For the *De Rebus Bellicis*, see Thompson 1952a and Hassall 1979, and for Vegetius, Milner 1996: xiii–xli. Philip Rance's forthcoming translation of and commentary on the treatise on *Strategy* attributed to Maurice promises to illuminate not just that text, but sixth-century warfare more generally. Note also two further military treatises in Greek, not referred to in the text above: the anonymous treatise *On Strategy*, sometimes attributed to Syrianus and sometimes dated to the sixth century (edition and translation in Dennis 1985, discussion of date with references to previous literature in Cosentino 2000), and Urbicius *Invention* (*Epitedeuma*) from the reign of Anastasius (491–518) (edition, translation, and discussion in Greatrex et al. 2005).

The best study of the *Theodosian Code* is Matthews 2000. Honoré 1978 includes much of value on the background to the production of the *Justinianic Code*, but this later code, and Justinian's *Novels*, have yet to receive the same attention which the *Theodosian Code* has attracted in recent years (for an overview of which see Lee 2002b).

There are valuable discussions of aspects of the *Notitia Dignitatum* in Goodburn and Bartholomew 1976, and Brennan 1996, 1998b; for a convenient summary of the issues relating to the dating of the document, see Kelly 1998: 163–5. Peter Brennan is producing a translation of and commentary on the *Notitia* which will mark a major advance in understanding of this deceptively straightforward text.

Although the following volumes devote only limited attention to late antiquity, they offer more general guides to the potential value of papyri, inscriptions, and coins, respectively, as evidence for the ancient world, as well as the principal methodological issues they raise: Bagnall 1995, Bodel 2001, and Howgego 1995.

1

EMPERORS AND WARFARE

Rulership in antiquity often relied on military success for legitimation, and late antiquity was no exception. What is particularly interesting about late antiquity, however, is that, despite the pressing military circumstances in which the empire often found itself, a significant number of Roman emperors in this period did not involve themselves directly in warfare, instead delegating command to their generals. This phenomenon of non-campaigning emperors raises important questions which are considered both in this chapter and, to some extent, in the next.

The first half of this chapter traces the changing patterns of imperial involvement in warfare, investigating the factors which appear to have influenced the decisions of emperors and/or their advisers as to the wisdom or otherwise of direct participation in campaigning. The second half of the chapter addresses the issue of military success, and the ways in which emperors endeavored to communicate an ideology of victory to the inhabitants of the empire even when the emperor himself could not claim credit, or when there was little to claim credit for.

1.1. Changing Patterns of Imperial Involvement in Warfare

Broadly speaking, late antiquity falls into two halves with respect to imperial involvement in warfare. During the third and fourth centuries, nearly all emperors took an active role in campaigning, whereas during the fifth and sixth centuries this became the exception rather than the rule. It was only in the early seventh century that the pattern came full circle with the resumption of active campaigning by the emperor Heraclius.

Since the level of imperial involvement which characterized the second half of the third century represented something of a contrast with the Principate, the first part of this section examines the factors and circumstances which brought about this change. The second part focuses on the fourth century, during which there can be observed growing tensions between the claims of military experience and ties of heredity in determining occupation of the

imperial throne. The third part investigates the range of possible reasons for the major shift at the end of the fourth century, and on through the fifth and sixth centuries, whereby it became very rare for emperors to undertake campaigning in person, even when they had military experience.

1.1.1. *The later third century: the advent of soldier emperors*

> How pampered by good luck in administering the state and obtaining praise were those emperors who, while spending their days at Rome, had triumphs and victory titles of nations conquered by their generals accrue to them. Thus when Fronto . . . was praising the emperor Antoninus [138–61] for having brought the war in Britain to completion, although he remained behind in the city [of Rome] in the palace itself, and had delegated command of the war to others, he averred that the emperor deserved the glory of its whole launching and course, as if he had actually presided at the helm of a warship. But you, invincible Caesar, were the commander-in-chief of that whole expedition of yours, both of the actual sailing and the fighting itself, not only by right of your imperial authority but by your personal participation, and by the example of your firm resolve were its instigator and driving force. (*Latin Panegyrics* 8(5).14.1–3 [trs. Nixon and Rodgers, with revisions])

This passage occurs in a panegyric delivered before the emperor Constantius I at Trier in 297 or 298, following his recovery of Britain from usurpers (Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 105). While this circumstance explains the choice of Britain as the point of comparison, the specific contrast between Constantius and the second-century emperor Antoninus Pius undoubtedly oversimplifies matters somewhat. First, Antoninus was one of the few emperors from the period of the Principate not to have engaged actively in military campaigning of any sort either prior to or after becoming emperor, and so cannot be regarded as typical in this respect. Second, "the panegyrist inflates the role of Constantius in the expedition, not surprisingly, and obscures that of the praetorian prefect Asclepiodotus, who is not so much as mentioned by name or even title. Yet it is clear from later sources that Asclepiodotus was generally credited with the victory" (Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 133 n.52).

Despite these qualifications, however, the passage does encapsulate a fundamental contrast with regard to the military involvement of emperors during the Principate, on the one hand, and during the late third century, on the other. For although it is possible to cite the counter-example of Trajan as an emperor during the Principate who was very much "hands on" when it came to campaigning, and although Constantius may not have been quite as closely involved in the campaigning in this instance as his panegyrist implies, it is undeniable that emperors during the Principate did not for the most part spend the bulk of their time campaigning and did regularly spend much of their time in Rome, whereas those of the late third century devoted much

of their time to active involvement in warfare, which significantly restricted the opportunities of most incumbents to be in Rome for any length of time.

This important change, one of the defining features of the transition from the Principate to late antiquity, was the result of the altered circumstances of the empire. During the Principate, military initiative lay largely with the empire and warfare was usually the result of the emperor and his advisers deciding to embark on an offensive campaign to expand the imperial domain; unwanted campaigns were for the most part the result of revolt by discontented provincials within the empire, notably the Jews. An exception to this was the Marcomannic war of Marcus Aurelius, toward the end of the second century, which might be regarded as heralding third-century developments – namely, the emergence of militarily stronger neighbors to the north of the empire, such as the Goths and the Alamanni, but also to the east, in the form of the Sasanians, who overthrew the Parthian Arsacid regime in the mid 220s. These exogenous changes had the effect of removing the military initiative from the empire to a significant degree, so that warfare during the third century, and especially the second half of the century, was predominantly defensive in nature.

In these often desperate circumstances it was no longer realistic to rely on emperors drawn from a social group whose military competence was not assured – namely, the senatorial aristocracy. Until 235, all emperors were, with one minor exception, senators by background,[1] and while some of these had undoubtedly demonstrated military proficiency (most notably Trajan, but one might also include here Tiberius (prior to his accession), Vespasian, Titus, and Septimius Severus), there could be no assurance that this would invariably be the case:

> Despite the increased number of military commands available to senators [during the Principate], . . . the emperor could not count on finding men of significant military experience for the major consular provinces and . . . there was no deliberate attempt to ensure regular military experience of commanding troops . . . The Romans had no military academy, no formal process for educating officers in ordnance, tactics, and strategy, and no systematic means for testing the quality of aspirants to top commands . . . The length of time spent in commanding an army of several legions and *auxilia* was normally too limited to allow the development of a military hierarchy or specialized high command which could have provided a fund of military experience . . . Few emperors had much, if any, military experience before they assumed the purple. (Campbell 1987: 22)

Against this background, the overthrow of the unlucky young emperor Severus Alexander in 235 by the short-lived Maximinus acquires a greater significance than one might otherwise have expected. While the manner of Severus' death – brutally murdered by his own troops – can be seen, with hindsight, as an important precedent for the coming decades, it is the

difference in the social background and military experience of the two men which is of importance. Alexander was of senatorial status and, still only in his early twenties in 235, he had had little time to gain much personal knowledge of the army or of warfare, whereas the surviving evidence about Maximinus, unsatisfactory though it is, indicates a man who had acquired equestrian status (i.e., the status below that of senator) through a long military career (Syme 1971: 179–93; Drinkwater 2005: 28–30).

The accession of Maximinus did not mark an absolute rupture in the pattern of imperial office holding, for there were subsequent emperors of senatorial status – most prominently, Gordian III (238–44), Decius (249–51), Valerian (253–60), and Gallienus (253–68). Over the course of the third century, however, there was a gradual but inexorable shift of power into the hands of those of equestrian status. For some of these, access to power came through their holding of the office of praetorian prefect, long the acme of an equestrian career: the prime examples are Philip (244–9) and Carus (282–3), who (following Macrinus' example in 217) used the praetorian prefecture as a stepping stone to imperial power, but one should not overlook Timesitheus and Aper, whose tenure of the office allowed them to exercise a predominant influence during the reigns of Gordian and Numerian (283–4), even if they did not manage to become emperor themselves.

