

SOLDIERS AND EQUESTRIAN RANK IN THE THIRD CENTURY AD

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This article considers a group of inscriptions, ranging in date from the late second to late third centuries AD, which indicates that low-ranked members of the Roman army gained access to equestrian rank in this period. The inscriptions attest two interrelated phenomena: (1) the promotion of soldiers to posts in the militiae equestres, a series of officer commands usually held by men from the ordo equester; and (2) grants of equestrian status to soldiers' sons, many of whom were only very young. These developments represent a marked departure from the circumstances that prevailed in the early Empire, when equestrian rank could be bestowed only by the emperor on men who possessed a census qualification of 400,000 sesterces. In this article, I propose that successive emperors gave soldiers greater access to the militiae equestres, and in some cases awarded equestrian rank to their sons, because they recognized the widespread desire for social mobility among the ranks of the army. The widening of access to equestrian rank within the Roman army contributed to the devaluation of this status over the course of the third century AD.

Questo articolo prende in considerazione un gruppo di iscrizioni, la cui datazione è compresa tra tardo II e tardo III secolo d.C., che indica che i membri di basso livello sociale dell'esercito romano guadagnarono l'accesso al rango equestre in questo periodo. Le iscrizioni attestano due fenomeni correlati: (1) la promozione dei soldati da destinare alle militiae equestres, una serie di ordini di ufficiali generalmente rivestiti da uomini provenienti dall'ordo equester; e (2) sovvenzioni dello status equestre a figli di soldati, molti dei quali erano molto giovani. Questi sviluppi rappresentano una notevole mossa dalle circostanze che prevalevano nell'Alto-Impero, quando il rango equestre poteva essere concesso solo dall'imperatore ad un uomo che possedeva una qualifica censoria pari a 400.000 sesterzi. In questo articolo, propongo che imperatori che si succedettero al trono diedero ai soldati un maggiore accesso alle militiae equestres, e in alcuni casi conferirono il rango equestre ai loro figli, perché questi riconoscessero il diffuso desiderio di mobilità sociale tra i gradi dell'esercito. L'ampliamento dell'accesso al rango equestre all'interno dell'esercito romano contribuì alla svalutazione di questo status nel corso del III secolo d.C.

INTRODUCTION

The army was one of the most significant institutions in the Roman world, with a social, cultural and economic impact extending far beyond the battlefield. It would have been difficult for any of the Empire's 60 million or so inhabitants to go about their daily lives without coming into contact with the military in some capacity: soldiers manned customs-posts, acted as police officers, enforced the law, and

built bath complexes, roads and aqueducts.¹ The army also served as the prime conduit of social mobility in the Roman Empire, with service in the legions offering even the poorest citizens regular pay, the prospects of promotion and a healthy discharge bonus on retirement.² In this article, I shall consider one particular aspect of this phenomenon, namely the acquisition of equestrian rank by Roman soldiers and their sons in the third century. Membership of the equestrian order (*ordo equester*) was one of the most prestigious status designations in the Roman world, second only to the position of a senator.³ The term *ordo equester* reflects the order's origin as the cavalry of the early Roman Republic, but by the Imperial period it encompassed a much broader range of the Empire's inhabitants, including town councillors, junior army officers, prominent lawyers and government administrators.⁴ Given the high standing of the equestrian order and its members, the fact that soldiers were able to gain access to this status marks a significant development in the evolution of the Roman social hierarchy. It was one of several important changes in the army and administration in the third century, which witnessed the transferral of major army commands from senators to equestrians, the reorganization of the provincial administration, and the elevation of emperors from the ranks of the legions rather than from the senatorial aristocracy.⁵

Before examining the specific problems of the third century, it is first necessary to outline the normal circumstances in which a Roman citizen entered the *ordo equester* in the Imperial period. Two major points are uncontroversial: to be eligible for equestrian status, a man had to possess free birth going back three generations, and own property worth 400,000 sesterces.⁶ There has, however,

¹ For a general overview of this topic, see B. Campbell, *War and Society in Imperial Rome, 31 BC–AD 284* (London/New York, 2002). All dates are AD unless otherwise noted. The following standard abbreviations are used for epigraphic works: *AE* = *L'année épigraphique*; *CIL* = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*; *ILS* = *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* (ed. H. Dessau); *P.Flor.* = *Papiri greco-egizii, papiri fiorentini* (ed. G. Vitelli and D. Comparetti); *RIB* = *Roman Inscriptions of Britain* (ed. R.G. Collingwood and R.P. Wright).

² C. Adams, 'War and society', in P. Sabin, H. Van Wees and M. Whitby (eds), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare. Volume II: Rome from the Late Republic to the Late Empire* (Cambridge, 2007), 198–232, esp. pp. 211–15.

³ The most accessible summaries of the equestrian order in the Imperial period are P.A. Brunt, 'Princeps and equites', *Journal of Roman Studies* 73 (1983), 42–75; R.P. Duncan-Jones, 'Who were the equites?', in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History XIII* (Brussels, 2006), 183–223.

⁴ G. Alföldy, *The Social History of Rome*, trans. D. Braund and F. Pollock (London, 1984), 122, estimated that there were some 20,000 *equites* during the Augustan period; this number would have increased over the following centuries.

⁵ The best recent overview of these and other social, cultural and economic changes has been provided by A.K. Bowman, P. Garnsey and D. Rathbone (eds), *The Cambridge Ancient History, Volume XII* (second edition), *The Crisis of Empire, A.D. 193–337* (Cambridge, 2005).

⁶ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 33.32; A. Stein, *Der Römische Ritterstand* (Munich, 1927), 30; T.P. Wiseman, 'The definition of *eques Romanus* in the late Republic and early Empire', *Historia* 19 (1970), 67–83, esp. p. 75; F.G.B. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (London, 1977), 279. This property qualification still existed in the Antonine period, as shown

been some debate as to whether these qualifications were sufficient in and of themselves, or whether equestrian rank had to be officially granted by the emperor.⁷ The evidence of the third-century jurist Ulpian shows that the honour of the public horse (*equus publicus*) was bestowed by the emperor.⁸ There are also honorific and funerary inscriptions that state that an individual had been ‘furnished with the public horse’ (*equo publico exornatus*), sometimes naming a specific emperor as the benefactor.⁹ However, a number of scholars has argued that equestrians who were formally granted the *equus publicus* by the *princeps* merely constituted a privileged group within the larger *ordo equester*, which encompassed all men who possessed a fortune of 400,000 sesterces.¹⁰ There is, I believe, convincing evidence that this is not the case, and that to be considered an *equus Romanus* an individual had to have received the rank from the emperor.¹¹ Duncan-Jones’s survey of inscriptions from north Africa and Italy shows that the term *equus equo publico*, or variations thereof, was used to refer to members of the *ordo equester* from the early first century until the 230s. In contrast, the more straightforward title of *equus Romanus* is attested only after the mid-second century in Italy, and from the Severan period onwards in north Africa.¹² If we accept the proposal that there were men who had not received the *equus publicus* from the emperor, but still considered themselves members of the *ordo equester*, then what term did they use to describe themselves on inscriptions before the mid-second century?¹³ It certainly could not have been *equus Romanus*, since that title is attested epigraphically only in the age of the Antonine and Severan emperors. This means that the terms *equus equo publico*

by an inscription (*CIL* X 7507) referring to 400,000 sesterces as necessary for enrolment in the *decuriae*. The minimum age at which one usually could enter the equestrian order was eighteen (*Cassius Dio* 52.20.1).

⁷ The various scholarly positions were discussed in detail by S. Demougin, *L’ordre équestre sous les Julio-Claudiens* (Paris, 1988), 78–84, 189–225; what follows is merely a summary of the main points of contention.

