). For thus we will give confidence to the barbarians, who will accuse us not of a desire to return to our country but of flight and fear. But it would be splendid for you, after mastering all of them and bounding the empire on the north with the ocean, to return home triumphing and leading bound barbarian kings and satraps as prisoners. (1.6.5)

But Commodus is eventually swayed by other arguments: the relative comfort of Rome compared to the discomforts and legendary bad

1. See also Cass. Dio 72[73].1–2. The best commentary on Herodian's text is that of Whittaker in the Loeb edition (1969–1970).

weather of the Danube frontier, and the fear that a pretender might take advantage of his absence from the capital to seize power (1.6.1–3).

It is natural to view an account like this with some skepticism; in fact, for example, Commodus seems to have continued Marcus' war for a few months before making his notorious choice to withdraw.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the tremendous value of the testimony of literary sources for the reasoning and motivations behind the type of decision Herodian describes should not be underestimated. For these decisions were not made by experts trained in economics, political science, or military theory, nor did those making the decisions even, very often, have a great deal of specialized experience to aid them. Roman foreign policy was conducted by wealthy but otherwise relatively ordinary men. In fact, the class of people who made Rome's foreign-relations decisions in the period under discussion here, from the first century B.C. to the third century A.D., is largely indistinguishable from the class that composed what remains of Greek and Latin literature. For example, the philosopher Seneca was one of the emperor Nero's most trusted advisers; his nephew Lucan, also a member of the imperial entourage, wrote a surviving epic on the civil war between Caesar and Pompey; Pliny the Elder, author of the extant *Natural History* and lost historical works, was an *amicus*, or "friend," of the emperor Vespasian and visited him every day. The Latin historian Tacitus and his friend Pliny the Younger, whose letters survive along with a panegyric to the emperor Trajan, both governed provinces; the latter helped judge cases as a member of Trajan's council. Tacitus also had a close relationship with his father-in-law, the famous governor of Britain and the subject of his biography *Agricola*, with whom he discussed questions of strategy. Arrian, the author of an important history of Alexander the Great, works on tactics, and two geographical treatises, governed the province of Cappadocia and repelled an invasion of the Alani. Fronto's correspondence with the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, whom he tutored, survives. Cassius Dio, the author of a largely extant history of Rome in Greek, was a "friend" of three emperors (Severus, Caracalla, and Severus Alexander), and governor of several provinces, including the crucial military province of Upper Pannonia on the upper Danube.<sup>3</sup> We do not know whether any of these individuals was consulted about any specific foreign-affairs decision, but

2. See Alföldy 1971 and Whittaker's commentary (1969–1970) ad loc.

3. On Seneca as adviser to Nero, see Griffin 1976, 76–103; on Pliny the Elder, Plin. *Ep.* 3.5.7–9; Pliny the Younger helping Trajan judge cases, *ibid.*, 4.22, 6.22, 6.31, with Sherwin-White 1968 ad locc.; Tacitus and *Agricola*, Tac. *Agr.* 24; on Arrian's military exploits, see Bosworth 1977; on his life and works generally, Stadter 1980. Fronto's role as friend of the

they and others of similar education, status, and background were the most likely candidates for the emperor to call on: their views are important. Others, like the Augustan poet Horace and the geographer Strabo, were not part of the circle directly involved in decisions, but they had friends who were. Conversely, many emperors, commanders, and provincial governors were authors: Marcus Aurelius wrote philosophy, and Claudius wrote history and geography; the prince Germanicus translated Aratus' poem on astronomy into Latin; and Cornelius Gallus, the militaristic prefect of Egypt under Augustus, was most famous for his love elegies.<sup>4</sup> This cultural tradition was inherited from the Republic and persisted well beyond the time period discussed here. During his Gallic campaigns Caesar had written a treatise called *On Analogy*, and Quintus Cicero, serving as legate under him, composed four tragedies;<sup>5</sup> in the fourth century, the historian Ammianus would accompany the emperor Julian on campaign against the Persians. The Roman aristocracy was educated mainly in literature and rhetoric, and valued these pursuits highly as an important part of their cultural and class identity, as I shall argue later in this chapter. A division between literature and policy that might seem natural enough to a modern observer might not have seemed obvious to them. That is, it may be tempting for the modern reader to assume that Roman aristocrats must have thought differently, and articulated different concerns, when they were conferring about a foreign-relations issue than when they were composing a history or an epic poem. But much of the evidence that we shall see suggests—although it cannot prove—the opposite conclusion. The question I would like to ask in this work is, Supposing we take the Romans at their word, what are the views that emerge from Roman literature on questions of war and peace, and can they in fact help us understand Roman actions?

The status of Herodian, the author of the statement with which this chapter began, is unknown. It is not clear whether he belonged to the senatorial aristocracy and whether he had any way of knowing what was in fact said to Commodus by his advisers, though he does claim to be a contemporary of the events he describes.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, there are sev-

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Antonine emperors is the subject of Champlin 1980, chap. 7. On Cassius Dio's career, see Millar 1964, 16–27.

4. On the literary efforts and attitudes of emperors, see the interesting work of Barndon 1940; Augustus, for example, wrote a tragedy entitled *Ajax* (ibid., p. 15; Suet. *Aug.* 85); on Gallus, see especially Crowther 1983.

5. Fronto, *Ep.* (Loeb) 2:29; Cic., *Qfr.* 3.5.7.

6. On Herodian's life and status, see Whittaker 1969–1970, 1:ix–xxiv. Whittaker argues that Herodian may have been an equestrian procurator and, as such, would have had senatorial patrons and access to their information and views.

eral significant features of the conversation as he imagines it. There is concern, first of all, about what is “dishonorable”; and, apparently closely related to this, a strong necessity not to appear afraid in front of barbarians; and the idea that a lack of aggressive action will undermine security by producing a certain state of mind (“confidence”) in the enemy. There is also a desire for the glory of conquest; a special significance to achieving the northern “ocean” as frontier; and relish at the thought of leading barbarian kings (and, confusingly, satraps)<sup>7</sup> in a humiliating triumph. All of these, I shall argue, are very typical Roman concerns. Also, Herodian cannot imagine an aggressive, expansionist campaign waged by anyone other than the emperor. If Commodus wants to enlarge his reputation by conquering barbarians and annexing territory, he has to do it himself and not through a subordinate.

Commodus and his advisers do not, in Herodian’s version of these events, discuss the relative merits of the Danube River as a frontier. They do not look at maps, and they seem, in their optimism about reaching what they call the “ocean,” profoundly to underestimate the distance to the Baltic coast. They do not specifically discuss the cost of the war, the revenues available, or the potential economic benefit of withdrawal. Herodian attributes Commodus’ ultimate decision to a defect in his character: his laziness. On this last point he is not alone; his more reliable contemporary Cassius Dio takes the same view (72[73].1.2). Perhaps, we might think, a better description of the process of making a foreign-relations decision, by a more competent historian than Herodian, would reveal a very different set of concerns. But in fact no such descriptions exist for the period we are discussing here.