Yet this was not the most significant development. Praetorian prefects becoming emperor was a novelty, but the post had long lent itself to the exercise of significant political influence, stretching all the way back to Sejanus in the reign of Tiberius. What was strikingly new was the pattern foreshadowed by Maximinus and firmly established after the death of Gallienus in 268 by a succession of emperors – Claudius (268–70), Aurelian (270–5), Probus (276–82), and Diocletian (284–305). Once again, paucity of detail and a pejorative attitude toward emperors of non-senatorial origin mean that the meager surviving ancient sources for these decades are unsatisfactory as evidence for the careers of these men (Michael Whitby 2004: 179–80); nevertheless, there is no doubt about their military background, confirmed by their common Balkan origin (the major recruiting ground for the army in this period), and it looks like they were individuals who achieved equestrian status by promotion through the ranks to positions of command in the army (Syme 1971: 208–12; Potter 2004: 263–80; Drinkwater 2005: 48–58) – a reflection of a more general trend whereby equestrians increasingly dominated military commands at the expense of senators during the mid to late third century (Christol 1999: 625–7). It is unlikely that this important development was the result of a specific law of the emperor Gallienus, as one fourth-century writer claimed (Aurelius Victor *On the Caesars* 33.34, with Potter 2004: 640 n.188 for details of modern discussions). Rather, this development should be seen as recognition that, in the increasingly dire circumstances in which the empire found itself in the 260s, military competence was the fundamental desideratum for military commands – and, by logical extension, for the commander-in-chief. In this respect, then, the warfare of the mid third century had a significant impact on the political character of the Roman empire.

That impact, however, extended beyond affecting the type of man who held imperial office, significant though that change was; it also had a profound influence on his style of rule. Given the background of these soldier emperors and the severe problems which they confronted, it is unsurprising to find them closely involved in military campaigning and warfare. One important consequence of this close involvement is epitomized by the contrast in the opening passage between Antoninus, permanently resident in Rome, and Constantius, based in Trier and active on the northern perimeter of the empire. Although emperors during the Principate were often mobile and saw many parts of the empire – most famously, Hadrian – they invariably spent significant portions of their reign in Rome or its environs.[2] From the 230s onward, on the other hand, it became much rarer for emperors to spend much time in Rome, or in some cases even to visit the city (Table 1.1). During the period 193–235 (42 years), emperors spent about 22 years in Rome (52 percent). During the period 235–337 (102 years), emperors spent about 38 years in Rome (37 percent), with only 15 of these years falling during the 53 years of the Tetrarchy and Constantine (28 percent). The reduced proportion of time spent in Rome between 235 and 337 is even more significant when it is remembered that at a number of times in this period (especially during the Tetrarchy) there were multiple emperors.

Leaving aside those whose reigns were so short that they did not spend much time anywhere, this change was partly because emperors were heavily involved in military affairs along the empire's frontiers, and partly because, in a period when soldiers had become accustomed to making and unmaking emperors with alarming regularity, it was vital to maintain close contact with the troops; in the case of those emperors of non-senatorial origin, it may also betray a reluctance to deal at first hand with a disdainful senate. Certainly, this trend can only have served to diminish further the corporate ability of the senate to influence imperial politics. When an imperial visit to Rome did take place, it was usually occasioned by a ritual of importance, such as taking up the consulship, the staging of a triumph, or celebration of a major imperial anniversary – events which offered Balkan soldier emperors valuable symbolic opportunities to legitimate their positions and affirm their Roman identity.

As the city of Rome became increasingly less frequented by emperors during the second half of the third century, so other cities acquired greater prominence as emperors spent more time in bases closer to the frontiers. The Persian threat to the east meant that Antioch assumed even more importance than it had in the past, while the problems affecting the northern frontiers led emperors to make regular use of such cities as Sirmium, Serdica, Milan, and Trier, particularly after Diocletian developed a pattern of government where he shared power with three colleagues (Millar 1977: 40–53).

Table 1.1 Emperors in Rome, 193–337

Emperor	Reign	No. of years in Rome	Dates in Rome	Occasion
Septimius Severus	193–211	1	193	Accession
		1	196–7	
		6	202–8	
Caracalla	211–17	1	211–12	Accession
Macrinus	217–18	0		
Elagabalus	218–22	3	219–22	
Severus Alexander	222–35	9	222–31	
		1	233–4	
Maximinus	235–8	0		
Gordian III	238–44	4	238–42	Accession
Philip	244–9	1	244–5	Accession
		2	247–9	Millennial celebrations
Decius	249–51	1	249–50	Accession
Trebonianus Gallus	251–3	2	251–3	Accession
Valerian	253–60	1	253–4	Accession
Gallienus	253–68	1	253–4	Accession
		4	263–7	
Claudius II	268–70	1	268–9	Accession
Aurelian	270–5	1	270–1	Accession
		1	274	Triumph
Probus	276–82	2	280–2	Triumph
Carus	282–3	1	282–3	Accession
Numerian	283–4	0		
Carinus	283–5	1	284	
Diocletian	284–305	1	303	*Vicennalia*
Maximian	286–305	1	293	
		1	299	Triumph
		1	303–4	*Vicennalia*
Constantius I	293–306	1	295	
Galerius	293–311	1	307	
Severus	305–7	0		
Maximinus Daia	305–13	0		
Maxentius	306–12	6	306–12	Rome his capital
Constantine I	306–37	1	312–13	Defeating Maxentius
		1	315	Decennalia
		1	326	Vicennalia
Licinius	308–24	0		

Note: In some cases, the occasion for an emperor's visit is not known, or in cases when he spent a substantial amount of time there, the reasons cannot be summarized succinctly. Only emperors who ruled for longer than 12 months are included.

Sources: Bowman et al. (2005: Appendix II (Imperial movements, AD 193–337)); Barnes (1982).

At the same time, the emergence of the so-called Tetrarchy coincides with some improvement in the surviving evidence, which provides a clearer picture of the extent to which, despite the emergence of these imperial bases, emperors were still having to maintain a highly mobile existence as they moved around the empire in order to tackle different crises. So, for example, Diocletian's legal pronouncements, which usually preserve both the place and date of issue, allow us to track his movements during the course of the year 290 (Barnes 1982: 51–2). At the start of that year, he was wintering in Sirmium following a campaign against the Sarmatians on the lower Danube; during the spring, he traveled eastward, reaching Antioch in early May, from where he embarked on a short campaign against Arab tribesmen before returning to Sirmium, where he spent much of the second half of the year prior to journeying to Milan for a "summit meeting" with his fellow-emperor Maximian – a round trip in excess of 3,000 miles. It was exertions of this sort which gradually restored a degree of stability to the empire's frontiers. With that stability, however, there also came renewed pressure to take into account considerations other than military experience in the selection of emperors.

1.1.2. *The fourth century: military experience vs heredity*

> Meanwhile when [the emperor] Valentinian was assailed by a serious illness [at Amiens in August 367] and was close to death, the Gauls who were attending the emperor held a clandestine meeting at which it was proposed that Rusticus Julianus, then master of the records (*magister memoriae*), should be made emperor... They were opposed by some with higher concerns who championed Severus, then commander of the infantry (*magister peditum*), as a suitable man for this rank... But while these plans were being formulated in vain, the emperor recovered thanks to various remedies. As he reflected on his narrow escape from death, Valentinian decided to bestow the imperial insignia on his son Gratian, who was now approaching adulthood. And when everything was ready and the soldiers had been induced to grant their approval, Gratian arrived and the emperor advanced into the parade ground (*campus*) and mounted the tribunal. Surrounded by a splendid body of high-ranking officials, he took the boy by the hand, led him into their midst, and commended the future emperor to the army with a formal speech. (Ammianus 27.6.1–5)

During the Principate, hereditary succession had been the key determinant in access to imperial power, even when, as in the second century, it had involved emperors without sons adopting suitable successors; competition based on military power, as in 69 and 193, had been the exception. Even if its influence continued to be felt – as, for example, in Gallienus' proclaiming successive sons as Caesars, in the troops' elevation of Claudius II's brother Quintillus to the purple following the former's death in 270, and in Carus'

naming his sons Carinus and Numerian as Caesars soon after his accession in 282 – the dynastic principle had had to bow increasingly to the claims of military competence. The climax of this countervailing tendency was Diocletian's experiment in sharing power between four emperors chosen for their military competence and without reference to blood.[3]

This arrangement proved its value in the short term in so far as it broke the cycle of usurpation which had plagued the empire during the mid third century. Diocletian's attempt to establish it as a long-term mechanism for the transmission of imperial power failed, however, in the face of a resurgence of the dynastic principle. Diocletian himself had a daughter but no son (which may have been an important factor in his willingness to embark on his experiment in the first place), but two of his chosen colleagues did have able and ambitious sons – Maxentius and Constantine – who expected their opportunity to follow in their fathers' footsteps. The tetrarchic system duly unraveled over the course of the opening decades of the fourth century until, by 324, one of those sons, Constantine, had emerged as sole ruler of the empire.