⁸ Ulpian, *Tituli* 7.1. The term *equus publicus* dates back to the early Republican period, in which the state provided horses (or the money to purchase them) to members of the cavalry. See H. Hill, *The Roman Middle Class in the Republican Period* (Oxford, 1952), 10–11.

⁹ Note, for example, *CIL* IX 23 = *ILS* 6472 (granted by Hadrian), *CIL* VIII 20144 (Antoninus Pius), *CIL* VI 1586 (Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus), *CIL* XIV 390 (Marcus Aurelius).

¹⁰ Wiseman, ‘The definition’ (above, n. 6), 82–3; Millar, *The Emperor* (above, n. 6), 279–84; M.I. Hendersen, ‘The establishment of the *equester ordo*’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 53 (1963), 61–72.

¹¹ This was the view of C. Nicolet, *L’ordre équestre à l’époque républicaine* (Paris, 1966), 177–88; Demougin, *L’ordre équestre* (above, n. 7), 198; Duncan-Jones, ‘Who were the *equites*?’ (above, n. 3), 219–20. G. Rowe, *Princes and Political Cultures: the New Tiberian Senatorial Decrees* (Ann Arbor, 2002), 73, preferred to envisage a broad range of qualifications that signified equestrian status.

¹² R.P. Duncan-Jones, ‘Equestrian rank in the cities of the African provinces under the principate: an epigraphic survey’, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 35 (1967), 147–86, esp. pp. 149–51; Duncan-Jones, ‘Who were the *equites*?’ (above, n. 3), 219–20.

¹³ Duncan-Jones, ‘Who were the *equites*?’ (above, n. 3), 220. The term *equus Romanus* and its plural *equites Romani* were the standard terms used in literature to refer to equestrians throughout the Republican and Imperial periods.

and *equus Romanus* did not denote individuals of different status, but were both used to describe members of the *ordo equester*.

There is significant literary and epigraphic evidence that confirms the decisive role played by the emperor and his administration in determining access to equestrian status. From the time of Augustus onwards, emperors regularly reviewed the ranks of the *equites*, enrolling new members and demoting those who failed to live up to the appropriate moral standards.¹⁴ Senatorial advisers assisted in this process: Augustus relied on the support of ten such senators in examining individual *equites*, and L. Volusius Saturninus is known to have played a role in selecting candidates for the equestrian *decuriae*.¹⁵ As the size of the *ordo equester* grew, the emperor is unlikely to have interviewed every candidate for the equestrian order personally,¹⁶ but admission to the *ordo* still seems to have been centrally controlled. Cassius Dio, whose *Roman History* was written in the early third century, recommended in the ‘Speech of Maecenas’ that the responsibility for reviewing the rolls of the senatorial and equestrian orders should be in the hands of a senior senator, rather than an *equus*.¹⁷ The implication of Dio’s suggestion is that in the early third century, such a task was entrusted to an equestrian official. This hypothesis is confirmed by an inscription attesting the procurator M. Aquilius Felix in the post of *a censibus equitum Roman(orum)*, which suggests that he possessed oversight of the census qualifications of equestrians.¹⁸ Furthermore, Herodian writes of an actor advanced by Elagabalus to a high office, which required him to supervise the morals of the youth and draw up the lists of senators and equestrians.¹⁹ The imperial administration evidently continued to monitor membership of the *ordo equester* into the Severan period.²⁰ Even though the property qualification of 400,000 sesterces seems to have lapsed over the course of the third century, imperial decisions preserved in the *Codex Theodosianus* show that emperors maintained an interest in regulating access to the *ordo equester*.²¹ It is

¹⁴ Augustus: Suetonius, *Augustus* 37, 39, 46. Gaius: Suetonius, *Caligula* 16; Cassius Dio 59.9.5. Claudius: Suetonius, *Claudius* 16. Vespasian: Suetonius, *Vespasian* 9.

¹⁵ Suetonius, *Augustus* 39; Tacitus, *Annals* 3.30.

¹⁶ That said, the *Hadriani Sententiae* (6 = *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum* III.33) preserves a story concerning the Emperor Hadrian in which he addressed a man petitioning for the *equus publicus*, discussed by Duncan-Jones, ‘Who were the *equites*?’ (above, n. 3), 221, and Millar, *The Emperor* (above, n. 6), 281.

¹⁷ Cassius Dio 52.21.3–5.

¹⁸ AE 1945, 80. CIL X 6657 = ILS 1387 gives him the slightly different title *a(d) census equit(um) Roman(orum)*. See H.-G. Pflaum, *Les carrières procuratoriennes équestres sous le haut-empire romain* (Paris, 1960), 598–601.

¹⁹ Herodian 5.7.7.

²⁰ It is uncertain whether Felix’s position is identical with that of the *procurator a censibus* attested in the Antonine period, as argued by J.H. Oliver, ‘M. Aquilius Felix’, *American Journal of Philology* 67 (1946), 311–19. See Pflaum, *Les carrières* (above, n. 18), 600–1, who regarded it as a new title.

²¹ *Codex Theodosianus* 6.35.37, 6.35.38, 13.5.16. Regulation of equestrian rank was the subject of an edict to the province of Bithynia issued by Licinius: *Codex Theodosianus* 8.4.3, 10.7.1,

consequently unlikely that a Roman emperor ever would have permitted a man to assume equestrian rank without authorization, even if he did possess the requisite census amount.²² Membership of the equestrian order could not even be inherited, as shown by inscriptions revealing that descendants of *equites* did not become equestrians themselves.²³ If their sons did acquire equestrian status, it was often explicitly acknowledged in inscriptions.²⁴ Therefore, it is clear that in the Imperial period, all *equites Romani* not only possessed free birth and 400,000 sesterces, but also had been officially granted the status by the emperor.²⁵

THE PROBLEM

The stringent requirements for entrance to the *ordo equester*, including the substantial property qualification, mean that the acquisition of this status by soldiers represents a significant achievement. The primary source of evidence for the change is a group of inscriptions dated to the third century. Most of these monuments are epitaphs erected to commemorate deceased soldiers or members of their family, but the corpus also includes altars and honorific statue-bases.²⁶ The inscriptions reveal that comparatively junior members of the Roman army, that is, men who held the rank of centurion or lower, were able to obtain direct promotion to officer commands previously restricted to members of the *ordo equester*. These positions, including the command of auxiliary *cohortes* and *alae*, and five of the six legionary tribunates, are collectively known as the *militiae equestres*.²⁷ There were four grades in the *militiae*, but candidates were not required to serve at all four stages, and the vast majority of officers did not do so, especially since there was a decreasing number of positions available at each level.²⁸ The normal route to these

10.20.1, 12.1.5, with S. Corcoran, *The Empire of the Tetrarchs: Imperial Pronouncements and Government AD 284–324*, revised edition (Oxford, 2000), 283–4. For discussion of the property qualification, see below, pp. 107–8.

²² This does not exclude the possibility that men who possessed the necessary wealth claimed to be *equites* in inscriptions and in their public life, as there is certainly evidence for the usurpation of equestrian rank. See M. Reinhold, ‘Usurpation of status and status symbols in the Roman Empire’, *Historia* 20 (1971), 275–302, esp. pp. 281–2.

²³ Stein, *Der Römische Ritterstand* (above, n. 6), 76; Nicolet, *L’ordre équestre* (above, n. 11), 183–4; Duncan-Jones, ‘Who were the *equites*?’ (above, n. 3), 185.

²⁴ *CIL* XI 4209 = *ILS* 6630.

²⁵ Stein, *Der Römische Ritterstand* (above, n. 6), 54–9; Duncan-Jones, ‘Equestrian rank’ (above, n. 12), 149–51; Duncan-Jones, ‘Who were the *equites*?’ (above, n. 3), 219–20.