This study will attempt to discover whether Herodian’s scenario, for example, accurately reflects the most important factors in Roman decisions about war and peace in the period from Augustus to Severus Alexander. The importance of the subject needs no defense. The decision to invade Dacia, conquer Britain, or withdraw from newly acquired provinces beyond the Euphrates could affect a hundred thousand lives directly and had cultural consequences that persist to this day. But while the subject is important, it is also one that resists exact definition. What is “Roman,” for example, and what is “foreign”? Though the empire came to have certain fixed psychological boundaries, nevertheless there were always tribute-paying tribes and “client-kings” of ambiguous sta-

7. Herodian’s choice of the word *satrap* to refer to the barbarian chieftains of Marcus’ Danube campaigns seems odd, though the word may have had a rather general meaning at the time. See the entry for this term in Liddell and Scott’s *Greek-English Lexicon*, especially Philostratus *VS* 1.524, with Bowersock 1969, 52, where it refers to a Roman procurator.

tus beyond its borders. Conversely, the Romans thought of provincial revolts like those in Dalmatia and Pannonia in A.D. 6, or in Judaea in A.D. 69, as foreign wars.<sup>8</sup> Thus we must be prepared, in our discussion, for some divergence between ancient and modern notions of “foreign relations.”

The time boundaries, too, are problematic. The period we are considering here begins with the reign of the first emperor, Augustus, usually described as beginning with his defeat of Antony at Actium in 31 B.C., and ends with the reign of Severus Alexander, whose death in A.D. 235 marked the fall of the Severan dynasty. After this, the empire entered a period of crisis during which evidence of the type used in this study—literature produced by the aristocracy, and especially historiography—either was not produced or does not survive. But until then, the system established by Augustus—often called the “Principate” (for Augustus styled himself “princeps” or “first citizen”), or the “empire,” because of the title *imperator*, which he and his successors assumed—remained relatively stable, though Rome gradually added territory to its empire and the size of the army also, gradually, increased. However, the ideas we shall encounter regarding the proper conduct of foreign relations in this period do not differ sharply from those of the long period of constitutional oligarchy that preceded Augustus’ reign, called the Republic, or from those of the so-called Dominate that emerged in the fourth century A.D. It is therefore inevitable that examples from outside the stated chronological boundaries of this study will emerge here and there in support of some of my arguments; but it would not be practical to undertake a systematic survey of all the evidence from these other periods, and I do not claim to do so, though I have tried especially to touch on the Republican background to many of the ideas and institutions of the Principate.

The ultimate responsibility for the conduct of foreign affairs in the imperial period lay with a very few people. In the Republic, the senate traditionally held this central role;<sup>9</sup> but in the Principate, its place was

8. On the Dalmatian war as *bellum externum*, see Suet. *Aug.* 20, *Tib.* 16; see Rosenberger 1992, 66–67 and *passim*, on the different terminology of civil and foreign wars. The propaganda campaign with which the Jewish victory was advertised indicates a foreign war; see below, chap. 5, p. 193.

9. A detailed study of the role of the senate vs. the individual general in foreign-relations decisions in the Republic is available in Eckstein 1987. He argues that while the senate retained the tradition of ultimate responsibility, in fact much of foreign policy was necessarily determined by generals in the field. On the transition to the Principate and the senate’s role in foreign relations under the empire, see Talbert 1984, 411–425. The senate retained a formal role, especially in hearing embassies. See *id.* 1988 for an instance from

gradually usurped by the emperor and his circle of advisers. These advisers included one or both of the praetorian prefects—commanders of the elite troops stationed in Rome—who were always in close attendance on the emperor,<sup>10</sup> plus a number of people usually called his “friends” (*amici*), some of whom would accompany him on a trip or campaign as “companions” (*comites*). As a group they were sometimes called his “council.” Also influential might be the secretary *ab epistulis* (of letters), often (though not always) a Greek intellectual, who sometimes traveled with the emperor; and in general the presence of a number of Greek doctors, sophists, or other intellectuals in the imperial court should be assumed for all periods.<sup>11</sup> The emperor relied on these men (not women, of course)<sup>12</sup> to advise him on administrative matters and judicial decisions as well as foreign relations.<sup>13</sup> But the latter function was an important one, as the ancient sources indicate in the few cases where they describe such decisions actually being made. The best example is a scene from the beginning of Nero’s reign; one of the first decisions the new emperor, like Commodus, had to face involved a major foreign crisis, this time in the east. Rome’s nominee to the Armenian throne had been expelled by the Parthians, who were pillaging the country. Tacitus describes the anxiety felt by some over Nero’s potential performance in this situation:

Therefore in a city eager for gossip, they were questioning how a *princeps* hardly seventeen years old could handle this danger or repel it; and what refuge there was in one who was ruled by a woman, and whether battles, and

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Commodus’ reign where peace with a hostile tribe is apparently concluded before the senate.

10. On the role of the praetorian prefects see Millar 1977, 122–131, and Halfmann 1986, 103–105.

11. On the *ab epistulis* on imperial journeys, see Halfmann 1986, 106; cf. 108–109 on doctors. On this subject, see also Bowersock 1969, chap. 4; on the secretaries *ab epistulis*, *ibid.*, 50–56. The issue of the criteria for choosing the *ab epistulis* is, like all questions of this sort, controversial; see further N. Lewis 1981 and A. R. Birley 1992, 21–25, 41–54.

12. Though see a reference in Millar 1977, 120, to a passage from the *Acta Alexandrinorum* where Claudius hears a case between an embassy from Alexandria and King Agrippa of Judaea accompanied by twenty *assessore*s, sixteen consulars, and some Roman matrons (*Acta Isidori* ii.7–8 = Musurillo 1954, 19).

13. On the emperor’s friends and advisers generally, see Crook 1955, 21–30 and *passim*; Millar 1977, 110–122; and Halfmann 1986, 92–103; on the issue of who was responsible for foreign-affairs decisions, Millar 1982, 4–7. On the role of the *amici* in judging cases and receiving embassies, see also Millar 1977, 119–122. The most famous council is the one called by Augustus to hear the claimants to Herod’s throne, in which his grandson Gaius was allowed, for the first time, to participate (Crook, *op. cit.*, 32–33; Joseph. *BJ* 2.25, *AJ* 17.229). For a list of attested *comites* of the emperor, see Halfmann 1986, 245–253.

attacks on cities, and the rest that war involves could be handled by school-teachers. Others, however, contended that things had come out better than if Claudius, weak with old age and inaction, had been called to the labors of war, ready to obey the orders of slaves; but Burrus and Seneca were known for their experience in many matters. . . .<sup>14</sup>

While Tacitus' representation of the public mood may reflect his own biases rather than reality, nevertheless this passage includes some interesting assumptions. The historian assumes that the decision about Armenia will be made personally by the emperor in close consultation with advisers. The character and social position of these advisers is important to him: Claudius is reviled for consulting freedmen, and the idea that a woman, Nero's mother, might have some influence here is repellent. It is especially interesting to note that Seneca took part in this and presumably other important foreign-affairs decisions, because a large body of his work survives and can be examined. It is also interesting that Tacitus describes Seneca and Burrus as exceptionally qualified to advise Nero in this case, though it is probable that neither had substantial military experience or specialized knowledge about Armenia or Parthia.<sup>15</sup>

Later in his reign, facing another crisis in the same area, Nero again consults with advisers—this time described as “the most prominent men in the state (*primores civitatis*)”—about whether to embark on “dangerous war or disgraceful peace.”<sup>16</sup> Other examples emerge here and there. Maecenas, Augustus' friend, may have advised him on foreign issues;<sup>17</sup> Hadrian's “friends” dissuade him from abandoning Dacia.<sup>18</sup> Severus Alexander also confers with his “friends” upon hearing the bad news of Ardashir's invasion (Herodian 6.2.3). Later, facing invasions in Germany, our source writes that “both Alexander and the friends who were with him feared even for Italy itself” (6.7.4).