Thereafter, throughout the remainder of the fourth century, there is an interesting tension between the competing claims of military competence and blood ties, as reflected in the passage at the start of this section. Between 337 and 363 imperial power passed to Constantine's sons and nephews. However, the death of the last of these, Julian, in the midst of a military crisis, presented senior army officers with the opportunity to select a new emperor without the need to take account of dynastic considerations. The immediate circumstances – the army was trying to extricate itself from Persian territory – were not conducive to lengthy deliberation but the man finally agreed upon, Jovian, came from a very similar background to emperors of the late third century: he was a middle-ranking officer from the Balkans (Lenski 2002a: 16). Although Jovian himself had not necessarily had much opportunity until then to demonstrate prowess in command, he is likely to have benefited from his close association with men who had, namely his father Varronian and his father-in-law Lucillianus – both men with reputations for military competence in senior posts during the 350s (Lenski 2000: 506–8).

Although he had an infant son, Varronian, whom he no doubt intended to proclaim as Caesar, Jovian died after a reign of little more than seven months, and the youth of his son and the fact that he had not formally been proclaimed meant that there was a second opportunity to select a new emperor without reference to dynastic considerations, this time in somewhat less pressured circumstances. Although there was more civilian involvement in this decision, the main candidates discussed were mostly men "with qualifications remarkably similar to those of Jovian" (Lenski 2002a: 20), including the eventual successor, Valentinian, another middle-ranking officer of Balkan origin – all of which no doubt reflected a consciousness of the need for appropriate experience in the aftermath of the failure of Julian's Persian

expedition. The surviving sources have little to say about the specific details of Valentinian's military record, but they do indicate that he was "a man with considerable military experience" (Lenski 2002a: 21). As with Jovian, the military record of Valentinian's father Gratian may also have been a factor of importance. Interestingly, when Valentinian consulted his senior officers about his intention to appoint an imperial colleague, one of them is said to have replied, "If you love your relatives, most excellent emperor, you have a brother; if it is the state that you love, seek out another man to clothe with the purple" (Ammianus 26.4.1), the most obvious interpretation being that Valentinian's brother Valens lacked the requisite military record (cf. Lenski 2002a: 51–2).

Valentinian, however, ignored this advice and soon after appointed his brother Valens as co-emperor, a reassertion of the dynastic principle further reinforced by his elevation of his son Gratian in 367, as related in the excerpt at the head of this section. Another reflection of the power of blood ties at this time was the usurpation attempt launched by Procopius against Valens in 365. Although ultimately unsuccessful, Procopius initially enjoyed considerable support largely because he was able to present himself as a relative of the former emperor Julian, an evident advantage on which he tried to capitalize further by parading before his troops the wife and daughter of Julian's cousin and predecessor Constantius II, whose presence is said to have "excited his men to fight more resolutely" (Ammianus 26.9.3, with further discussion in Lenski 2002a: 97–101).

When military disaster supervened once again to eliminate Valens at the battle of Adrianople in 378, Gratian, now the senior emperor (although only 19 years of age), faced a dilemma. Under normal circumstances, dynastic considerations would have dictated his younger brother and co-emperor, Valentinian II, taking over Valens' role as emperor of the eastern half of the empire. However, Gratian and his advisers appreciated that the crisis in the Balkans consequent upon the Gothic victory at Adrianople required the attentions of a man with more military experience than Gratian himself had, let alone his seven-year-old brother. Hence the choice of Theodosius, whose father had been a successful general under Valentinian I and who had himself already demonstrated comparable competence as a commander on the lower Danube in recent years (Ammianus 29.6.15; cf. Matthews 1975: 91–8 and Leppin 2003: 29–34). Although Theodosius may not, in the event, have been able to expel the Goths from the empire, that had more to do with temporary manpower shortages than generalship, and he did contain the problem in the early 380s, as well as dealing effectively with two western usurpers (Magnus Maximus and Eugenius) in the late 380s and early 390s.

As will be apparent from the foregoing overview, the reassertion of the dynastic principle had mixed results in terms of the military record of the empire in the fourth century, notably the defeats and deaths of Julian

and Valens (neither of whom had the sort of military experience which Theodosius did). On the other hand, however much ancient commentators may have criticized him (e.g., Eutropius 10.10.1; Ammianus 21.16.15; Libanius *Orations* 18.205–7), Constantius II did demonstrate considerable military sense in his conduct of affairs on the eastern frontier and more generally (Blockley 1989), perhaps reflecting the fruits of his father's efforts to train him in warfare (Julian *Orations* 1.9a–13b). Similarly, when presenting the eight-year-old Gratian to the troops at Amiens in 367, Valentinian was quick to acknowledge that Gratian did not yet have the requisite military training and experience to be emperor, but assured them that he had the aptitude and commitment to acquire them with time (cf. Rufinus *Church History* 11.13). This awareness of the need for such a background reflects the fact that, even if military experience was again having to compete more strongly against the claims of blood ties when it came to their selection, emperors during this period continued to be actively involved with the army and in campaigning, as is clear from narrative accounts of the period, particularly the detailed history of Ammianus Marcellinus (cf. Matthews 1989: 283). As with third-century emperors, this is corroborated by the relative rarity with which fourth-century emperors visited Rome and, in the case of emperors based in the east, Constantinople (Table 1.2). Although the latter city was consecrated by Constantine in 330, Theodosius I (379–95) was the first emperor to spend any substantial periods of time there (seven years in total), thereby setting "a fourth-century record for sustained imperial immobility" (McLynn 2004: 261) – a record, however, which, interestingly, also earned him criticism in some quarters (Zosimus 4.33, 50).

The only real exception to this general pattern of active campaigning prior to 395 was Valentinian II, who was a minor for most of his reign and, once a young adult, apparently faced the powerful opposition of the general Arbogast to any attempt on his part to gain military experience.[4] While the exception to the rule for the period before 395, however, the experience of the young Valentinian proved to be an ominous precedent for developments after Theodosius' death in 395.

1.1.3. *The fifth and sixth centuries: non-campaigning emperors*

> So long as it was the case that emperors went out to wars in person, the [praetorian] prefecture had a certain power and influence, if not as great as it had been, greater, nonetheless, than all the other magistracies. But from the time when Theodosius I, making provision for the indolent dispositions of his own sons, put a curb on valour by legislation, prohibiting, through them, a Roman emperor from going forth to the wars – from then on matters concerning wars became the field of the generals. (John the Lydian *On the Magistracies of the Roman State* 2.11.3–4 [tr. Carney, with revisions]; cf. 3.41.3)[5]

Table 1.2 Emperors in Rome and Constantinople, 337–95

Emperor	Reign	Rome: No. of periods	Rome: Date	Rome: Occasion	Constantinople: No. of periods	Constantinople: Date	Constantinople: Occasion
Constantine II	337–40	0			0		
Constans	337–50	1?	340?		0		
Constantius II	337–61	1	357	Vicennalia and triumph	5	May 337	Constantine's funeral
						Sep. 337	
						Early 342	Expulsion of bishop Paul
						Oct. 343 (or 349)	
						Winter 359	
Julian	361–3	0			1	Dec. 361–May 362	
Jovian	363–4	0			0		
Valentinian I	364–75	0			1	364	Accession of Valens
Valens	364–78	0			3	Dec. 364–Aug. 365	Accession and consulship
						370–1	Famine
						May 378	En route to deal with Goths
Gratian	375–83	1	May 376		1	Oct. 378	After battle of Adrianople
Valentinian II	375–92	1	388	During Theodosius' campaign vs Maximus	0		
Theodosius I	379–95	2	June–Aug. 389	After defeat of Maximus	2	380–7	
			Oct. 394–Jan. 395	After defeat of Eugenius		391–4	

Sources: Seeck (1919); Dagron (1974: 79–85); Barnes (1993: Appendix 9); Barnes (1998: Appendix 10).

As this excerpt from a sixth-century commentator indicates, albeit in a somewhat muddled manner, the death of Theodosius I in 395 marked a critical juncture, a fundamental reversal, with regard to imperial involvement in warfare. For more than two centuries thereafter, until the reign of Heraclius in the early seventh century, it was extremely rare for the emperor to lead the army or to campaign in person. The reasons for this are to be sought elsewhere than in John the Lydian's fanciful claim about legislation by Theodosius I. In the context of the years immediately after Theodosius' death, this change comes as no real surprise. At the time of their father's demise, Arcadius and Honorius, who succeeded to the throne in the eastern and western halves of the empire, were about 17 and 11 years old respectively (it is not possible to be more precise about Arcadius' age since his date of birth is known only approximately). There was clearly no immediate prospect of the younger of the two taking an active military role; Arcadius might perhaps have begun to do so, had he had the ability and determination of an Alexander – but it is apparent that he did not. Upon his death in 408 at the age of 31, he was succeeded by his son Theodosius II, who was then seven years old – so perpetuating the pattern in the eastern half of the empire.