²⁶ For a general overview of such military monuments, see V.M. Hope, ‘Trophies and tombstones: commemorating the Roman soldier’, *World Archaeology* 35 (2003), 79–97.

²⁷ The sixth legionary tribune, the *tribunus laticlavius*, was a senator, and notionally second-in-command of the legion: P. Southern, *The Roman Army: a Social and Institutional History* (Oxford, 2007), 126–7.

²⁸ There were around 300 positions in the *militia prima*, as *praefectus cohortis quingenariae* or a *tribunus cohortis*, compared to nine in the fourth grade, as a *praefectus alae milliariae*. See the classic

equestrian officer commands would be through the support of a senatorial patron or the emperor himself.²⁹ The vast majority of these men was well-connected municipal aristocrats, members of the curial class who sought a short period of military service (generally three to four years), in order to enhance their dignity and standing in their local community.³⁰

The earliest securely dated case of a former soldier being advanced to a post in the *militiae* is P. Aelius Valerius, who served as tribune of the *cohors I Campanorum*, stationed in Pannonia Inferior, in 212. A fragmentary dedicatory inscription from Sirmium records his position as *trib(unus) ex vet(erano)*, indicating that he was a legionary veteran who then received a commission as a tribune.³¹ There are ten such examples of soldiers promoted to an equestrian command (including Aelius Valerius), but if we include veterans described as *militiae petitores*, the number increases to 24.³² The term *militiae petitor* indicates that a man had been granted the right to seek a commission in the *militiae equestres*, but had yet to be appointed to a specific post.³³ An example of the use of this terminology can be found on the sarcophagus of C. Tauricius Verus, dated c. 233. It records that he was a former *beneficiarius consularis* and *equestris militiae petitor*, suggesting that Verus would have been awarded an officer's commission had one become vacant before he died.³⁴ The earliest example of the title *militiae petitor* dates to the reign of Commodus, only a generation before the veteran Aelius Valerius is attested in post as an auxiliary tribune.³⁵ We might reasonably wonder, therefore, how soldiers who had not even reached the rank of centurion were able to obtain posts in the *militiae equestres*, or at least be in a position to canvass for such a command as a *militiae petitor*. The issue is connected closely with a second group of

study of E. Birley, 'The equestrian officers of the Roman army', in E. Birley, *Roman Britain and the Roman Army: Collected Papers* (Kendal, 1953), 133–53. Nor was military service a prerequisite for procuratorial posts in the imperial government, although it has been estimated that some 85 per cent of equestrian administrators had seen at least one tour of duty as an officer: Brunt, 'Princeps and equites' (above, n. 3), 48.

²⁹ A.R. Birley, 'The commissioning of equestrian officers', in J.J. Wilkes (ed.), *Documenting the Roman Army: Essays in Honour of Margaret Roxan* (London, 2003), 1–18.

³⁰ Birley, 'The commissioning of equestrian officers' (above, n. 29), 2; Birley, 'The equestrian officers' (above, n. 28), 135–7; B. Dobson, 'Legionary centurion or equestrian officer? A comparison of pay and prospects', *Ancient Society* 3 (1972), 193–207, esp. p. 194; H. Devijver and F. Van Wonterghem, 'The funerary monuments of equestrian officers of the late Republic and early Empire in Italy (50 BC–100 AD)', *Ancient Society* 21 (1990), 59–98, esp. pp. 74–5.

³¹ *CIL* III 3237; E. Birley, 'Septimius Severus and the Roman army', *Epigraphische Studien* 8 (1969), 63–82, esp. p. 76.

³² These examples are presented in full in Tables 1 and 2, below.

³³ G. Henzen, 'Monumenti: iscrizione militare', *Bullettino dell'Institut di Corrispondenza Archeologica* (1868), 71–3.

³⁴ *AE* 1956, 252. For Tauricius's career, see R. Haensch, 'Veteranus ex beneficiario consularis, equestris militiae petitor: mögliche Gründe für einen außergewöhnlichen Aufstieg', *Kölner Jahrbuch* 34 (2001), 135–9.

³⁵ *CIL* VI 3550 = *ILS* 2759; Stein, *Der Römische Ritterstand* (above, n. 6), 158.

inscriptions, predominantly from the late second to mid-third centuries, in which soldiers' sons are attested with the title of *equus Romanus*.³⁶ Some of the children were very young indeed: an extreme example is that of T. Flavius Maritimus, the son of a centurion of the *legio II Parthica*, whose epitaph accords him the title *equus Romanus*, although he was only eight months old when he died in 244.³⁷ It might be objected that the number of inscriptions attesting soldiers in the *militiae equestres* is relatively small — some 24 examples — and the group of monuments recording soldiers' sons as *equites Romani* is not much larger.³⁸ But collectively they are significant because they attest a real change in the ability of military men to access officer commands and equestrian status in the third century.

Prior to these developments, equestrian rank was not widespread within the Roman army. Even among centurions, the status was confined to those commissioned *ex equite Romano*, a term that signified that they were already *equites* when appointed to the post. There are some isolated cases of centurions who were promoted to the *ordo* by the emperor, but, even then, their descendants did not inherit equestrian status.³⁹ Equestrian rank usually was confined to the *primipilares*, men who had been the chief centurion of a legion: they qualified for a discharge bonus of 600,000 sesterces, which was more than sufficient to meet one of the primary requirements for membership of the *ordo*.⁴⁰ A *primipilaris* who remained in the army could be promoted to the post of *praefectus castrorum*, or to one of the Rome tribunates (in the *vigiles*, urban cohorts, praetorian guard or *equites singulares*).⁴¹ However, this status was not easy to acquire, and soldiers were appointed to the post of *primus pilus* only after a lifetime of military service. Promotion to the centurionate came after fifteen to twenty years in the legions, and centurions served on average a further twenty years.⁴² No *primus pilus* is recorded to have been

³⁶ Stein, *Der Römische Ritterstand* (above, n. 6), 159.

³⁷ CIL III 14403a.

³⁸ It has been estimated that there are approximately 300,000 extant Roman inscriptions: L. Keppie, *Understanding Latin Inscriptions* (Baltimore, 1991), 9.

³⁹ Centurions: E. Birley, 'The origins of legionary centurions', in Birley, *Roman Britain and the Roman Army* (Kendal, 1953), 104–24. *Ex equite Romano*: Dobson, 'Legionary centurion' (above, n. 30), 193, 196; B. Dobson, 'The centurionate and social mobility during the principate', in C. Nicolet (ed.), *Recherches sur les structures sociales dans l'antiquité classique* (Paris, 1970), 99–115.

⁴⁰ B. Dobson, *Die Primipilares: Entwicklung und Bedeutung, Laufbahnen und Persönlichkeiten eines Römischen Offiziersranges* (Bonn, 1978), 116.

⁴¹ B. Dobson, 'The significance of the centurion and *primipilaris* in the Roman army and administration', in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.1 (Berlin, 1974), 392–434, esp. pp. 413–20.

⁴² Promotion to the centurionate: D.J. Breeze, 'The organisation of the career structure of the *immunes* and *principales* of the Roman army', *Bonner Jahrbücher* 174 (1974), 245–92, esp. pp. 273–4; B. Dobson and D.J. Breeze, 'The Rome cohorts and the legionary centurionate', *Epigraphische Studien* 8 (1969), 100–24, esp. p. 103. Length of service as a centurion: Dobson, 'The centurionate and social mobility' (above, n. 39), 101–2.

appointed before the age of 49; most seem to have been in their 50s.⁴³ Few legionaries would reach such a high rank, if only because they would not be likely to survive to an age at which they could achieve it.⁴⁴ Equestrian status evidently was not conferred on soldiers who were junior either in rank or age, but on those men who had accumulated the necessary seniority and wealth to meet the qualifications for entrance into the *ordo equester* after years of service. The direct promotion of soldiers to the *militiae equestres*, or the advancement of their sons to equestrian rank itself, thus represents an important development.