The council of friends was by now a traditional element of Roman

14. *Ann.* 13.6: *Igitur in urbe sermonum avida, quem ad modum princeps vix septemdecim annos egressus suscipere eam molem aut propulsare posset, quod subsidium in eo, qui a femina regeretur, num proelia quoque et obpugnationes urbium et cetera belli per magistris administrari possent, anquirebant. Contra alii melius evenisse disserunt, quam si invalidus senecta et ignavia Claudius militiae ad labores vocaretur, servilibus iussis obtemperaturus. Burrum tamen et Senecam multarum rerum experientia cognitos. . . .*

15. The evidence for Burrus' career is collected by Pflaum (1960–1961, 1:30–31). His military experience before becoming praetorian prefect seems to have been limited to one term as military tribune, though Tacitus credits him with “an outstanding military reputation” (*egregia militaris fama*) in *Ann.* 12.42.

16. *Tac. Ann.* 15.25. “Nor did they hesitate to choose war.”

17. *Hor. Carm.* 3.8.17–25 and 3.29.25–28; and see Crook 1955, 31.

18. *Eutropius* 8.6.2; see Crook 1955, 65; and cf. Lepper 1948, 14.

political life. The government of the Republic had only a small official bureaucracy, and much decision making was done by aristocrats in consultation with a council formed partly of their friends, whether they were acting as head of the family, governor of a province, or commander of an army.<sup>19</sup> Thus the council was not an “official” body, and there were no strict rules about its composition. Deferring to the senate’s traditional role in foreign policy, Augustus had established a rotating advisory group including the consuls and fifteen senators chosen by lot (Cass. Dio 53.21.4, Suet. *Aug.* 35.3–4); remnants of this system survived early in the reign of Tiberius, whose council was composed of “old friends and household members,” plus twenty of the “foremost in the city” (Suet. *Tib.* 55). By now, the emperor could choose whomever he liked.<sup>20</sup> Young rulers, or potential successors entrusted with weighty missions, were of course especially dependent on the advisers chosen for them. Gaius was only nineteen years old when his grandfather Augustus sent him to the eastern front in 2 B.C.; the worried emperor provided him with trustworthy counselors to help with whatever decisions might arise (Cass. Dio 55.10.18). In A.D. 14 Tiberius sent some of his own advisers with Drusus to Pannonia; these were, again, “the foremost of the city” (*primores civitatis*) and included the later-notorious Sejanus (Tac. *Ann.* 1.24). Vespasian’s “friends” advised the young Domitian against an unnecessary German expedition (Suet. *Dom.* 2.1). Nero, Commodus, and Severus Alexander, all very young at their accession, were also especially dependent on their advisers.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the imperial period the emperor was, at least in theory, the ultimate authority responsible for all foreign-relations decisions. Embassies were usually sent to him rather than to the senate or the

19. Cf. Crook 1955, 4–8; Gelzer 1968, 101–103. E.g., Flamininus settles matters in Greece “either by himself or with his own friends” (Polyb. 18.34.3); Augustus took part in Tarius’ *consilium* about the fate of his son (Sen. *Clem.* 1.15.3–4). On war councils, see also Szidat 1970, 17.

20. On Augustus’ formal rotation system and Tiberius’ modifications, see Crook 1955, chap. 2; on the essential informality of the council in later periods, see *ibid.*, 104–106. Crook cannot find a consistent official designation, in Latin or Greek, for what is now usually called the *consilium principis*.

21. On Nero, see Tac. *Ann.* 13.6, quoted above; in the case of Commodus, the dying Marcus entrusted him to his own advisers, who had accompanied him to the front (Herodian 1.4; Cass. Dio 72[73].1.2), and Commodus is said to have ruled well as long as he listened to them (Herodian 1.8.1); Severus Alexander’s advisers were apparently chosen by his mother (Herodian 6.1.1–2; and see Halfmann 1986, 97 n. 346, for further references); on the point generally, see Halfmann 1986, 96–97, arguing that in the early empire the *comites* of young princes were perhaps more likely to be men of greater experience and high rank.



nearest governor, for example.<sup>22</sup> Thus the king of Thrace writes directly to Tiberius, who responds through the governor of Moesia (Tac. *Ann.* 2.65–66). The Dacian king Decebalus negotiates with Domitian directly, though Domitian responds by appointing a special commander against him (Cass. Dio 67.6.5). Claudius, responding to a plea from the king of the Suebi, directs the governor of Pannonia to station troops on the Danube frontier (Tac. *Ann.* 12.29); and he is supposed to have sent Aulus Plautius to Britain because a native chieftain had convinced him to come to his aid (Cass. Dio 60.19.1). Thus, much foreign policy was carried out by the emperor indirectly, through communications to governors or through special commanders. The degree to which the governors of provinces, especially imperial legates who commanded troops, could act autonomously is difficult to determine but may have been greater earlier in the Principate.<sup>23</sup> Early in the reign of Augustus, imperial legates seem to have retained much of the power of decision—and potential to achieve glory—that characterized the senatorial class during the Republic, though from the very beginning it was clear that this created a political threat. Thus while Licinius Crassus was granted a triumph in 29 B.C. for his reduction of Thrace, he was denied other honors: the title of *imperator*, which was traditionally voted to a victorious general by acclamation of the army; and the *spolia opima*, the dedication of the armor of an enemy leader slain in single combat by a Roman general, an honor that was extremely rare.<sup>24</sup> Cornelius Gallus' campaigns in Ethiopia, and the loud publicity he gave them, eventually led to his downfall.<sup>25</sup> And in 19 B.C. Cornelius Balbus, proconsul of Africa, became the last commander ever to celebrate a triumph who was not an em-

22. See n. 9 above, and further Millar 1988, 348–352, citing, e.g., Augustus' boasts in *RGDA* 35. A major exception is from the reign of Claudius, where Parthian envoys appear before the senate (Tac. *Ann.* 12.10), but they are answered by a speech from Claudius. For some other exceptions, see Talbert 1984, 428; Millar 1982, 4. In the famous speech composed by Cassius Dio (52.31.1), Maecenas recommends that foreign embassies be introduced to the senate.

23. For more detailed discussion of the degree of autonomy and potential for glory available to the governors of public and imperial provinces, see Millar 1982, 7–15, including most of the examples that follow; see also Campbell 1984, 348–362. Austin and Rankov (1995, chap. 7) argue that governors must have retained a significant degree of autonomy; Potter (1996) argues for explicit instructions from emperors to governors and special commanders.