In the west, the dominant force at Honorius' court until 408 was the general Stilicho. Although not an outsider – he was linked by marriage to the imperial family well before Honorius' accession – it was in his interests to ensure that any nascent military ambitions on the part of the emperor were not encouraged. A militarily active Honorius might have become more independent, or if he had died on campaign, Stilicho's own position might well have become tenuous. At the same time, Stilicho's publicist, the poet Claudian, sought to assuage any concerns about Honorius' lack of military experience in a series of panegyrics delivered in the early years of his reign. In that of 396, when Honorius was 11 years old, Claudian emphasized his familiarity with military camps and weapons from an early age, Theodosius' measures to ensure that Honorius received an appropriately rigorous training, and Honorius' keenness to accompany his father on the campaign against Eugenius in 394 (not, however, permitted) (*Panegyric on the Third Consulate of Honorius* 22–62). Two years later, Claudian was emphasizing Honorius' military pedigree with reference to the achievements of his father and grandfather, and even hinting at a possible association with Trajan, who had also originated from Spain (*Panegyric on the Fourth Consulate of Honorius* 18ff.); he refers to the role of the army in Honorius' formal elevation as emperor (169ff.); he imagines Theodosius' advice to his son about the conduct of war, including encouragement to participate in the soldiers' work since "with you as their comrade, they will press on the more readily" (320ff.); he reiterates Honorius' supposed desire to participate in the expedition of 394 – "Do you think me still a child? . . . Give me arms now. Why is my age an objection?" – and Theodosius' response – that he is too young, but has great military successes in store if he gives himself to training in war (352ff.); and he concludes by crediting Honorius with one of his father's earlier victories because Honorius was holding the consulship at the time, and by asserting that "once the author of your father's victories, now you will be the author of your own . . . A time will come when you, victor beyond the Rhine estuary, and Arcadius, laden with the spoils of captive Babylon, will inscribe your shared year with a greater consulship" (638ff. [tr. Barr]).

By the time of Stilicho's fall in 408, Honorius was nearly 24 years old, at which point he could have begun to assume the more active military role which Claudian had purported to predict. That he did not do so could reflect understandable trepidation at the particularly severe problems Italy faced at that time, in the form of Alaric and the Goths, but what little is known about his character indicates that, despite Claudian's rhetoric, Honorius was an individual ill-suited to military endeavor. According to one anecdote, he (then resident in Ravenna) was more preoccupied with the well-being of his pet chickens than that of Rome at the time of the Gothic sack of the city in 410 (Procopius *Wars* 3.2.25–6).

Following his death in 423, Honorius' eventual successor (after a short period of political turmoil) was Valentinian III, who came to the throne in 425 aged six. Like Honorius, he too was dominated for much of his reign by a powerful general in the person of Aetius, who no doubt will have discouraged any military interests in the emperor. In the west, at any rate, a combination of accession to the throne at a young age and the presence of dominant generals at court seems to have ensured that for the half century following Theodosius' death, no western emperor was involved in military campaigning.[6]

As for the eastern half of the empire, the youth of emperors was also a factor, though dominant generals were less so, since in the east civilian bureaucrats managed to maintain control vis-à-vis the military in a way which did not happen in the west (which is not to say that there were not occasional scares, as in the Gainas episode in 400, on which see Liebeschuetz 1991: 104–25; Alan Cameron and Long 1993: 161–75, 201–11). This divergence can be accounted for, at least in part, by reference to the differing military structures in east and west: in the latter, Stilicho had created a centralized command structure, whereas in the former military power was more dispersed (Jones 1964: 609–10; Lee 2000b: 60). Like Honorius, too, Theodosius II – who ruled the east for most of the first half of the fifth century (408–50) – does not seem to have had any inclination to undertake military activities once he reached adulthood, preferring to focus his attention on scholarly pursuits and personal piety and rarely venturing beyond the confines of Constantinople (cf. Lee 2000b: 34–6).[7]

The phenomenon of non-campaigning emperors did not escape contemporary criticism, most explicitly in Synesius' tract *On Kingship* (*Peri basileias/De regno*), written in 398 (but unlikely to have been delivered in this format

before Arcadius: Liebeschuetz 1991: 106; Alan Cameron and Long 1993: 127–42). As part of his veiled attack on the palace eunuch Eutropius, whose excessive influence over Arcadius he deplored, Synesius urged the emperor to involve himself actively with his soldiers:

> Now my speech must go on to lead the emperor from out his palace, and, after his friends, to hand him over to his soldiers, second friends these; and further to make him descend to the plain and inspect his men, their arms, and their horses. There he will ride with the cavalry, charge with the infantry, arm himself heavily with the hoplites, manoeuvre with the targeteers, and hurl the javelin with the light-armed troops, enticing every man to living comradeship by association in their operations; so that not merely in semblance shall he call them fellow-soldiers. They will come to know him when he addresses them on the field . . . This custom is capable of bringing goodwill towards him in that the spectacle of a ruler is not a rare one to his soldiers . . .
>
> The king will benefit from this close intercourse, not only because the army will surround him as one unified organism, but also because many of the incidents on these occasions are, some of them, an exercise in warlike affairs, and at the same time will be initiations, and preparations of a kind, for the functions of command and awaken his ambition for great and serious tasks. It is no small advantage in active service that he can address by name, a general, a commander of a unit, the commander of a squadron or a brigade, or a standard-bearer, as the case may be; that he can call up and exhort any of the veterans from his knowledge of them . . . Who would not be lavish with his blood when the king has praised him? This benefit then will come to you from frequent contact with your troops . . . The king is a craftsman of wars, just as a cobbler is a craftsman of shoes. The latter is laughable when he does not know the tools of his craft; how then shall a king understand how to use his tools, namely soldiers, when he does not know these tools? (*On Kingship* 13–14 [tr. Fitzgerald]).

Half a century later, the Gallic aristocrat Sidonius Apollinaris lamented the consequences of non-campaigning emperors: "Since that time [the reign of Theodosius I], much has been lost, for with the emperor, whoever he be, closely confined (*principe clauso*), it has been the constant lot of the distant parts of this wretched world to be laid waste" (Sidonius *Poems* 5.358ff.). Intriguingly, the historian Sulpicius Alexander, probably writing early in the fifth century, referred to Valentinian II in remarkably similar phraseology as being "shut in the palace in Vienne" (*clauso apud Viennam palatii aedibus principe Valentiniano*) (preserved in Gregory of Tours *History of the Franks* 2.9, with discussion in Stroheker 1970).

The expression of such reservations, however, had no noticeable impact on the behavior of emperors during the first half of the fifth century. Moreover, once a pattern of emperors not campaigning had become established over the half century following 395, there was always a likelihood that sheer inertia would ensure that the pattern persisted. That it did so in the fifth-century

east is nonetheless somewhat surprising, given that those who succeeded Theodosius II down to the end of the century – Marcian (450–7), Leo (457–74), and Zeno (474–91) – were all men with military experience prior to coming to the throne. Perhaps one should distinguish between the first two and Zeno, insofar as it looks like Marcian and Leo had only reached the middling ranks of the officer class (the tribunate – i.e., commanding a unit) and so may not have felt competent to command armies.[8] Moreover, both faced the problem of powerful generals, in the form of Flavius Zeno (not to be confused with the later emperor) and Aspar, who presumably did all they could to ensure that these emperors did not undertake military campaigning themselves. Age may also have been a consideration: Marcian was born in 392, so was approaching 60 when he acceded to the throne, while Leo was probably born in 401, so would have been only a few years younger than Marcian when he became emperor in 457. Zeno, on the other hand, was an experienced soldier (cf. *Anonymous Valesianus* 9.39) who had held a number of senior commands prior to becoming emperor in 474 when in his mid to late 40s. Once emperor, however, he did not engage in any campaigning himself: he expressed his intention to lead an army against the Goths in Thrace in 478, but then apparently changed his mind (Malchus fr.18.3), and campaigns against various internal challengers to his position seem to have been entrusted to others on his behalf.