Scholars of the Roman army have not neglected this topic. The accepted interpretation of the inscriptional evidence is that the appointment of soldiers to the *militiae equestres* was the result of a shortage of candidates from the municipal aristocracies in the third century.⁴⁵ The grants of equestrian rank to the sons of soldiers and centurions likewise have been regarded as an attempt by the imperial administration to compensate for a shortfall in the number of willing officers.⁴⁶ It has been proposed that these developments were connected with an attempt to ‘professionalize’ the equestrian officer corps by Septimius Severus and his successors, who decided to promote soldiers who were more competent and experienced than members of the curial classes.⁴⁷ There are several problems with these theories. Not only was the concept of professionalism itself somewhat foreign to the Roman mind-set,⁴⁸ but the events of the third century did not alter dramatically the way in which positions were awarded in the Roman army. In the late Empire, promotions to officer rank continued to be made through patronage, rather than being based explicitly on considerations such as qualifications and experience.⁴⁹ Instead of envisioning

⁴³ Dobson, *Die Primipilares* (above, n. 40), 411.

⁴⁴ For mortality rates among Roman soldiers, see W. Scheidel, *Measuring Sex, Age and Death in the Roman Empire: Explorations in Ancient Demography* (*Journal of Roman Archaeology, Supplementary Series* 21) (Ann Arbor, 1996), 124–9.

⁴⁵ M.G. Jarrett, ‘The African contribution to the imperial equestrian service’, *Historia* 12 (1963), 209–26, esp. p. 226; Birley, ‘Septimius Severus’ (above, n. 31), 76–7; E. Birley, ‘A Roman altar from Old Kilpatrick and interim commanders of auxiliary units’, *Latomus* 42 (1983), 73–83, esp. p. 83; H. Devijver, ‘Veränderungen in der Zusammensetzung der ritterlichen Offiziere von Septimius Severus bis Gallienus’, in W. Eck (ed.), *Prosopographie und Sozialgeschichte* (Cologne, 1993), 205–31, esp. p. 227. See also Birley, ‘The commissioning of equestrian officers’ (above, n. 29), 11; Dobson, ‘The centurionate and social mobility’ (above, n. 39), 104; M. Handy, *Die Severer und das Heer* (Berlin, 2009), 206.

⁴⁶ Dobson, ‘The significance’ (above, n. 41), 401; L. de Blois, *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus* (Leiden, 1976), 38; H. Devijver, ‘*Successoribus acceptis militare desinunt* (Digesta, XXVIII, 1, 21)’, in H. Devijver, *The Equestrian Officers of the Roman Imperial Army II* (Stuttgart, 1992), 212–21, esp. p. 221.

⁴⁷ H. Devijver, ‘Les milices équestres et la hiérarchie militaire’, in Y. Le Bohec (ed.), *La hiérarchie (Rangordnung) de l’armée romaine sous le haut-empire* (Paris, 1995), 175–91, at p. 184; Handy, *Die Severer* (above, n. 45), 206–9.

⁴⁸ K. Hopkins and G. Burton, ‘Ambition and withdrawal: the senatorial aristocracy under the emperors’, in K. Hopkins, *Death and Renewal* (Cambridge, 1983), 120–220, esp. p. 153.

⁴⁹ A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1964), II, 637–42; J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (London, 1989), 270.

the third century as a period of sudden and dramatic change, it is necessary to place these developments within the wider evolution of the Roman government and administration throughout the Imperial period.⁵⁰

The current interpretations of the phenomenon are formulated primarily from the perspective of Roman élites who did not spend their entire lives in the army: the emperor, his advisers and members of the curial classes. Little attention has been paid thus far to the experiences and viewpoints of the soldiers themselves.⁵¹ This is particularly regrettable, since our major source of evidence for the acquisition of equestrian rank comes from honorific and funerary monuments set up by the soldiers, their army comrades or family members, in order to commemorate their careers and achievements. In many ways, the text of these inscriptions is formulaic, recording basic facts such as their age and the positions they had held. But it is important to remember that, despite the spread of the ‘epigraphic habit’ throughout the Roman Empire, it was always a conscious decision to erect an inscribed monument.⁵² At every stage of the process, choices had to be made regarding the wording of the text and the iconographic details. By recording facts such as the length of time served, decorations received and promotions bestowed, the inscriptions expressed a sense of pride in a soldier’s service and their belonging to the wider military community.⁵³ The attention to detail is indicative also of a competitive spirit within the army, since honours and achievements served as a way of distinguishing a soldier from his peers.⁵⁴ These monuments therefore are carefully constructed pieces of self-representation, through which soldiers and their family expressed their status and identity to the wider world.⁵⁵ In order to

⁵⁰ Note, for example, the work of B. Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army, 31 BC–AD 235* (Oxford, 1984), 408–9, who demonstrated that the Severan period did not see a sudden ‘militarization’ of the Roman Imperial government through the promotion of greater numbers of centurions to administrative posts.

⁵¹ See, particularly, S. James, ‘Writing the legions: the development and future of Roman military studies in Britain’, *Archaeological Journal* 159 (2002), 1–58, on the need to examine Roman soldiers as people, rather than tools of the state.

⁵² On the epigraphic habit, see R. MacMullen, ‘The epigraphic habit in the Roman Empire’, *American Journal of Philology* 103 (1982), 233–46. G. Woolf, ‘Monumental writing and the expansion of Roman society in the early Empire’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 86 (1996), 22–39, analysed the diffusion of epigraphic culture throughout the provinces.

⁵³ Hope, ‘Trophies and tombstones’ (above, n. 26), 85; J. Coulston, ‘Armed and belted men’: the soldiery in imperial Rome’, in J. Coulston and H. Dodge (eds), *Ancient Rome: the Archaeology of the Eternal City* (Oxford, 2000), 76–118.

⁵⁴ J.E. Lendon, *Empire of Honour: the Art of Government in the Roman World* (Oxford, 1997), 239, 245–7.

⁵⁵ The same point was made in analyses of senatorial and equestrian career inscriptions. See in particular Campbell, *The Emperor* (above, n. 50), 329–30; W. Eck, ‘Senatorial self-representation: developments in the Augustan period’, in F. Millar and E. Segal (eds), *Caesar Augustus: Seven Aspects* (Oxford, 1984), 129–67; W. Eck, ‘Auf der Suche nach Personen und Persönlichkeiten. *Cursus honorum* und Biographie’, in K. Vossing (ed.), *Biographie und Prosopographie: Internationales Kolloquium zum 65. Geburtstag von Anthony R. Birley* (Stuttgart, 2005), 53–72.

consider properly the reasons why soldiers gained access to equestrian rank, it is necessary to examine the inscriptional evidence carefully. The texts do not tell us why these particular soldiers received rapid advancement to equestrian status, but the fact that they, their family members or their comrades thought it worth recording indicates that it was an important distinction. Through an analysis of these monuments and their social context, I shall argue that the promotion of selected soldiers and their sons to equestrian rank in the third century was as much the result of the soldiers' own desire for greater social mobility as it was an initiative from the imperial administration.