24. Cass. Dio 51.24.4; Syme 1939, 308 n. 2. On the title of *imperator*, see below, chap. 5, n. 115.

25. See Cass. Dio 53.23.5–7 on Gallus' boasting, exile, and suicide; *ILS* 8995 for his ostentatious record of achievements; and *PIR* II, C1369. See also Suet. *Aug.* 66.1–2 and Syme 1939, 309–310.

peror or a member of the imperial family.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, provincial governors still acted autonomously to some degree, as in the case of Petronius, another prefect of Egypt. He carried out extensive retaliatory operations against the queen of Meroë in Ethiopia, capturing and burning cities, refusing embassies, enslaving natives, and leaving a garrison at Premnis. Later, the garrison was attacked and Petronius marched to defend it; the queen sent ambassadors to make peace, and Petronius this time sent them on to Augustus. They replied, however, that “they did not know who Caesar was or where they were supposed to go to him,” so Petronius provided them with guides (Strab. 17.1.54). Here apparently the prefect conducted his campaigns independently until the time came to negotiate peace. The role of the emperor was critical, but remote.

Under Augustus, Aelius Catus transplanted into Thrace 50,000 Getae from across the Danube (Strab. 7.3.10). Similarly, a famous inscription on the tomb of Ti. Plautius Silvanus, governor of Moesia under Nero,<sup>27</sup> records that he brought over more than 100,000 “Transdanuviani” and reduced them to paying tribute; he repressed a Sarmatian threat; negotiated with foreign tribes and received hostages from some of them; and, as he is particularly proud to note, “deterred even the king of the Scythians from the siege of the Chersonese that is beyond the Borysthenes [i.e., the Crimean Peninsula].” How much of this was done on his own initiative and how much under instructions from the emperor is a question about which we can only speculate.<sup>28</sup> We know that Tiberius gave specific orders to Vitellius on his negotiations with the Parthians (Joseph. *AJ* 18.96; 101–104); Corbulo also was given specific guidelines when he set out for the east, and at one point he refused to invade Armenia because “he did not have those instructions from the emperor” (Tac. *Ann.* 15.17).<sup>29</sup> In A.D. 72 Caesennius Paetus, the governor of Syria, wrote to Vespasian accusing the king of Commagene of conspiracy with the Parthians and asking permission to invade; and a law still on the books prescribed death for waging an unauthorized war.<sup>30</sup>

26. Campbell 1984, 358–359; see Pliny *HN* 5.36 on Balbus’ triumph, also noteworthy because he was not born a Roman citizen.

27. *ILS* 986, using Dessau’s suggested emendations in n. 11. For a discussion of this well-known inscription, see Conole and Milns 1983.

28. See Millar 1982, 7–8. Note also *ILS* 985.

29. “Instructions” here is *mandata*, the Latin word used to indicate the instructions given to governors on their appointment (ἐντολαί); these seem to have covered all aspects of administration and to have contained some elements that remained unchanged from reign to reign. See Millar 1977, 314–317; id. 1982, 8–9; Potter 1996.

30. Joseph. *BJ* 7.220–225 and Campbell 1984, 348–349; *Dig.* 48.4.3 and Talbert 1984, 429 with n. 36.

Yet it is unclear whether such permission was always in fact required, at least early in the imperial period. Tacitus appears in several passages to assume that the provincial governors themselves bore the responsibility for a decision to invade. Thus under Tiberius the governor of Moesia sends a detachment of troops to deal with a situation in Thrace and accompanies them himself on the campaign (*Ann.* 3.39). When the Frisians refuse to pay tribute, the governor of Lower Germany summons reinforcements from Upper Germany and attacks them; Tacitus writes that this happened “when [the news] was known to Lucius Apronius, propraetor of Lower Germany”—not after he had asked the emperor’s permission (*Ann.* 4.73). Similarly, Suetonius Paulinus invaded the island of Mona for his own reasons: because he wished to emulate Corbulo’s success in Armenia; again, he is given sole credit for this decision (*Tac. Ann.* 14.29). Tacitus ascribes aggressive and glorious, or weak and defensive, foreign policy in Britain to the character of its governors—not of the emperors.<sup>31</sup>

Certainly practical considerations of distance and travel time meant that much would need to be left to the governor’s discretion.<sup>32</sup> Arrian’s famous confrontation with the Alani, who had encroached on his province of Cappadocia on their way back from a raid on Armenia, could not have waited for authorization from Hadrian. And yet this campaign was not necessarily a limited defensive maneuver but may have taken Arrian well into enemy territory and possibly resulted in a rearrangement of the border between the kingdoms of Iberia and Albania in the Caucasus Mountains.<sup>33</sup> Tacitus provides a clearer illustration of the tension between imperial authority and the need to make decisions quickly, on the

31. E.g., *Agr.* 14: “Aulus Plautius was the first of the consular governors in charge [of Britain], and then Ostorius Scapula, both exceptional in war; and the nearest part of Britain was reduced little by little to the form of a province, and a veteran colony was founded besides. . . . Then Didius Gallus maintained what his predecessors had acquired, only putting out a few forts in the regions beyond, through which he sought the glory of having expanded his office. Didius Veranius took over, and he died within a year. Then Suetonius Paulinus enjoyed successful undertakings for two years, subjecting tribes and consolidating them with garrisons. . . .” On Britain, see also *Ann.* 14.29, and cf. 13.53: “Until now the situation in Germany had been quiet, due to the temperament of the generals; for the triumphal ornaments had become so debased that they hoped for honor rather from having continued the peace.”

32. On this point, see Millar 1982, 9–11; cf. Austin and Rankov 1995, 123–125. On travel time and communications speed, see chap. 3 below, p. 99.

33. On this campaign, see Bosworth 1977. The evidence is mainly Cass. Dio 69.15, and of course Arrian’s own Ἐκταξίς κατὰ Ἀλανῶν—which, however, focuses entirely on battle tactics and gives no historical context. Bosworth (op. cit., 229–230) notes that a fourth-century oration by Themistius (*Orat.* 34.8) credits Arrian with establishing the boundaries between the two kingdoms.

spot, when the governor of Syria learns that Rome's nominee to the throne of Armenia has been deposed and killed. He calls a council of his own friends to decide what action to take; they determine to do nothing at first, but nevertheless the governor, Quadratus, sends an embassy with a stiffly worded message to the invaders, "lest he appear to condone the crime and Caesar should order something different" (*Ann.* 12.48). Here, Quadratus intends to write to the emperor about the situation but cannot wait for his reply to make an important decision. Thus the emperor's authority placed limits—albeit vague ones—on what a governor could do. When Tiberius dies, Vitellius must return from a campaign against Nabataea because he is no longer empowered to conduct the war.<sup>34</sup> In another example, this time under Claudius, Corbulo negotiates with the Frisians, provokes hostilities with the Chauci, and appears to be in the process of occupying enemy territory by the time he receives a letter from Claudius ordering him to withdraw behind the Rhine.<sup>35</sup> In the eastern war under Nero, neither Corbulo nor Paetus has the authority to make a binding peace treaty with the Parthians;<sup>36</sup> in fact, from Republican times all treaties made by military commanders in the field had to be ratified by the senate, which occasionally, though rarely, refused to do so.<sup>37</sup> Thus while significant decisions could be made by imperial legates, the most significant and far-reaching decisions had to be made, or at least approved, by the emperor.