This apparent reluctance on the part of men with military experience to engage in campaigning once they became emperor, particularly in the face of significant military challenges, is perhaps explicable in terms of certain traumatic fourth-century events – specifically, the deaths of Julian and Valens in battle in 363 and 378. As previously noted, both events created constitutional crises over the succession, with attendant instability: the fall-out from Julian's death was arguably felt for some years afterward, until the end of Procopius' revolt in 367, while Valens' demise at Adrianople precipitated a major problem in containing the Goths, which was not achieved until 382– and even that settlement did not represent a definitive solution. It may be that fifth-century emperors in the east and their advisers were influenced by the memory of these events (cf. Kaegi 1981: 21–3; McCormick 1986: 47; Michael Whitby 1992b: 302–3).[9]

In the west, on the other hand, some emperors in the decades after the death of Valentinian III in 455 were more militarily active, though necessarily on a limited scale, given the parlous state of imperial finances in that half of the empire. Avitus (455–6) had served under Aetius during the 430s, rising to the rank of *magister* in Gaul, in which capacity he saw active service against the Huns and Visigoths, and his brief reign came to an end as a result of defeat in battle, albeit by the generals Majorian and Ricimer rather than a foreign invader. After a brief hiatus, Majorian emerged as Avitus' successor, campaigned in Gaul, and attempted unsuccessfully to mount an invasion of Vandal north Africa (a setback which resulted in his elimination by Ricimer in

461). Anthemius (467–72) had a distinguished military record in the east prior to his accession, but although he was involved in preparations for campaigns against the Vandals and Visigoths, he seems to have delegated campaign leadership to others (specifically Marcellinus and his own son Anthemiolus), rather than being involved personally. Finally, Julius Nepos (474–5) was another individual with a military background who, with the support of the eastern emperor Leo, fought his way to the throne in the west in 474, though his hold on power proved too brief for him to take any military initiatives. As will be apparent, then, although a number of the final emperors in the west had the experience and inclination to engage in active campaigning, the severity of the west's problems prevented them from achieving the sort of success which might otherwise have helped to stabilize their regimes.

Returning to the east in the period after the demise of the west, Zeno's successor in 491 was Anastasius, a man with no military background whose age at accession (about 61) precluded him from acquiring one. Unusually, the widowed empress, Ariadne, had been allowed to nominate her late husband's successor, perhaps because she was the last descendant of the emperor Leo. Why she chose Anastasius is not entirely clear, but given her husband's trials and tribulations it is perhaps less surprising that she opted for an individual from a non-military background.[10] At any rate, he proved a good choice in so far as he managed to restore stability to the empire's affairs over the ensuing decades. His successor, Justin I, did have a military background and had recently been involved in the successful repulse of the attempted seizure of power by the *magister* Vitalian (Greatrex 1996: 135–6), though his position as commander of the palace guard also played a crucial part in his gaining the throne on Anastasius' death in 518; however, since he was already in his mid to late sixties, he did not lead Roman forces in person. Nor did his adopted son and successor Justinian (527–65), who is not known to have had any significant military experience despite his holding the (presumably honorific) post of praesental *magister* for seven years or so before his accession. His successor, Justin II (565–78), had a background in the imperial bureaucracy and so continued the sixth-century pattern of non-campaigning emperors.

Tiberius II (578–82) and Maurice (582–602) both had military experience prior to their accession, even if they had begun their careers as bureaucrats (cf. Menander fr.23,2: "[Maurice] had not been trained in war and conflict" at the time he was appointed *magister* of the east), but once elevated to the throne, they left campaigning to subordinates, apart from three occasions, in 584, 592, and 598, when Maurice briefly led troops short distances from Constantinople into Thrace (Theophylact Simocatta 1.7.2, 5.16.1–6.3.8, 7.15.7, with Michael Whitby 1988: 143, 156–8, 163); interestingly, on the second occasion, he did so in the face of concerted opposition from courtiers apparently concerned for his safety (Theophylact

Simocatta 5.16.2–4). Phocas (602–10), the usurper who overthrew Maurice, had a military background as a relatively junior officer, but also appears to have directed campaigns from Constantinople rather than taking an active role himself. It was not until the reign of Heraclius (610–41) that there was a genuine return to the campaigning emperors of the third and fourth centuries. This partly reflects the context of his accession – he led forces from north Africa to overthrow Phocas – but above all the circumstances which he inherited – a major war on two fronts against Persia and the Avars, against whom the empire had already lost substantial ground by 610, which meant that a man of his experience could not sit in Constantinople leaving others to get their hands dirty. Perhaps the Phocas episode had made him and his advisers realize that, whatever the risks on the battlefield, it was not an option to distance himself from the army and risk another usurper emerging from that quarter.

1.2. The Unchanging Ideology of Victory

Military success had always been a fundamental ingredient in political power at Rome. This tradition did not lose any of its force during the Principate, the important difference being that the emperor necessarily monopolized military glory (cf. Gagé 1933). Although military success was in short supply during the middle decades of the third century, it remained important to maintain the ideology of victory, and this continued to be the case throughout late antiquity, even when the empire suffered severe setbacks. Although the habit of emperors not campaigning in person meant that the imperial office was better protected from any adverse effects arising from military defeat, one might have expected that it would make it difficult for emperors to maintain an aura of military invincibility. It is clear, however, that this was not the case. From the Principate, emperors were able to claim the credit and the glory for the successes of subordinates (Gagé 1933: 6–8; Kent 1994: 46–7), and late Roman emperors had an impressive array of media at their disposal through which their subjects could be made aware of military successes, whether gained by the emperor's own endeavor or that of others.

1.2.1. Verbal media

> By frequent repetition of empty praise and a vain parade of facts which were obvious, some of Constantius' courtiers inflated his natural self-conceit after their usual manner, ascribing to his lucky star any success in any corner of the world. This big talk by his toadies encouraged him to set forth in the edicts which he published then and later a number of arrogant lies; though he had not been present himself at an action, he often declared that he alone had fought and conquered and inclined a merciful ear to the entreaties of native kings. If, for example, while he was in Italy, one of his generals distinguished himself against the Persians, no mention would be made of him in a very long bulletin,

> but letters wreathed in laurel would be sent to extract money from the provinces, in which Constantius informed them with odious self-praise that he had fought in the front rank. Statements by him are still extant in the imperial records which show his vainglorious habit of praising himself to the sky. When this battle was fought near Strasbourg, from which he was forty days' march away, his account of the action stated that he had drawn up the order of battle, taken his place by the standards, put the barbarians to flight, and had [the Alamannic ruler] Chnodomar brought before him. Disgraceful to relate, he said nothing of the glorious exploits of Julian. (Ammianus 16.12.68–70 [tr. Hamilton])

Perhaps the most immediate way in which campaigning emperors were able to communicate military success to a wide audience was through the dispatch of victory reports to be posted and read out in the major cities of the empire. In one of his sermons, John Chrysostom made reference to the absolute silence which prevailed in the theater when imperial letters of this sort were read out (*Homily on Matthew* 19.9 (*PG* 57.285)). Circumstantial allusions to the practice survive in a range of different sources. A church council at Serdica in 343 was interrupted by the arrival of a victory report (*epinikia*) over the Persians from Constantius (Athanasius *History of the Arians* 16.2); Symmachus reported to a friend his having read out in the senate in Rome a letter with news of imperial victories in 379 (*Letter* 1.95.2; cf. *Consular Lists of Constantinople s.a.* 379); the ability of an Egyptian holy man to foretell the future was confirmed when, soon after, "there arrived in Alexandria the letter of victory (*epinikia*) of the pious emperor Theodosius announcing the destruction of the tyrant Eugenius [in 394]" (*History of the Monks* 1.64); and in a wry inversion of normal practice, one Christian ostentatiously tore down a copy of Diocletian's first persecution edict in Nicomedia, "declaring mockingly that victories over Goths and Sarmatians were being proclaimed" (Lactantius *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* 13.2).[11]

The excerpt at the head of this section concerning the aftermath of Julian's victory at Strasbourg in 357 provides further valuable evidence on the subject of victory reports. Despite Ammianus' trenchant criticisms, Constantius was fully justified in claiming the credit for a success achieved under his auspices, even if he showed less magnanimity than Theodosius I in acknowledging the role of his general (cf. Symmachus *Memoranda* 47.2). As Ammianus' comments indicate, these reports could be very detailed and they were intended to enhance the reputation of the emperor.[12] The tradition of emperors claiming credit for victories gained by their subordinates also provided scope for non-campaigning emperors to accrue vicarious military prestige in this way, as when Theodosius II led an impromptu celebratory march through the streets of Constantinople on the arrival of news of Aspar's suppression of the usurper John in Italy (Socrates *Church History* 7.23), and Maurice instigated chariot-racing on receipt of victory reports over the Persians from Heraclius senior in 589 (Theophylact Simocatta 3.6.5).