PATRONAGE AND PROMOTION

We shall consider first the epigraphic evidence for the promotion of soldiers into the *militiae equestres*. The fundamental list of veterans who served in the *militiae equestres* was compiled by Devijver.⁵⁶ I have reproduced his catalogue in Tables 1 and 2, together with new examples discovered in the intervening years (marked with an asterisk).⁵⁷ Table 1 collects all known examples of soldiers promoted to the posts of *tribunus cohortis*, *praefectus alae* or *tribunus angusticlavius* directly from the ranks.⁵⁸ The chronological range of military posts in this table shows that soldiers who served in the legions and the praetorian guard were able to secure appointments to equestrian officer posts from the Severan period onwards. The earliest example dates to 212, though this is subject to change depending on future epigraphic discoveries. Some of the soldiers, such as P. Aelius Valerius and Atius Valerianus, are attested only as veterans without any further post mentioned, so their precise army rank is difficult to ascertain. Others, like Flavius Maximianus and Q. Peltradius Maximus, are recorded to have been *principales* (non-commissioned officers) or *evocati* (discharged soldiers who returned to service): these positions were well paid in comparison

⁵⁶ Devijver, 'Veränderungen' (above, n. 45), 219–23. The table does not include the case of Aelius Triccianus (Cassius Dio 78.13.3–4), a soldier who eventually acquired equestrian status, because the exact course of his career is uncertain: J. Fitz, 'Die Laufbahn des Aelius Triccianus', *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 26 (1978), 21–7. His contemporary, Oclatinus Adventus, a praetorian prefect who rose from the ranks (Cassius Dio 78.14.1–2), did not enter the *militiae equestres*: B. Rankov, 'M. Oclatinus Adventus in Britain', *Britannia* 18 (1987), 243–9.

⁵⁷ For the case of Atius Va[leria]nus in Table 1, see A. Kurilić, 'Recent epigraphic finds from the Roman province of Dalmatia', in D. Davison, V. Gaffney and E. Marin (eds), *Dalmatia: Research in the Roman Province 1970–2001, Papers in Honour of J.J. Wilkes* (Oxford, 2006), 133–47.

⁵⁸ M. Aurelius Syrio is a special case: he is not recorded as an *evocatus* of the praetorian guard, but this status is strongly suggested by his Thracian origin and his fictional voting tribe, Ulpia, derived from his home town of Ulpia Nicopolis ad Istrum. See M.W.C. Hassall and R.S.O. Tomlin, 'Roman Britain in 1988, II: inscriptions', *Britannia* 20 (1989), 327–45, esp. pp. 331–3, and R.S.O. Tomlin, 'Documenting the Roman army at Carlisle', in Wilkes (ed.), *Documenting the Roman Army* (above, n. 29), 175–85, esp. p. 184.

Table 1. Veterans in the *militiae equestres*.

Date	Name	Position	Inscriptions
212	P. Ael(ius) Valerius	ex vet., trib. coh.	<i>CIL</i> III 3237
213/222	M. Aurelius Syrio*	[evocatus] trib. mil.	<i>AE</i> 1989, 489 = <i>RIB</i> 3460
235/238	Flavi[us Ma]ximia[nus]	ex evoc. praet. coh., trib. coh.	<i>RIB</i> 1896
c. 220s–240s	Q. Peltradius Maximus	ex corn. praef. praet., trib. coh.	<i>RIB</i> 989 = <i>ILS</i> 4721
238/244	Drusinius Lupulus	ex evoc., praef. vice coh.	<i>AE</i> 1969/70, 637
before 253	P. Aelius Primianus	ex dec., trib. coh., primus pilus, praep.	<i>CIL</i> VIII 9045 = <i>ILS</i> 2766
III c.	Atius Va[leria]nus*	veteranus, a militiis	Kurilić no. 26
III c.	Aurunc(-) Felicissimus	ex evoc. trib. coh.	<i>RIB</i> 988
III c.	Paternius Maternus	ex evoc. palatino, trib. coh.	<i>RIB</i> 966 = <i>ILS</i> 4724a
III c.	M. Val(erius) Speratus	vet., ex bf. cos., praef. coh.	<i>CIL</i> III 12659 = <i>ILS</i> 7173

* = Additions to the lists compiled by Devijver.

Table 2. *Militiae petitores.*

Date	Name	Position	Inscriptions
180/192	M. Ulpianus Silvanus	eq. pub., petitor militiae	<i>CIL</i> VI 3550 = <i>ILS</i> 2759
c. 233	C. Tauricius Verus	vet., ex bf cos., militiae petitor	<i>AE</i> 1956, 252
244/249	Cassius Timotheus	ἄπὸ βφ, πετεῖτορ	<i>IGR</i> 3, 1202 = <i>ILS</i> 8847
c. 250	Q. Gargilius Martialis	eq. Rom., militiae petitor, praef., trib.	<i>CIL</i> VIII 9047, 20751
II/III c.	Ignotus*	[militiae] petit(or)	<i>AE</i> 1997, 156
II/III c.	P. Ael(ius) ---*	[militiae] petitor	<i>AE</i> 2004, 206
III c.	M. Aurelius Emeritus	veteranus, militiae petitor	<i>CIL</i> VI 3548
III c.	M. Aurelius Festinus	vet. ex coh. praet., militiae petitor	<i>CIL</i> VI 2485
III c.	Aurelius Maximus	militiae petitor	<i>CIL</i> VI 3549
III c.	M. Aurelius Secundinus	vet. ex coh. praet., militiae petitor	<i>CIL</i> VI 2488
III c.	Ti. Claudius Claudianus	eq. Rom., militiae petitor	<i>CIL</i> VI 2606 = <i>ILS</i> 2758
III c.	Helvi[di]us Pris[c]us	eq. Rom., [m]i[]itia[e] petitor	<i>CIL</i> III 7416
III c.	Ignotus	[militiae] petitor	<i>CIL</i> VI 32937
III c.	Ignotus	a mi[lit]i(i)s, e[questrem m(ilitiam) pe]t(iit?)	<i>AE</i> 1971, 319

* = Additions to the lists compiled by Devijver.

with rank-and-file soldiers.⁵⁹ The examples collected in Table 2 are of men who were styled *militiae petitores*, that is, they were candidates for positions in the officer corps. However, they obviously had yet to obtain a commission, otherwise the post itself would have been recorded, as on the inscriptions in Table 1.

The first question that needs to be addressed is how these men came to be awarded equestrian rank. Were they able to obtain the census qualification of 400,000 sesterces in the course of their military service? Septimius Severus is known to have granted the soldiers a pay rise, but the extent of the increase is unknown, with scholars proposing a variety of figures between one-third and double.⁶⁰ Yet even if Severus had doubled the *stipendium*, this would not have been sufficient for legionaries to amass 400,000 sesterces during twenty years of service.⁶¹ We must also account for the fact that legionaries from military families would have owned property already, but the evidence from Egypt demonstrates that these landholdings would not have been sufficient to meet the equestrian census.⁶² What about the highest paid soldiers who obtained equestrian commissions: could they have qualified on the basis of their wealth? The most well-off undoubtedly would have been the *evocati* of the praetorian guard, of which four are on record as having entered the *militiae equestres*: Drusinius Lupulus, Flavius Maximianus, Paternius Maternus and M. Aurelius

⁵⁹ They probably received 5,600 sesterces per annum under Severus; this was still well below the *stipendium* of a centurion, which was 36,000 sesterces per annum in the same period. See M.A. Speidel, 'Roman army pay scales', *Journal of Roman Studies* 82 (1992), 87–106, esp. p. 101 n. 105.

⁶⁰ P.A. Brunt, 'Pay and superannuation in the Roman army', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 18 (1950), 50–71, following A. von Domaszewski, 'Der Truppensold der Kaiserzeit', *Neue Heidelberger Jahrbücher* 10 (1900), 218–41, with some modifications, argued that soldiers' salaries rose by two-thirds, to 2,000 sesterces per annum under Severus. R. Develin, 'The army pay rises under Severus and Caracalla and the question of the *annona militaris*', *Latomus* 30 (1971), 687–95, proposed a lower pay rise of one-third. However, R. Alston, 'Roman military pay from Caesar to Diocletian', *Journal of Roman Studies* 84 (1994), 113–23, noted that a one-third increase would have necessitated the abandonment of the old payment scheme and considered 50 per cent the most likely amount. At the top end of the scale, Speidel, 'Roman army pay scales' (above, n. 59), 98–9, argued that Severus doubled army pay.