When Trajan undertook the conquest of Dacia it was still noteworthy that he did it himself.<sup>38</sup> His predecessors were often content to entrust major campaigns to commanders like Vitellius or Corbulo, or to go just near enough to the front and stay just long enough to acquire a military reputation. In a famous passage, Fronto describes Antoninus Pius' role in the British war as one of remote supervision: "Although he himself remained on the Palatine in the city [of Rome] and had dele-

34. Joseph. *AJ* 18.124; Millar 1982, 8–9. In *AJ* 18.115 Tiberius orders Vitellius to declare war after receiving a letter from Herod the tetrarch that his army had been attacked and destroyed by the Nabataean king Aretas.

35. Tac. *Ann.* 11.19; Cass. Dio 61.30.4–5.

36. Tac. *Ann.* 15.14 for Paetus' notorious truce, and Vologeses' sending an embassy to Nero; in 15.16 Paetus promises that the Romans will stay out of Armenia *donec referrentur litterae Neronis, an pace adnueret* (until Nero's response should arrive, about whether he approved the peace); the emperor rejects the peace in 15.25; see Cass. Dio 62.22.3 on Corbulo's treaty.

37. Eckstein 1987, xiii.

38. Cass. Dio 68.10.4: "καὶ ὁ Τραιανὸς δι' ἑαυτοῦ καὶ αὐθις, ἀλλ' οὐ δι' ἐτέρων στρατηγῶν, τὸν πρὸς ἐκεῖνον πόλεμον ἐποιήσατο" (and Trajan once again waged the war on him [Decebalus] himself, and not through other commanders).

gated the authority to wage the war (*gerendi eius mandasset auspicium*), still like one guiding the rudder of a warship, he earned the glory of the whole navigation and voyage.”<sup>39</sup> But by the end of our period the authority to command an army on a major campaign may have become more concentrated in the emperor himself.<sup>40</sup> Thus Marcus Aurelius conducted the complicated negotiations with various trans-Danuvian German and Sarmatian tribes personally and not by letter, leading campaigns and negotiating peace terms on the spot (Cass. Dio 71[72].3–11). When Marcus died, Commodus’ decision to return to Rome meant that the campaign beyond the Danube had to be abandoned. By now any important campaign seems to have required at least the proximity of an emperor (or a co-emperor or chosen successor).<sup>41</sup> When the aggressive Persian monarch Ardashir invaded Roman territory, Severus Alexander had to choose between leading an expedition himself and trying to solve the crisis through diplomacy (Herodian 6.2–3). While the emperor was at Antioch, the news arrived that German tribes had invaded the Rhine provinces and that his presence was required (6.7.2–3), whereupon he marched the three thousand miles to the northern frontier. The campaign could not be delegated, even though Alexander knew it would be some six months before he could take command of it.<sup>42</sup> Still, it seems that minor campaigns, which would require only a governor’s provincial army, would be handled by the governor; this seems to be the implication of an obscure passage from Cassius Dio (71[72].33.1): “When matters in Scythia again required him [Marcus], he gave Crispina as a wife to his son earlier than he wanted to on account of it; for the Quintilii were unable to end the war, although there were two of them and they had a great deal of intelligence, courage, and experience, and for this reason it was necessary for the emperors themselves to set out on campaign.”<sup>43</sup> But the governors, in normal circumstances, should have been able to handle the situation. And even now it was still possible for a legate to undertake an invasion without the emperor’s knowledge; in a passage from Lucian’s satirical *Alexander*, which refers to events in the

39. Fr. 2 (Loeb 2: 251); cf. Millar 1982, 12.

40. *Ibid.*, 11–15. See also Millar 1988, 374–375; Austin and Rankov 1995, 205–212.

41. Thus Cass. Dio 71.1.3 tells us that it was in response to the Parthian crisis that Marcus married his daughter to Lucius Verus, who was then dispatched to the east. The actual conduct of the war was entrusted to Avidius Cassius, however (*ibid.*, 71.2.2), with disastrous results, for Cassius led a revolt against the emperors (71[72].17.22–26).

42. Millar 1982, 13.

43. Marcus probably married off the young Commodus in order to enhance his authority with the army, as Augustus does with his grandson Gaius in Cass. Dio 55.10.18.

reign of Marcus, the pseudoprophet persuades the governor of Cappadocia to invade Armenia. The campaign results in disaster when the legate is killed and a legion destroyed.<sup>44</sup>

The reasons for this concentration of power in the emperor's hands will be examined in a later chapter. For now it is enough for us to observe that especially toward the end of the period we are discussing, ultimate responsibility for foreign-relations decisions lay with the emperor and his circle of friends. To some limited extent the governors of provinces were in a position to determine policy. These were for the most part men of very high rank. At the pinnacle of Roman society was the small, elite class of senators, a largely hereditary group that supplied all Rome's provincial governors and high-ranking military officers, as well as its emperors. Governors of the armed, "imperial" provinces were called legates; the emperor retained ultimate power or *imperium* over these provinces—a device for controlling the glory and status attached to military victory. In any case, these legates, depending on the province involved, would be senators who had held the office of praetor or the highest office, that of consul—which conferred extra status on the senator within his community. A larger order, lower in prestige and generally in wealth, of *equites*, or "knights," held military commissions and a variety of civil-service posts in the imperial government; the prefect of Egypt, a province too critical to be entrusted to someone of sufficient prestige to threaten the emperor, was also a knight. Both the senate and the equestrian order had property qualifications, and movement between the two orders was not unusual. The emperor's friends and advisers normally came from these groups.<sup>45</sup> It is common, as we have seen, for our sources to describe the emperor's council as composed of "the best" or "most prominent" citizens,<sup>46</sup> and the pressure to choose advisers from society's upper echelons is clear.<sup>47</sup>

We might wonder to what degree the education and training of a

44. Lucian *Alex.* 27; Fronto *Principia historiae* 16 (Loeb 2:215); Cass. Dio 71.2.1; Angeli Bertinelli 1976, 25–26; Birley 1987, 123–124.

45. See Halfmann 1986, 94–101, on the rank of those attested as the emperor's *comites*; after the Julio-Claudians these are always *equites* or senators (usually senators).

46. See Tac. *Ann.* 1.24, where young Drusus' companions on his journey to Pannonia are described as *primores civitatis*; 15.25, cited above, on Nero's advisers (again, *primores civitatis*); Cass. Dio 72 [73].1.2, where Commodus' advisers are οἱ κρᾶτιστοι τῶν βουλευτῶν, the most powerful men in the senate; SHA *Marcus* 22.3, where Marcus confers *semper cum optimatibus*, always with the best men.