The only surviving text of a victory report derives from the early seventh century, when Heraclius seems to have sent back regular reports of his progress (Theophanes *Chronicle* pp. 313–14). The final one, announcing his defeat of Khusro in 628, is preserved in a chronicle (cf. Howard-Johnston 1994: 70–2):

> In the 18th year of the reign of Heraclius . . . on the 15th of the month May . . . in the most holy Great Church [Hagia Sophia] were read out dispatches which had been sent from the eastern regions by Heraclius, our most pious emperor, which announced the fall of Khusro and the proclamation of Siroe as the Persian king. They were as follows: "Let all the earth raise a cry to God; serve the Lord in gladness, enter into his presence in exultation, and recognise that God is Lord indeed . . . And let all we Christians, praising and glorifying, give thanks to the one God, rejoicing with great joy in his holy name. For fallen is the arrogant Khusro, opponent of God . . . " (*Easter Chronicle* pp. 727–8 [trs. Whitby and Whitby])

The text continues at considerable length, but it is in some respects atypical, in so far as its overtly Christian emphasis shifts the focus away from the emperor's achievements to the divine aid which he credits with his success. This partly reflects the way in which religious devotion had increasingly been harnessed by the state during the second half of the sixth century (Averil Cameron 1979) and partly the way in which the long war against Persia in the early seventh century had developed into a quasi-religious conflict (cf. Howard-Johnston 1999: 39–40).

The fact that victory reports were read out meant that they were in principle accessible to a wide audience, unlike other verbal media which required varying degrees of literacy. At the simplest level, there were the various imperial titles employed in inscriptions and laws which were generally on public display and which conveyed information about the emperor's military successes, whether at the generalized level of *victor* and *triumphator*, or at the specific level of success against a particular people, as in *Alamannicus* or *Gothicus* – victor over the Alamanni and over the Goths respectively. Knowledge of the use of such titles by particular emperors is obviously dependent on the random survival of sources. Analysis of the surviving evidence (as tabulated by Rösch 1978, especially in the tables after p. 172) indicates employment of the title *victor* by nearly all late Roman emperors. *Triumphator* seems to have become less popular as the fourth century progressed, but then is used consistently from the end of the fourth century onward, and it is tempting to see a possible correlation between its revival and the advent of non-campaigning emperors keen to insist on their military credentials. For titles which refer to foreign peoples, it is less easy to discern any clear patterns beyond their striking and significant efflorescence under Justinian and his successors, as in the following formula used in the preambles to a number of Justinian's laws: *Imperator Caesar Flavius Iustinianus*

Alamannicus Gothicus Francicus Germanicus Anticus Alanicus Vandalicus Africanus pius felix inclitus victor ac triumphator semper Augustus (Rösch 1978: 167).[13]

At the other end of the spectrum in terms of demands on educational attainment lay the use of rhetoric, poetry, and other literary genres to celebrate military success. The audience capable of appreciating such work was naturally a very small proportion of the empire's population, but it was important since it included those who held positions of power and influence at court. More often than not, the existence of such works is known only through chance references to them rather than through their survival. Hence, Faltonia Betitia Proba, the wife of a prefect of the city of Rome and better known as the author of a Christian poem based on Virgil, also wrote a poem about Constantius II's defeat of the usurper Magnentius (*PLRE* I.732; Clark and Hatch 1981: 98); one of Julian's bodyguards is reported to have celebrated his deeds in epic verse (Socrates *Church History* 3.21; cf. Viljamaa 1968: 27); when a student in Constantinople, a lawyer named Eusebius witnessed the revolt of Gainas, whose suppression he commemorated in a poem in four books in heroic meter (Socrates *Church History* 6.6.36); the empress Eudocia, among others, produced poems in honor of Roman military success against Persia in the early 420s (Socrates *Church History* 7.21.7–10); the defeat of the Isaurians by Anastasius' generals in the 490s prompted a six-book epic by Christodorus, while Anastasius' Persian war of a decade later resulted in a poem by Colluthus (*Suidas*, *s.v.* Christodorus, Colluthus); and John the Lydian, a middle-grade bureaucrat in the early sixth century, recorded that he wrote an account of the Persian wars of Justinian's early years (John the Lydian *On the Magistracies of the Roman State* 3.28). In this last case, John is explicit that Justinian commissioned the work, and this may have been the case with some of the other items noted above. Alternatively, ambitious individuals may have produced the work on their own initiative in the hope of winning imperial favor and patronage (cf. the reasons given by Menander (fr.1) for writing his history during the reign of Maurice).

None of these works has survived, but others have, to provide some idea of their typical content. Papyrus fragments preserve small portions of an epic poem probably written to honor the military achievements of the Tetrarchs (cf. Barnes 1976: 183; for alternative possible contexts, see Viljamaa 1968: 65–6):

> Just as Zeus goes from Crete above Othrys and Apollo leaves sea-girt Delos for Pangaeus, and as they don their arms the noisy throng of Giants is set to trembling, in such fashion the elder lord [Diocletian] with his army of Ausonians reached the Orient in the company of the younger king [Galerius]. They had the likeness of the blessed gods, one in strength matched Zeus on high and the other the fair-haired Apollo . . . (*P. Strasbourg* 480 [tr. Dodgeon in Dodgeon and Lieu 1991: 125])

In the early fifth century, Cyrus of Panopolis wrote a short encomium of Theodosius II in which he likened him to a range of Homeric heroes, including Achilles (*Greek Anthology* 15.9). Another, even more fragmentary, papyrus preserves a hexameter encomium which may well relate to Zeno's suppression of the revolt of Illus in the 480s (MacCail 1978). Although the panegyrics of Priscian and Procopius for Anastasius focused mainly on the emperor's non-military achievements, they gave some attention to the Isaurian war and how "the army of the invincible emperor, favored in arms, and its generals, no less powerful in their loyalty than in their courage, brought utter ruin on those they killed and put to flight" (Priscian *Panegyric* 63–5; cf. Procopius of Gaza *Panegyric* 7–10, *Greek Anthology* 9.656). An anonymous epigram looked forward to the Persians, Saracens, and Huns being defeated by Anastasius, "whom time brought into the world to outshine even Trajan" (*Greek Anthology* 9.210).

The introduction to Agathias' collection of epigrams also celebrated Justinian's military prowess (cf. Viljamaa 1968: 60–2):

> Let no barbarian, freeing himself from the yoke-strap that passes under his neck, dare to fix his gaze on our king, the mighty warrior; nor let any weak Persian woman raise her veil and look straight at him, but, kneeling on the ground and bending the proud arch of her neck, let her come uncalled and submit to Roman justice . . . Go now, thou Roman traveller, unescorted over the whole continent and leap in triumph . . . You will be amid the possessions of our wise king, whichever way you progress, since he has encompassed the world in his dominion. (*Greek Anthology* 4.3, lines 47–52, 77–8, 93–6 [tr. Paton])

Writing as he was for a newly enthroned emperor who had no military experience, Corippus might have been excused for the omission of any military references in his panegyric for Justin II, but he managed to use his description of Justin's accession attire adeptly to sidestep this seemingly insurmountable obstacle:

> He put on his royal limbs the red thongs . . . with which the victorious Roman emperor tramples conquered kings and tames barbarian necks. Only emperors, under whose feet is the blood of kings, can adopt this attire . . . The robe, which was adorned with tawny gold and outdid the sun as the emperor stretched out his right hand, covered the imperial shoulders in glowing purple. A golden brooch fastened the joins with its curving bite, and from the ends of chains hung jewels which the fortunate victory in the Gothic war produced and which Ravenna, loyal to our rulers, brought back, and which Belisarius carried from the Vandal court. The indications of your triumphs, pious Justinian, will remain while Justin is safe and rules the world. (Corippus *In Praise of Justin II* 2.105–27 [tr. Cameron])

The most detailed surviving examples of such literature, however, comprise the poetry of George of Pisidia celebrating the achievements of

Heraclius in the early seventh century, notably his *On the Persian Expedition* (early 620s) and *Heraclias* (late 620s) – both probably commissioned by Heraclius (Mary Whitby 1998b: 250–1). These poems are "chiefly concerned with the emperor as military leader" (Mary Whitby 1998b: 263) – hardly surprising, given the novelty of an emperor leading the army in person once again, and the successes which he achieved – but with a distinctively Christian emphasis which was novel (Mary Whitby 1994) (cf. above p. 39).