⁶¹ Assuming a 100 per cent increase, legionaries would have been paid 2,400 sesterces each year after Severus's pay rise, resulting in a total income of 48,000 over twenty years. Soldiers seem to have been able to save between twenty and 30 per cent of their annual pay: Campbell, *The Emperor* (above, n. 50), 179. Even taking into account discharge bonuses (12,000 sesterces) and donatives (the largest recorded being 20,000 sesterces in 161), the equestrian property qualification would have remained far out of reach.

⁶² Pompeius Niger, a first-century veteran in Egypt, declared property worth only 1,250 sesterces: D. Rathbone, 'PSI XI 1183: record of a Roman census declaration of A.D. 47/8', in T. Gagos and R. S. Bagnall (eds), *Essays and Texts in Honor of J. David Thomas (American Studies in Papyrology 42)* (Oakville, 2001), 99–113. See also J.F. Gilliam, 'Notes on Latin texts from Egypt', in J. Bingen, G. Cambier and G. Nachtergaeel (eds), *Le monde grec. Pensée, littérature, histoire, documents: hommages à Claire Préaux* (Brussels, 1975), 766–74, esp. p. 769, who noted that although legionary families could prosper, they were unlikely to be able to achieve the equestrian census.

Syrio (Table 1). The *cornicularius* of the praetorian prefects, represented in this group by Q. Peltradius Maximus, would have received the same pay. Their salaries were higher, certainly — with a maximum of 16,800 sesterces per annum if Severus doubled army pay —, but this *stipendium* would have been achieved only after years in the ranks.⁶³ Caracalla and Maximinus significantly increased army pay, by 50 and 100 per cent respectively,⁶⁴ but the earliest dated examples in Tables 1 and 2 show that the process of granting soldiers equestrian commissions had begun well before their reigns. The evidence for military pay in the third century is fragmentary and uncertain, but it is nevertheless clear that soldiers were not sufficiently wealthy to claim the equestrian census of their own accord. Emperors did, however, sometimes make exceptional grants to soldiers as a reward for service, as in the case of Caracalla, who awarded T. Aurelius Flavinus 75,000 sesterces and a promotion ‘on account of his fierce courage’ (*[ob] alacritatem virtu[tis]*), which he displayed in battle against the Getae.⁶⁵ The *princeps* could also intervene to ensure that a promising officer was advanced to the next grade of service: M. Caecilius Donatianus earned promotion to the second *militia equestris* ‘by gift of the emperor’ (*dono principis*).⁶⁶ These examples suggest that the soldiers in Tables 1 and 2 also received their promotions to equestrian officer posts by direct imperial benefaction.

This interpretation finds strong support from the inscriptional evidence. The funerary monument of M. Ulpus Silvanus from Rome records that he was honoured with the *equus publicus* by Commodus.⁶⁷ As a consequence of this grant of equestrian rank, he was able to seek an officer commission, indicated by the use of the term *militiae petitor* on the same inscription:

*D(is) M(anibus) | M(arco) Ulp(io) Silvano eq(uo) | publ(ico) ornato ab Imp(eratore) |
Commodo Aug(usto) pet(it)ori | mili(tiae) Atil(ius) Hospitalis | fratri dulcissimo | fecit*

(To the divine shades. To Marcus Ulpus Silvanus, provided with the *equus publicus* by the Emperor Commodus Augustus, *militiae petitor*, Atilius Hospitalis made this for his dearest brother.)

We know little about Ulpus Silvanus’s origin, but the text of the funerary monument strongly suggests that he was a soldier. The epitaph was dedicated by Atilius Hospitalis to ‘his dearest brother’ (*fratri dulcissimo*); the strikingly different nomenclature of the two men indicates that they were not brothers by birth. It was common for men who served in the army together to refer to each

⁶³ On a standard career reconstruction, they would have spent seven years as praetorian *milites*, four as *sesquiplarii* and then another five as *duplicarii*. See Breeze, ‘The organisation of the career structure’ (above, n. 42), 257.

⁶⁴ Herodian 4.4.7, 6.8.8.

⁶⁵ *CIL* III 14416.

⁶⁶ *RIB* 1791.

⁶⁷ *CIL* VI 3550 = *ILS* 2759.

other as *fratres*,⁶⁸ making it all but certain that Silvanus and Hospitalis were both soldiers. There are three other examples in Table 2 of soldiers who possessed full equestrian status and styled themselves *militiae petitores*: Q. Gargilius Martialis, Ti. Claudius Claudianus and Helvidius Priscus. While Priscus's background is unknown, Martialis and Claudianus were themselves sons of soldiers, which suggests that they may have acquired equestrian rank through their fathers' service.⁶⁹ However, there are other examples of soldiers who were *militiae petitores*, but do not mention that they held equestrian rank.⁷⁰ If they had been awarded the *equus publicus*, it would have been included on their inscriptions, given the prestige of the *ordo equester*. Instead, it is better to postulate that the title of *militiae petitor* was awarded to those men who had been granted the right to seek an equestrian commission by the emperor, but for whom there was currently no vacant post available.⁷¹ The vast majority of *militiae petitores* is epigraphically attested in Rome, in close proximity to the emperor; the remaining examples probably encountered him at some point in their career, as has been proposed in the case of Tauricius Verus.⁷² Equestrian officer posts were arranged by powerful patrons, usually senators or the emperor himself: without this formal support, any appointment would have been unattainable.⁷³ An inscription carved on the base of a statue of the senior Vestal Virgin Campia Severina, dated to 240, sheds important light on this process.⁷⁴ The crucial part of the text records that Aemilius Pardalas, *tribunus cohortis I Aquitanicae*, set up the statue in her honour 'on account of the benefactions of equestrian rank and the second *militia* which have been bestowed on him' (*pro conlatis in se beneficiis / equestr(is) ord(inis) item secundae militiae*). Campia Severina, an enormously influential woman in Rome at the time,⁷⁵ obviously was able to petition the emperor Gordian III to secure both equestrian rank and

⁶⁸ S.E. Phang, *The Marriage of Roman Soldiers (13 BC–AD 235): Law and Family in the Imperial Army* (Leiden, 2001), 162.

⁶⁹ Martialis: *CIL* VIII 20751. Claudianus: *CIL* VI 2606 = *ILS* 2758. Priscus: *CIL* III 7416. This matter is discussed further below, in conjunction with Table 3.

⁷⁰ For example, M. Aurelius Emeritus, who is only styled *veteranus* and *militiae petitor* on his epitaph (*CIL* VI 3548).

⁷¹ There was a finite number of equestrian posts on offer at any one time, as noted by R.P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge, 1982), 50. We might wonder whether some support from fellow-soldiers was also required, as shown in the examples of those men promoted to centurion: M.P. Speidel, 'Becoming a centurion in Africa: brave deeds and the support of troops as promotion criteria', in M.P. Speidel, *Roman Army Studies II* (Stuttgart, 1992), 124–8.

⁷² Haensch, 'Veteranus' (above, n. 34), 135–9. See also Duncan-Jones, 'Who were the *equites*?' (above, n. 3), 216–17, for similar remarks regarding equestrian status and soldiers' sons.

⁷³ Senatorial patronage: Birley, 'The equestrian officers' (above, n. 28), 141–2; Birley, 'The commissioning of equestrian officers' (above, n. 29), 3; Saller, *Personal Patronage* (above, n. 71), 46–7; H.M. Cotton, 'Military tribunates and the exercise of patronage', *Chiron* 11 (1981), 229–38.

⁷⁴ *CIL* VI 2131 = *ILS* 4929.