47. See Millar 1977, 59–60, pointing out that the period of influential freedmen was a very short one and contrary to the values of the society; on their influence, see *ibid.*, 69–83; cf. Tacitus' comment in *Ann.* 13.6, quoted above—by no means the only criticism of Claudius on this point. See also Isaac 1992, 386–387.

member of the Roman aristocracy prepared him to make the crucial decisions about war and peace that we will be examining.<sup>48</sup> Traditionally, in the system that Augustus inherited from the Republic, the Roman command structure was class-based. As mentioned earlier, the officer class came from the narrow aristocracy of senators and equestrians. The great armies of the Republic were commanded by senators who had attained the rank of consul, the pinnacle of their society. Their training in military science came mainly from experience: until the later second century B.C., aspiring senators were required to serve in ten campaigns before they could hold political office.<sup>49</sup> Intellectual education was brought to Rome by the Greeks and began to take hold in the Roman aristocracy sometime in the second century B.C.; thus it is the Greek Polybius who advocates a formal training for generals in tactics, astronomy, geometry, and history.<sup>50</sup> And in fact some basic education in astronomy and geometry—which Polybius suggests would be useful for calculating, for example, the lengths of days and nights or the height of a city wall—was normal for a Roman aristocrat of the late Republic or the Principate. Aratus' verse composition on astronomy, several times translated into Latin, was especially popular.<sup>51</sup> But by the late Republic the law requiring military service for office was long defunct; and Roman education as described by Seneca the Elder or Quintilian was designed mainly to produce orators. The emphasis was overwhelmingly on literature and rhetoric;<sup>52</sup> one did not take courses, for example, on "modern Parthia" or military theory. Details of grammar and rhetorical style were considered appropriate subjects for the attention of the empire's most responsible individuals; this is attested in the letters of Pliny the Younger, the musings of Aulus Gellius, and the correspondence of Fronto with Lucius Verus and Marcus Aurelius.<sup>53</sup> Of Marcus, Cassius Dio writes that "he

48. On this question in general, see MacMullen 1976, 49–58.

49. See Harris 1979, 10–16.

50. 9.12–20; 11.8. Polybius also wrote a treatise on tactics; see 9.20, with Walbank 1957–1979, vol. 2, ad loc.

51. On Aratus, see recently A. M. Lewis 1992; cf. Walbank 1957–1979, vol. 2, at 9.15.7–11; on Republican education, see Marrou 1956, 229–254; and note the discussion of Harris 1979, 14–15. Cato the Elder's education of his son is described by Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 20, and see Bonner 1977, 10–11. Cicero's ideal education included, besides rhetoric, astronomy (of which geography was a subcategory), geometry, and music (*ibid.*, 77–79). On Hellenization, see Rawson 1985, chap. 11, and recently Gruen 1993.

52. On what was taught in Roman secondary schools (by the *grammaticus*), see Bonner 1977, chap. 14; and Marrou 1956, 274–283.

53. Aulus Gellius' own rank and status are unknown, but his observations of others are revealing; cf. 19.13.1, with MacMullen 1976, 51 n. 8 and 49–52. Fronto, *Ep.* (Loeb) 2:29, addressed to Marcus after the disaster of Severianus in Armenia, protests that if Caesar

was greatly aided by his education, having been trained in rhetoric and in the arguments of philosophy; in rhetoric his teachers were Cornelius Fronto and Claudius Herodes, and, in philosophy, Junius Rusticus and Apollonius of Nicomedia” (71[72].35.1). Here one of the empire’s most experienced statesmen describes training in eloquence and, probably for its moral emphasis, philosophy as the ideal education for a chief of state.

This emphasis on rank, and on the literary education that distinguished gentlemen from ordinary people, is certainly not unique to the Romans; but it is important not to project modern ideas about qualifications and competence onto a society that thought differently. To some degree any senator, simply by virtue of his birth and rank, was considered qualified and indeed entitled to lead; he required only an education in how to make his ideas persuasive. Of the twenty young aristocrats who started their political careers each year as *vigintiviri*, the entry-level office, virtually all would hold praetorian office; half would become consuls.<sup>54</sup> The “senatorial” provinces, including the proconsular provinces of Africa and Asia, were assigned to qualified senators *by lot*.<sup>55</sup>

The same was not true of the commanders of Rome’s great armies, the imperial legates of consular rank. Their careers have been much scrutinized with a view to establishing how they were chosen from among the senatorial elite. Some have traced patterns of promotion as far back as their position among the more privileged offices of the *vigintivirate*—when they were only eighteen years old. This probably means that ancestry and patronage—connections in high places, and especially with the emperor—played an important role.<sup>56</sup> Specialization in their careers—in particular, military specialization—is hard to

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could write his *De analogia* while conquering Gaul (“among the flying arrows discussing the proper declensions of nouns, and the aspirations of words and their properties amid horns and trumpets”), Marcus could surely find time “not only to read poems and histories and the precepts of philosophers, but even . . . to resolve syllogisms.”

54. By the end of the first century there were eighteen praetorships available each year, thus virtually no attrition up to that point (Eck 1974, 180–181; A. R. Birley 1981, 15; Talbert 1984, 19–20). On the number of consuls, see especially Alföldy 1977, 11–21; and A. R. Birley 1981, 24–25.

55. This was the case in theory, though Millar (1977, 309) notes some instances of imperial interference.

56. Certain positions in the *vigintivirate*, especially the *triumviri monetales*, were more prestigious than others; senators of exceptionally noble birth usually held them, and a disproportionate percentage of consular legates may have started their careers in these posts. For the argument, see especially E. Birley 1954, 201–205; and A. R. Birley 1981, 4–8. The traditional view of E. Birley and Syme (see below) that at this point the decision about a senator’s future career was somehow based on aptitude or ability is surely not tenable; nor was experience relevant at this stage; patronage seems an inviting alternative (cf. the suggestion of A. R. Birley, *op. cit.*, 5, and his comment, p. 7).



prove.<sup>57</sup> Most senators would have had some military experience in their careers; a year, perhaps more, as military tribune was usual and vaguely perceived as valuable training.<sup>58</sup> A large proportion—more than half—of all who had been praetors would command a legion, with a term of perhaps two or three years;<sup>59</sup> but this was not always a prerequisite for the command of a military province.<sup>60</sup> In fact, most imperial governors of consular rank had experience in a combination of civil and military

57. The polemical way in which the debate over the system of promotion for senators is usually framed masks, as often, the fact that substantial common ground now exists. A view long associated with Syme (see A. R. Birley 1992, 14 n. 53, for full bibliography) and E. Birley (1954) argued for a class of *virī militares* or military specialists whose careers were characterized by a rapid advancement to the consulship and a military emphasis in their praetorian careers, notably command of a legion and of an armed praetorian province. The main outlines of this view were endorsed by Eck in his very influential article (1974); but Eck's scheme also has much in common with the rather different argument of Alföldy (1977; summarized in English in 1976). The latter has consistently advocated a thesis that fast promotion to the consulship depended mainly on birth, and draws a division between imperial and senatorial careers, rather than civil and military ones, that emphasizes the importance of loyalty and a close relationship to the emperor in promotion (1977, 34–37, on the typology of senatorial careers; 95–125, on the criteria for advancement; 54–60, on the importance of loyalty and a close relationship with the emperor). Alföldy argues that at the level of consular legate—that is, commander of large armies—birth ceases to be a factor and “new men” with longer careers are overrepresented, perhaps because of their substantial experience, thus coming to the opposite conclusion of Syme and E. Birley; on this point, see also Eck 1974, 217–218; this argument is, however, difficult to prove statistically, except for the well-known rarity of patricians in these very important posts.