1.2.2. Visual media

> To these portraits [imperial statues and pictures] one emperor likes to add this representation, another that: some add depictions of the most famous cities offering them gifts, others, victories holding garlands over their heads; some, their officials doing homage to them, and decorated with the insignia of their office; others, hunting scenes and feats of archery; and yet others, barbarians overcome, and trampled under foot, or being slaughtered in various ways. (Gregory of Nazianzus *Orations* 4.80)

A range of artistic representations associating the emperor with victory has survived from late antiquity, together with descriptions of others no longer extant. As with the literary works just discussed, some of these artworks must have had a relatively restricted audience, but an audience which emperors nevertheless needed to impress and cultivate. This category of artwork includes:

1. plates made of precious metal, such as the silver dish from Kerch depicting a mounted emperor in military attire (probably Constantius II) and the silver *largitio* (largesse) plate of Valentinian I or II (Fig. 1.1),[14] likewise in military costume and flanked by soldiers (Leader-Newby 2004: 22–4), as well as the gold tableware which Justinian had inscribed with scenes of his triumphs (described by Corippus *In Praise of Justin II* 3.120–5);
2. the fine detail on imperial vestments, showing "barbarian phalanxes bending their necks, slaughtered kings and subject peoples in order... and Justinian himself... as victor in the midst of his court, trampling on the bold neck of the Vandal king" (Corippus *In Praise of Justin II* 1.275–87);
3. ivory carvings (typically exchanged as gifts among the aristocracy) such as the famous Probus diptych, depicting Honorius in military gear with a standard bearing the acclamation "May you always conquer in the name of Christ" (Kiilerich 1993: 65–8), and the so-called Barberini ivory, with a mounted emperor of the late fifth or sixth century triumphing over foreign enemies (Fig. 1.2); and

4. mosaics in the imperial palace like that on the ceiling of the vestibule known as the Bronze Gate, described by Procopius (cf. Michael Whitby 2000d: 64–5):

> On either side [of the mosaic] is war and battle, and many cities are being captured, some in Italy, some in Libya [i.e., north Africa]; and the emperor Justinian is winning victories through his general Belisarius, and the general is returning to the emperor, with his whole army intact, and he gives him spoils, both kings and kingdoms and all things that are most prized among men. In the centre stand the emperor and the empress Theodora, both seeming to rejoice and to celebrate victories over both the king of the Vandals and the king of the Goths, who approach them as prisoners of war to be led into bondage. Around them stands the Roman senate, all in festal mood. This spirit is

Figure 1.1 Silver largesse plate of Valentinian I or II.
This silver plate was discovered near Geneva in the eighteenth century, and is one of a number of silver plates from the fourth century depicting an emperor, probably given as gifts or rewards to leading courtiers. Although quite worn, the details on this particular example are still clear enough. The writing around the upper rim refers to the largesse of the emperor Valentinian, the central figure in military attire with a standard. The presence of soldiers emphasizes the military context, while in his right hand the emperor holds a globe surmounted by a winged victory offering him a victory wreath; at his feet are symbolic weapons of the defeated. For further discussion of this plate and the wider artistic context, see Leader-Newby 2004: 11–59. (Image © Musée d'art et d'histoire, Ville de Genève, inv. no. C 1241 (photographer: J. M. Yersin).)

Figure 1.2 The Barberini ivory.
Ivory was a valued artistic medium in late antiquity, most commonly used for consular diptychs – that is, hinged leaves of carved ivory depicting the consul and given as a celebratory gift to friends. This famous ivory (34 × 26 cm) seems to have served a somewhat different purpose, although it is unclear whether it was part of a diptych or a stand-alone item. It shows a victorious emperor in military dress on his charger, accompanied by a winged Victory and being presented by a military officer on the left with a statuette of victory, while conquered peoples present tribute in the lower register (where another winged Victory is also present), and Christ bestows his blessing from above. The identity of the emperor is not completely certain, but there are good reasons for thinking that it is Justinian (see Cutler 1991). The blank plaque on the right may originally have contained a civilian figure to balance the military figure on the left. The piece takes it name from the cardinal who owned it in the seventeenth century. (Image © Département des Objets d'art, Louvre, Paris (OA. 9063))

> expressed by the cubes of the mosaic, which by their colours depict exultation on their very countenances. So they rejoice and smile as they bestow on the emperor honours equal to those of God, because of the magnitude of his achievements. (Procopius *Buildings* 1.10.16–19 [trs. Dewing and Downey])

There was of course also a range of artwork accessible to the wider public. Again, some of these items have survived, while others are known only through literary descriptions or the drawings of early modern travelers. They include:

1. triumphal arches, of which those of Galerius in Thessalonica and of Constantine in Rome survive (Kleiner 1992: 418–25, 444–55), while that of Diocletian in Rome (the so-called "Arcus Novus") is known only from some of its reliefs (Kleiner 1992: 409–13),[15] and that of Honorius in Rome from an inscription recording success against the Goths in the early years of the fifth century (*ILS* 798);
2. victory columns, of which Theodosius' (commemorating the defeat of Goths in 386) is known primarily from literary sources and fragments (Kiilerich 1993: 51–5; Sodini 1994: 48–55), and Arcadius' (celebrating the suppression of Gainas in 400) is known mainly from detailed drawings made before its demolition in the early eighteenth century (Fig. 1.3; Liebeschuetz 1991: 120–1, 273–8; Kiilerich 1993: 55–64; Sodini 1994: 56–66);[16]
3. equestrian statues, all known examples of which were in Constantinople – that of Constantine (Socrates *Church History* 1.16; cf. Bassett 2004: 242–4), those of Theodosius I and of Marcian (both recorded in poems preserved in the *Greek Anthology* 16.65, 9.802; cf. Bassett 2004: 208–11 on the former), and that of Justinian (Mango 1993), of which Procopius provides a detailed description (cf. Michael Whitby 2000d: 65–6):

> And on the summit of the column stands a gigantic bronze horse, facing toward the east, a very noteworthy sight. He seems about to advance, and to be splendidly pressing forward . . . Upon this horse is mounted a colossal bronze figure of the emperor. And the figure is habited like Achilles, that is, the costume he wears is known by that name. He wears half-boots and his legs are not covered by greaves. Also he wears a breastplate in the heroic fashion, and a helmet covers his head and gives the impression that it moves up and down, and a dazzling light flashes forth from it . . . And he looks toward the rising sun, directing his course, I suppose, against the Persians. And in his left hand he holds a globe, by which the sculptor signifies that the whole earth and sea are subject to him, yet he has neither sword nor spear nor any other weapon, but a cross stands upon the globe which he carries, the emblem by which alone he has obtained both his empire and his victory in war. And stretching forth his right hand toward the rising sun and spreading out his

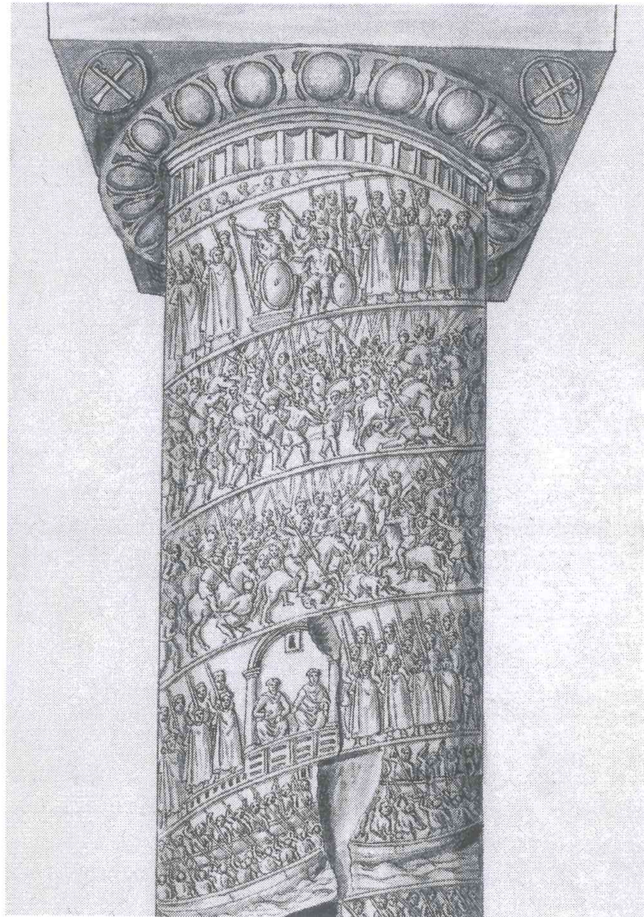

Figure 1.3 The victory column of Arcadius.
In 400, a rebellion by a Roman general, the Goth Gainas, which had threatened Constantinople itself was defeated. This victory was celebrated by the erection of a historiated (spiral) column, modeled on those of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius in Rome, in which reliefs depicted the sequence of events. The column itself has not survived, but a sixteenth-century German traveler made detailed drawings of the column when it still stood in Constantinople, and copies of these drawings are preserved in the Freshfield folder in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge. This particular part of one of the drawings, showing the upper spirals on the south side of the column, depicts two stages in the defeat of the rebellion – waterborne conflict on the Bosporus, and a land battle. The emperor Arcadius, who did not participate in the fighting, is shown twice: in the second lowest spiral, he is seen seated with another figure who is thought to be his brother Honorius, emperor in the west, symbolizing imperial solidarity, while in the top spiral, Arcadius is being crowned with a victory wreath after the successful outcome of the conflict (or alternatively, he is the seated figure looking on while a statue of perhaps his father Theodosius I is crowned). For further discussion of the episode and the column, see Liebeschuetz 1991: 111–26, 273–8. (Image reproduced by permission of the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge.)