⁷⁵ Severina also secured a procuratorship for Q. Veturius Callistratus, who praised her in fulsome terms (*CIL* VI 2132 = *ILS* 4928).

a posting in the *militia secunda* for Pardalas. It therefore seems likely that the *militiae petitores* would have been elevated into the *ordo equester* when they finally received their commissions, much like Pardalas.

The evidence for personal benefaction by the emperor increases when we examine the examples of soldiers' sons who claimed to hold equestrian status at a very young age (Table 3). Before analysing these cases in detail, some methodological remarks are in order. Firstly, it is important to note that the majority of soldiers listed in this table cannot be dated more precisely than the third century. However, the fact that their sons are often described as *equites Romani* provides a good chronological indication, as this term predominantly occurs on inscriptions of the late second and third centuries.⁷⁶ In other cases, the names of military units or the palaeography of the text have been used to supply approximate dates.⁷⁷ The second aspect worthy of comment is that many of the *equites Romani* were the sons of centurions (represented by the abbreviation *cen.* in Table 3). It is difficult to determine whether the centurions had risen from the ranks or were commissioned *ex equite Romano*. But it is nevertheless significant that the sons of centurions acquired equestrian rank in the third century, since this would have been exceptional even in the early Imperial period. Only the children of *primipilares* commonly entered the *ordo equester*, undoubtedly by virtue of their fathers' discharge bonus, and even then, equestrian status was not inheritable, but had to be formally granted by the emperor.⁷⁸

The earliest dated example of a soldier's son receiving equestrian rank is the case of Aurelius Sabinus, who is styled *eques Romanus* on a dedicatory inscription from Rome.⁷⁹ He was the son of M. Aurelius Bassinus, a *centurio exercitator* (training officer) in the *equites singulares*:

[Deo] | Herculi | M(arcus) Aur(elius) Baslsinus | 7(centurio) exlercita(tor) n(umeri) | eq(uitum) sing(ularium) | cum Aur(elio) Salbino eq(uite) R(omano) | fil(io) v(otum) l(ibens) s(olvit)

(To the god Hercules. Marcus Aurelius Bassinus, *centurio exercitator* of the unit of the *equites singulares*, with Aurelius Sabinus, *eques Romanus*, his son, willingly discharged his vow.)

Bassinus is known to have served in the *frumentarii* in the early 180s before being promoted to the horse guard. He was therefore not a centurion commissioned *ex equite Romano*, but a man who had worked his way up from the ranks. His son, Sabinus, probably acquired equestrian status late in the reign of Commodus.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Duncan-Jones, 'Who were the *equites*?' (above, n. 3), 219–20.

⁷⁷ For example, the epitaph of Iulius Valentinus, son of a *strator* of the *legio II Parthica*, must be dated after the formation of the legion by Septimius Severus (*CIL* VI 32878).

⁷⁸ Dobson, 'The centurionate and social mobility' (above, n. 39), 104–9.

⁷⁹ *CIL* VI 273; M.P. Speidel, *Die Denkmäler der Kaiserreiter: Equites Singulares Augusti* (Bonn, 1994), no. 34.

⁸⁰ Speidel, *Die Denkmäler* (above, n. 79), 66.

Table 3. Sons of centurions or soldiers with equestrian status.

Date	Name	Position	Age	Father's Position	Inscriptions
after 135	C. Iulius Nepotianus	eques Romanus	2 years	cen. leg. VIII Augusta	<i>AE</i> 1976, 494
late 180s/90s	Aurelius Sabinus	eques Romanus		cen. exercitator eq. sing.	<i>CIL</i> VI 273
after 197	Iulius Valentinus	eques Romanus		miles II Parthica, strator	<i>CIL</i> VI 32878
212/217	Aurelius Longinus	eques Romanus		cen. leg. III Gallica	<i>AE</i> 1993, 1641
212/217	Aurelius Capitolinus	eques Romanus		cen. leg. III Gallica	<i>AE</i> 1993, 1641
244	T. Flavius Maritimus	eques Romanus	8 months	cen. leg. II Parthica	<i>CIL</i> III 14403a = <i>IK</i> 41, 457
260	Q. Gargilius Martialis	eq. Rom., praepositus		veteranus	<i>CIL</i> VIII 20751
261/267	P. Aelius Aelianus	praef. leg., protector		arm. custos II Adiutrix	<i>CIL</i> III 3529
II/III c.	P. Aelius Marcus	eques Romanus	16 years	cen. leg. II Adiutrix	<i>AE</i> 2003, 1593
II/III c.	Q. Catinius Q. f.	eques Romanus		vet. ex eq. sing., signif.	<i>CIL</i> VI 3242 = XI 2625
II/early III c.	Aurelius Iason	eques Romanus		cen. leg. I Italica	<i>CIL</i> III 12388
II/early III c.	Ulpus Lucretius	eques Romanus		cen. leg. I Italica	<i>CIL</i> III 12388
II/early III c.	M. Valerius Ulpus	equo publico	8 years	cen. leg. IV Flavia	<i>CIL</i> III 4327
III c.	Aelius Marcellinus	eques Romanus	10 years	cen. leg. XXII	<i>CIL</i> XIII 11834
III c.	C. Artorius Tertullus	eques Romanus	14 years	veteranus	<i>CIL</i> VIII 4882
III c.	C. Caecilius Victor	eques Romanus		cen.	<i>AE</i> 1977, 259
III c.	Ti. Claudius Claudianus	eq. Rom, mil. petitor	34 years	cen. coh. VI praet.	<i>CIL</i> XIV 2429 = <i>ILS</i> 2758
III c.	T. Flavius Acceptus	eques Romanus	1 year	cen. leg. I Italica	<i>AE</i> 1999, 1335
III c.	Hostilius Saturninus	equo publico exornatus		vet., ex bf. leg., duovir	<i>CIL</i> VIII 4436 = 18595
III c.	Hostilius Felix	eques Romanus		vet., ex bf. leg., duovir	<i>CIL</i> VIII 4437 = 18596
III c.	Iulius Iulianus	eques Romanus		ex cen. coh. I Flav. Bess.	<i>SEG</i> 24, 492 = <i>AE</i> 1974, 587
III c.	Memmius Victorinus	equo publico exornatus		veteranus	<i>CIL</i> VIII 14344
III c.	M. Pompeius Quintianus	eques Romanus		veteranus	<i>AE</i> 1946, 66
III c.	L. Tacitus Dubitatus	eq. R., equo publico	17 years	cen. coh. II praet.	<i>CIL</i> VI 2477
late III c.	Aurelius Claudianus	eques Romanus	4 years	protector	<i>CIL</i> VI 1595
late III/ IV c.	Iulius Victorinus	eques Romanus	15 years	cen. leg. IV Flavia	<i>CIL</i> III 8156

The practice of granting equestrian rank to soldiers' sons seems to have increased significantly in the third century. During this period, we find a number of cases in which equestrian status was awarded to the sons of lower-ranked troops, notably Iulius Valens, a *strator*, Q. Catinius, a *signifer*, and C. Artorius Tertullus, a *veteranus*.⁸¹ One noticeable aspect of this phenomenon is that six of the *equites* in Table 3 are known to have been aged ten or under. Even in these cases, equestrian rank was almost certainly granted by the emperor. It could not have been inherited, since Valens, Catinius and Tertullus were not themselves *equites*.⁸² The idea that a Roman emperor would make such benefactions to children and babies might seem surprising, were it not for an inscription attesting that C. Velleius Urbanus was granted the *equus publicus* by Antoninus Pius at age five.⁸³ The gesture was intended to honour the child's father, and was particularly common in the case of imperial freedmen, who were not themselves of sufficient status to receive equestrian rank.⁸⁴ The soldiers' sons who earned the right to call themselves *equites Romani* were clearly part of a privileged group: Duncan-Jones has noted that many of the fathers belonged to units that were based in Rome or accompanied the emperor on campaign, such as the praetorian guard, *equites singulares* or the *legio II Parthica*.⁸⁵