The main challenge to the views of Syme and E. Birley has come from Campbell (1975), who seeks mainly to attack the notion of military specialization in the empire's high command. He points out that the phrase *vir militaris* used in this sense is a modern construction (ibid., 11–12) and finds only a small number of senators whose careers conform to the pattern specified by Syme and E. Birley. A. R. Birley (1981, 4–35; 1992, 14–15, 31–40) defends some of their views, notably about the “fast track” to the consulship, but does little to advance the case for specialization and seems himself willing partially to concede this point (1981, n. 19; but cf. ibid., 33). Finally, Lendon (1997, 185–191) argues that the chief criterion for appointment to any office was aristocratic “prestige,” which depended mainly on such factors as birth, wealth, moral virtue, and friendship with other prestigious individuals. A similar debate exists regarding the equestrian civil service, which I shall not enter into here; the main challenge to traditional views of specialization has come from Brunt 1975 and 1983.

58. On the military tribunate, see Campbell 1975, 18–19, citing, e.g., Suet. *Aug.* 38.2 and Pliny *Ep.* 8.14.4–5. On the length of service, some debate exists; Birley (1981, 9 n. 19) suggests a longer term of two or three years; Eck (1974, n. 70) thinks three years is too long; Campbell (1975, 18) argues that one year is possible.

59. On legionary legates, see, e.g., Eck 1974, 190; A. R. Birley 1981, 17–20. Tenure of more than one of these posts is attested but apparently unusual.

60. See Campbell 1975, 19–20, for examples; cf. Eck 1974, 176 with n. 76. E. Birley (1954, 208) also notes examples of consular legates who had never commanded troops and points out that Antoninus Pius, for example, had never held a military post before becoming emperor.

posts; and after all, their duties included both spheres. A few might have very little experience of any kind. The idea of specialization seems to have been alien to the Roman aristocracy, where some competence in a variety of fields was expected—including, of course, literary ones.<sup>61</sup>

It has been argued, in this context, that the many treatises on tactics produced during our period—five have survived—were meant to be used as textbooks by senators thrust into positions of command with no formal training and, sometimes, with little practical experience.<sup>62</sup> The literary element persists here too. In conformity with the archaizing trend of the Second Sophistic, Arrian wrote his tactical treatises under the pseudonym Xenophon, referring to the historian of the fourth century B.C.,<sup>63</sup> and Polyænus' treatise addressed to the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus draws nearly all of its examples from classical and Hellenistic Greek history.<sup>64</sup> The *Stratagems* of Frontinus, an experienced commander and governor of Britain, mixes relatively recent sources like Caesar with the more ancient, traditional material found in Livy, Herodotus, and Thucydides.<sup>65</sup> His section titled "Exploring the Plans of Enemies," for instance, includes no examples later than the second century B.C. and one mythical example.

Nor did the Romans develop the idea of geographical specialization—that is, of creating a high-level expertise in a specific area of the empire or the world. This has been persuasively argued for the Republic, and geographical patterns of promotion are equally difficult to detect for the Principate; the traditional ideals and values of the Republic did not change on this point.<sup>66</sup> There is only one known senator who served

61. A. R. Birley (1992) provides a list of eighty-seven consular governors whose careers are fully known; this is an updated and slightly altered version of Campbell's list (1975) (Birley strikes six names because they were patricians and thus not expected to hold offices at the praetorian level, leaving a total of eighty-one, but I include the patricians since this aspect of their status is not relevant here). Of the eighty-seven senators, ten held only civil posts, nineteen held only military posts, fifty-four held both civil and military posts, and four (all, presumably, patricians) had no experience at the praetorian level at all; eight held only one praetorian (civil or military) position. On literary competence see, e.g., A. R. Birley, *op. cit.*, 12, 25–26; and below.

62. Campbell 1987.

63. On Arrian's *Tactica* and *Ectaxis* see Stadter 1980, 41–49; he argues that Xenophon was a given name of Arrian's and not a pseudonym (*ibid.*, 2–3).

64. Krentz and Wheeler 1994, 1: xiv–xv; Campbell 1987, 15–16.

65. Herodotus in Frontinus, *Str.* 1.3.6, 1.5.4, 1.5.25, etc.; Xenophon, 1.4.10, 1.8.12, 1.11.10, etc.; Thucydides, 1.1.10, 1.3.9, etc.; Campbell 1987, 14–15.

66. On the Republic see Gruen 1984, 1: 203–249. For the Principate, E. Birley (1957) and some others (e.g., Sherk 1971) tentatively identified patterns of promotion whereby legates of certain praetorian military provinces would go on to govern certain other consular provinces (e.g., first Lower Pannonia, then Upper Pannonia). Eck 1974, 215 n. 296;

as military tribune, legionary legate, and governor of the same province—the famous case of Agricola, the father-in-law of Tacitus. It is possible that emperors actually sought to avoid this type of specialization, for good political reasons; an army might grow too loyal to a long-familiar commander.<sup>67</sup> If so, it would not be the first instance in the discussion so far where issues of political prestige took precedence over efficiency; recall Severus Alexander's march from the Euphrates to the Rhine. The idea of geographic specialization emerges, apparently, only once: Cassius Dio, looking back two centuries to the reign of Tiberius, writes that the emperor “made many, and especially those who had governed them in the past, party to his decisions” when he received embassies.<sup>68</sup> But in situations of international crisis, the emperor Nero, as we have seen, consults the *primores civitatis*, and Commodus seeks the advice of οἱ κρᾶτιστοι τῶν βουλευτῶν—“the most prominent men in the senate”—not those most knowledgeable about Armenia or the northern frontier. There is a possible exception: the council of Marcus Aurelius in the late 160s was formed largely of former governors of the Danube provinces.<sup>69</sup>

The exact criteria used to select those who governed provinces and commanded armies are thus difficult to determine. Since imperial legates could only be senators, the emperor was necessarily choosing from a very small pool of talent. A connection to the emperor, who controlled all appointments, and continual displays of loyalty to him were naturally critical at all stages.<sup>70</sup> The idea that officials should be selected according to merit of some kind, as distinct from birth or patronage connections, is attested.<sup>71</sup> But this idea did not necessarily include expert knowledge or specialized experience. The author of a treatise on tactics, writing in the first century A.D., has the following advice on how to choose a general:

Not according to birth, as in the case of priests, nor according to wealth, as gymnasiarchs, but one who is intelligent, self-controlled, sober, frugal, used to hardship, thoughtful, indifferent to money, neither young nor old, and

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Campbell 1975, 21–22; and A. R. Birley 1981, 29–30, all treat this argument with skepticism. Philo *Leg.* 245 considers it a rare piece of good luck that the heroic procurator of Judaea, Petronius, had in the course of his career acquired “some glimmerings” (ἐνάσματα) of knowledge about Jewish religion.

67. Cf. A. R. Birley 1992, 9.

68. 57.17.9; Crook 1955, 37.

69. See Campbell 1975, 22; Austin and Rankov 1995, 206–207.

70. See Millar 1977, 300–313; and Saller 1982, 42–46, on imperial control of senatorial appointments and the role of patronage. Alföldy 1977, 54–60, emphasizes the importance of loyalty and a close relationship with the emperor.