fingers, he commands the barbarians in that quarter to remain at home and to advance no further. (Procopius *Buildings* 1.2 [trs. Dewing and Downey])[17]

4 imperial portraits and icons, whether in the form of busts or paintings, were widely distributed in the cities of the empire (Ando 2000: 228–53), and could often include reference to military success, as the passage at the start of this section indicates. Consider also the following excerpt from one of his sermons in which John Chrysostom cast around for an appropriate analogy to explain the idea of the Old Testament as a foreshadowing of the truth fully revealed in the New:

> Come, let us direct our thoughts to the images that painters depict. You have often seen an imperial image covered with blue colour [i.e., the background wash]. Then the painter draws white lines, delineating an emperor, an imperial throne, horses standing nearby, bodyguards, and enemies lying below in chains. But while you watch these things being roughly sketched, you do not know the whole picture, but neither are you completely in the dark, for you are aware, however indistinctly, that it is a man and a horse being drawn. You do not know the identity of the emperor and the enemy with absolute certainty until the application of the colours reveals the truth and makes the appearance certain. (*Sermon on the words of Paul, "We do not want you to be ignorant," PG* 51.247)

One such painting, depicting Roman emperors on golden thrones with Huns lying dead at their feet, could be seen in fifth-century Milan – that is, until Attila captured the city and ordered the scene to be repainted so that it showed Attila on a throne with emperors pouring sacks of gold at his feet (Priscus fr.22.3). Likewise, it was common practice during games in the circus at fourth-century Rome to display paintings showing the bravery of the emperor or the strength of the soldiers (Eunapius fr.68).[18] Nor should one forget depictions of Victory personified, such as are known from provincial cities like Ephesus (Roueché 2002). Even if these did not always have an explicit link with an emperor, they must nonetheless have served to reinforce the general ideology of victory.

Another, less permanent visual medium was victory ceremonial. Such occasions were necessarily ephemeral, but the opportunity they provided for a degree of active participation on the part of at least some of the emperor's subjects served to enhance their impact significantly. The central ritual was the military triumph, with its traditions stretching back centuries into the Republican period of Roman history, a ritual which evolved and changed during late antiquity, particularly under the joint impact of the increasing marginalization of the city of Rome and of the influence of Christianity (full discussion in McCormick 1986: 11–130). Other events might also be staged in celebration of military success, such as the "[annual] circus games [i.e., chariot races] staged [in Rome] for the victory [of Constantius II in 344] over the inhabitants of Adiabenica [a region of

Mesopotamia]" (*Calendar of Polemius Silvius*, January 31). It has been observed, interestingly, that the frequency of such occasions seems to have increased when the empire was struggling militarily (McCormick 1986: 43–4).

The major limitation inherent in these different visual media was that they were located and took place in the major cities, which meant that many inhabitants of the empire would still never have seen or experienced them. There was, however, one visual medium which could be relied upon to achieve wide circulation in the provinces – coinage – and emperors were clearly aware of its potential as a means of advertisement. Coins had the additional advantage that they combined visual messages with succinct slogans (traditionally referred to as the "legend," in the root sense of the word, viz. that which is available for reading). Importantly, these slogans would have been comprehensible to those with otherwise limited literacy. Perusal of the relevant indices of *Roman Imperial Coinage* leaves no doubt that victory was consistently the most common theme among the range of slogans used from the third to the fifth century, a pattern which the standard catalogue on early Byzantine coinage (Bellinger 1966) confirms as continuing through the sixth century.

Coins also communicated the military prowess of emperors through a range of images. The obverse side of the coin, which usually bore a bust of the emperor, almost invariably portrayed him in military gear of some sort. So, for example, in the early fourth century the emperor was shown wearing a military cloak (*paludamentum*) and breastplate "with a laurel wreath on his head emphasizing the triumph and perpetual success constantly associated with him" (Bruun 1966: 36). This remained broadly typical throughout the fourth century, until a major change occurred in the eastern half of the empire soon after the death of Theodosius I, when the angle of the bust moved from side on to facing, and the laurel wreath was replaced with "a crested, diademed helmet. In the right hand and carried over the shoulder behind the head is a spear, and in front of the left shoulder a shield which usually carries the motif of a horseman riding to the right over an enemy and striking him with a spear" (Kent 1994: 47)(Fig. 1.4 (left)). It is tempting to see this more pronounced military emphasis, which remained standard in the east into the sixth century, as an attempt to compensate for the lack of direct military involvement on the part of Arcadius and his successors, although there was no comparable move in the west.[19]

The reverse sides of coins offered more scope for variation, but a figure personifying Victory is a common feature throughout the fourth century and beyond, while the emperor treading on an enemy captive also occurs (Fig. 1.5 (right)). Some novelties were introduced in the fifth century, notably the advent in the east of Victory holding a long jeweled cross from the 420s onward (Fig.1.4 (right)), and in the west at about the same time, the emperor placing his foot on the head of a human-headed serpent,

Figure 1.4 Gold *solidus* of the emperor Anastasius (491–518).
The obverse side (on the left) of this coin shows the emperor in a typical representation from the eastern half of the empire during the fifth century, in military attire (crested helmet, breastplate, spear, shield), with the shield depicting a rider trampling on an enemy – all this, despite the fact that emperors in this period rarely if ever actually participated in military campaigning themselves. The reverse side (on the right) shows another typical image from fifth-century coins: a winged Victory holding a jewel-studded cross – an interesting fusion of artistic motifs from Classical and Christian traditions. The visual message is reinforced by the slogan *Victoria*. (Image reproduced by permission of Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC.)

Figure 1.5 Gold *solidus* of the emperor Valentinian III (425–55).
The reverse side (on the right) of this coin shows a motif in common use by western emperors during the first quarter of the fifth century: the emperor in military attire holding an army standard in one hand and, in the other, a globe surmounted by a winged Victory proffering a victory wreath, while he treads on a prostrate captive; the slogan is again *Victoria*. (Image reproduced by permission of Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC.)

representing a defeated usurper (Kent 1994: 55–6). It is worth emphasizing that the theme of victory features as regularly on issues of bronze coinage as on gold *solidi*, since rural inhabitants were more likely to encounter smaller-denomination coins.

Further Reading

There is no detailed analysis of **imperial involvement in warfare** during late antiquity, although Kaegi 1981: 20–5 and Michael Whitby 2004: 179–86, 2005: 367–77, have some useful comments; for imperial involvement in campaigning during the Principate, see Campbell 1984: 59–69.

On the theme of **victory** in late Roman art, Grabar 1936: 125–62 remains valuable, as do Gagé 1933 and Straub 1939 on victory as an element of imperial ideology. Ferris 2000 includes discussion of representations of the empire's enemies in late Roman art. On victory ceremonial in late antiquity, the relevant sections of McCormick 1986 are fundamental.

2

MILITARY LOYALTIES AND CIVIL WAR

The common association of late antiquity with barbarian invasions means that the form of war which most readily comes to mind in the context of this period is external conflict with neighboring states and peoples. However, late antiquity also witnessed a recrudescence of civil war with a regularity unknown since the late Republican period. A high incidence of civil war particularly characterized the mid third century, forcefully reminding subsequent emperors of the need to work hard at retaining the loyalty of troops. The first part of this chapter examines the varied strategies emperors used to reinforce ties of loyalty and so reduce the risk of military challenges and internal conflict. Needless to say, those strategies were not always effective, and the second part of the chapter investigates episodes of civil war and military unrest with a view to identifying the factors responsible, the changing patterns of incidence over the course of late antiquity, and the strategies employed by emperors to deal with ambitious generals.

2.1. Retaining Soldiers' Loyalties

A range of factors had the potential to influence the loyalties of soldiers. Perhaps the most obvious was military success, and so the range of media through which victory (or failing that, the appearance thereof) was communicated to the inhabitants of the empire (as discussed in the second part of the previous chapter) was also of particular significance for the emperor's relations with the army. However, there were other strategies for reinforcing loyalty, ranging from rituals of initiation to material incentives and symbolic gestures of identification, each of which will be discussed in this section. As in the previous chapter, an essential element throughout is the changing pattern of imperial involvement in warfare, since non-participation in campaigning by the overwhelming majority of emperors from the end of the fourth century onward removed them from regular direct contact with their troops.