71. Saller (1982, 94–111) discusses the Roman idea of merit in promotion.

if possible also the father of children and eloquent, and with a good reputation. (Onasander 1.1)

The emphasis is on moral qualities and eloquence rather than specialized training and experience, and this is typical of Roman concerns.<sup>72</sup> Tiberius is praised for his wise policy of distributing offices based on “the nobility of ancestors, the brilliance of military deeds, and illustrious civil abilities.”<sup>73</sup> The first qualification, noble ancestry, is given equal weight with skill and achievement. When Pliny writes to the governor of Pannonia asking for an equestrian military post for a friend, he mentions in his recommendation first his friend’s lineage, second his friendship with Pliny, third his skill in rhetoric and literary accomplishment (*Ep.* 2.13); in another letter making a similar request he describes his candidate as, first of all, aristocratic and wealthy (*natus splendide abundat facultatibus*), and furthermore “a most fair judge, a most brave advocate, and a most faithful friend” (7.22).<sup>74</sup> Social rank, literary accomplishment, and loyalty emerge as three critical factors in the choice of Rome’s most powerful officials.<sup>75</sup> Roman foreign-relations decisions were made not by “experts,” but rather by a small elite group that was expected to engage in a wide range of official and semiofficial duties and an equal variety of literary pursuits. Pliny the Elder, while completing a full equestrian career and serving as “friend” to the emperor Vespasian, still also contributed 102 erudite volumes to Latin literature—an accomplishment for which he was very much admired (*Pliny Ep.* 3.5).

This study attempts to reconstruct the point of view of this elite class that made Roman foreign-policy decisions: the focus is on the center rather than the periphery, and on the psychological rather than the material. But this is not the only possible approach to the issue of Roman imperialism in the Principate, which has been the subject of several recent studies offering syntheses of the vast and sophisticated scholarship in the field of frontier archaeology.<sup>76</sup> The very nature and purpose of Ro-

72. See *ibid.*, 95–98, 101–103, on the prominent moral aspect of merit in ancient sources. On morality as an element of aristocratic prestige, see Lendon 1997, 40–42.

73. *nobilitatem maiorum, claritudinem militiae, inlustris domi artes spectando* (*Tac. Ann.* 4.6).

74. On this point see E. Birley 1957, 105–106 with n. 24. On Pliny’s commendations, see also Saller 1982, 106–110, arguing that their vague nature and emphasis on moral qualities, and on qualities such as deference and loyalty, make them relatively meaningless outside the context of a traditional system where ties of friendship and patronage are the organizing principles behind the bureaucracy.

75. See n. 57 above.

76. See especially Isaac 1992 and Whittaker 1994, discussed below. The debate up to this point is summarized in Whittaker 1996.

man frontiers have become the subjects of critical reassessment. While it was once usual to imagine the Roman frontier as a carefully planned and rationally constructed system of defense,<sup>77</sup> this view has been challenged in a recent work by Benjamin Isaac, first published in 1988.<sup>78</sup> Isaac argues that Roman goals in the eastern provinces were never defensive, but that the function of the military infrastructure in that region aimed primarily at aggression against Parthia and control of the local population. Another work, that of C. R. Whittaker (1994), seeks to replace the idea of military frontier lines with “frontier zones” of mainly social and economic significance. All Roman frontiers individually are also undergoing reanalysis and reinterpretation. This, however, I must leave to those more qualified. The premise of the present work is that the surviving literary evidence also provides valid insights into the thinking or strategy behind Roman foreign relations, and that this literary evidence, like the material evidence, should benefit from reexamination.

The sense that emerges from much of recent scholarship on Roman frontier archaeology is one of fragmentation. Scholarship has tended to emphasize, instead of a long-term military strategy, the discontinuities and disjunctions of place and time that seem to preclude generalization: frontier structures now reflect local circumstances rather than a coherent empire-wide plan. The Romans, it is argued, did not have the tools or the information to formulate a geopolitical strategy in the modern sense. Frontiers were not chosen for strategic reasons but congealed as a result of failure or nonmilitary factors.<sup>79</sup>

This study supports some of the ideas just described. But a further question then arises: If no coherent strategy or plan that is immediately recognizable *to us* emerges from a study of Roman frontiers, how then do we explain the success, or even the existence, of the empire? Are we perhaps seeking Roman strategy in the wrong places, and possibly using terms (*aggression, defense*) that are inadequate to describe it?

The Roman view of the geographical world, for example, as it emerges from abundant literary evidence, seems at first glance schematic—that is, simplistic; too simplistic a framework for a complex geopolitical strategy. When we turn to the Romans’ image of peoples outside the empire, we also find that they had no specific understanding of foreign social or political institutions. But though Roman perceptions of the world seem to lack a certain level of complexity from the modern point

77. A view usually associated with Luttwak 1976; more recently, see Ferrill 1991 and Wheeler 1993. In defense of imperial “grand strategy” see also Potter 1996.

78. Cited here in the second edition: Isaac 1992.

79. See, e.g., Mann 1974 and 1979, Millar 1982, Isaac 1992, Whittaker 1994.

of view, they were based on a long and intricate literary tradition. This tradition reflected a certain set of values and sense of cultural identity. And it is here—in questions of values and image or identity—that we should seek what we would call today foreign policy.

The division of a subject into manageable chapters is never an easy task, and in the present work it is especially problematic. The categories of military strategy and economics seem straightforward and necessary enough to a modern reader; further, manpower and money placed certain “real” constraints on Roman policy and did form a fundamental part of Roman thinking. Legions could be shuttled and reassigned only at a risk; war was expensive, and methods of raising money were limited. But in each case we find that Roman thought on what seem to be the most practical questions involves issues of status or morality—thus the emphasis on terror and vengeance in Roman military strategy, or the powerful symbolism of dominance and submission, honor and deference that was attached to the collection of tribute. It is especially here, in the realm of the moral and psychological, that we find complexity in Roman thought and policy.

The categories of “strategy” and “income and expenditure” then, are a convenience; they cannot really be separated from the category of “values” (which forms the final chapter of this book), where we ultimately find the explanations of Roman behavior. Most of all, this was a system of responses based on a concern for the empire’s status or “honor.” What mattered most was how the empire, and to some degree the emperor, were perceived by foreigners and subjects. Symbolic deference from the enemy was a policy goal; arrogance and insult, described in exactly those words, were just and necessary causes for war. Terror and vengeance were instruments for maintaining the empire’s image. Roman strategy was thus partly moral and psychological in nature. If this strategy is not easy to trace on a map, that does not necessarily mean it was incoherent, “irrational,” or ineffective. The system I have briefly outlined could dictate specific responses to specific situations, which remained consistent over a long period of time. And the Romans, unlike some modern nations, knew when they had won or lost a war.

While the Romans emerge from this study as relatively aggressive in their foreign policy, I would also like to suggest that “aggression” and “defense”—though the latter forms a convenient subheading for the third chapter, on strategy—are ultimately inadequate to describe Roman foreign relations. Rarely was the drive to expand the empire *in itself* an impetus for war; money in the form of plunder, and personal glory

for the emperor or military commander, were also secondary considerations, although all three of these things were considered to be good *results* (not good *causes*) of a successful war, and were occasionally the “real” causes as well. But the most compelling pattern of behavior is one of insult and revenge, revolt and retaliation, which involved the image or status of the Roman state as a whole rather than that of individual emperors and generals. The Romans succeeded in part because they believed in this system.