Many of the soldiers' sons are described simply as *equites Romani* on these inscriptions. In some cases, however, the texts are more explicit, referring to grants of the *equus publicus* by the emperor himself. The evidence comes from the African provinces, where many veterans obtained high rank in municipal communities after their military service.⁸⁶ Memmius Victorinus, son of the veteran P. Memmius Octavianus, is said to have been 'supplied with the public horse' (*equo publico exornatus*), terminology that would not have been used unless the status had been officially bestowed by the emperor.⁸⁷ Hostilius Felix, a former *beneficiarius legionis* and later *pontifex* and *duovir* at Lambaesis in Numidia, saw both of his sons become *equites Romani*.⁸⁸ One of these, Hostilius Saturninus, is specifically attested as being granted the *equus publicus* by an unknown emperor (*equo publico exorna[...]*); the inscription

⁸¹ Valens: *CIL* VI 32878. Catinius: *CIL* VI 3242 = XI 2625. Tertullus: *CIL* VIII 4882.

⁸² There are a few isolated inscriptions in which a man claims to have been born with equestrian rank, such as *natus eques Romanus in vico Iugario* (*CIL* VI 1632 = *ILS* 1318). Stein, *Der Römische Ritterstand* (above, n. 6), 79, argued that this did not mean 'born an *equus Romanus* in the *vicus Iugarius*' but 'an *equus Romanus* who was born in the *vicus Iugarius*'. Not everyone has agreed with this interpretation: Millar, *The Emperor* (above, n. 6), 280.

⁸³ *CIL* X 3924 = *ILS* 6305; F. Castagnoli, 'Sul limite di età degli *equites*', *Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma* 73 (1949/50), 89–90.

⁸⁴ See Duncan-Jones, 'Who were the *equites*?' (above, n. 3), 218, listing further examples of young *equites*; S. Demougin, 'Eques: un surnom bien romain', *Annali del Seminario di Studi del Mondo Classico, Archeologia e Storia Antica* 2 (1980), 158–69, esp. p. 160; P.R.C. Weaver, *Familia Caesaris: a Social Study of the Emperor's Freedmen and Slaves* (Cambridge, 1972), 289–90.

⁸⁵ Duncan-Jones, 'Who were the *equites*?' (above, n. 3), 217.

⁸⁶ Duncan-Jones, 'Equestrian rank' (above, n. 12).

⁸⁷ *CIL* VIII 14344.

⁸⁸ *CIL* VIII 4436 = 18595; *CIL* VIII 4437 = 18596.

unfortunately breaks off at a crucial point.⁸⁹ The weight of the inscriptional evidence supports the argument that the soldiers' sons, many of whom were little more than children, received their rank by direct imperial benefaction in the same manner as the sons of freedmen in previous centuries.⁹⁰ We can conclude, therefore, that most, if not all, of these inscriptions are not cases of status usurpation, in which soldiers illicitly claimed equestrian rank for their sons, but are representative of genuine grants by the emperor.

The important and inevitable corollary of this argument is that in the late second and early third centuries, equestrian status was being granted to citizens who did not meet the property qualification of 400,000 sesterces. The census requirement had not been abandoned by this period — as we saw in the Introduction, officials possessing some oversight of the equestrian order are still attested in the Severan period — but the evidence discussed above shows that it clearly could be waived by the emperor in selected cases. We might compare this development to the changing status of the *anulus aureus* (gold ring). In the early Empire, the gold ring was a symbol of the *ordo equester*, but successive emperors gradually devalued the honour by granting it to slaves and freedmen.⁹¹ The result was that the *anulus aureus* had ceased to denote equestrian rank by the end of the second century.⁹² In the same way, soldiers' sons below the age of eighteen were honoured with equestrian rank, even though they lacked the requisite property qualification. This is significant because it formed part of the larger process of status inflation in the third century, which resulted in the eventual devaluation and disappearance of equestrian rank.⁹³ The census requirement of 400,000 sesterces almost certainly had lapsed by the Constantinian period. In 317, Constantine wrote to Paternus Valerianus to inform him that individuals who had obtained letters entitling them to the high equestrian rank of *perfectissimus* should be permitted to hold this status if they were not slaves, in debt to the treasury, or held certain menial positions.⁹⁴ No mention is made of a property qualification. Constantine also took the step of granting equestrian status to members of the corporation of shipowners (*navicularii*), a decision that

⁸⁹ The term *equus publicus* is used on other inscriptions for soldiers' sons as well: *CIL* III 4327; *CIL* VI 2477.

⁹⁰ Second-century emperors also are known to have bestowed equestrian titles on men who had earned their favour: see V. Nutton, 'L. Gellius Maximus, physician and procurator', *Classical Quarterly* 21 (1971), 262–72, esp. pp. 270–1.

⁹¹ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 33.32–3; S. Demougin, 'De l'esclavage à l'anneau d'or du chevalier', in C. Nicolet (ed.), *Des ordres à Rome* (Paris, 1984), 217–41, esp. pp. 218–19; Duncan-Jones, 'Who were the *equites*?' (above, n. 3), 215–16.

⁹² Note the freedman L. Marius Doryphorus, honoured with gold rings by Commodus, who made no claim to membership of the *ordo equester* (*CIL* VI 1847 = *ILS* 1899).

⁹³ A. Chastagnol, 'La fin de l'ordre équestre: réflexions sur la prosopographie des derniers chevaliers romains', *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome* 100 (1988), 199–206.

⁹⁴ *Codex Theodosianus* 6.35.1 = *Codex Justinianus* 12.32.1.

evidently was made without regard to the wealth of the individuals concerned.⁹⁵ Licinius's edict on equestrian rank, also issued in 317, ruled that *Caesariani* could be granted the status of *vir egregius* or *perfectissimus* after service on the condition that they had conducted themselves appropriately in office; there was no corresponding requirement that they possessed 400,000 sesterces.⁹⁶ These imperial rulings, preserved in the *Codex Theodosianus*, show that, by the early fourth century, equestrian status was a reward for service, rather than a precondition for it.⁹⁷

I would argue that we can observe this process in action in the Roman army in the late second and third centuries. Although soldiers' sons received equestrian rank directly from the emperor, such grants to the men themselves were quite rare: some *militiae petitores* in Table 2 were styled *equites Romani*, but many were not.⁹⁸ This means that the *petitores* promoted from the rank-and-file would have been awarded equestrian status upon taking up their post as a tribune or prefect in the *militiae equestres*. This seems to be what happened in the case of Aemilius Pardalas, discussed above as the beneficiary of the patronage of a Vestal Virgin, who received equestrian rank and the post in the second *militia* simultaneously. Grants of equestrian rank in service were made also to a number of *principales* in the third century, including several who bore the title of *vir egregius*, such as an anonymous *canalicularius* in the reign of Gallienus; Munatius Paulinianus, an *optio evocatorum*; and L. Septimius Marcellianus, a *cornicularius* of the praetorian prefects.⁹⁹ We can add to this list Salonius Sabinianus, a former *cornicularis consularis* in the *legio I Adiutrix*, who is styled *eques Romanus*.¹⁰⁰ This was a major change from the Antonine period, in which the title of *vir egregius*, which was one rank higher than a mere *eques Romanus*, was generally restricted to procurators in the imperial government.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ *Codex Theodosianus* 13.16.pref.

⁹⁶ *Codex Theodosianus* 10.7.1

⁹⁷ This occurred in the senatorial order of the fourth century as well: Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (above, n. 49), II, 525–30; P. Heather, 'New men for new Constantines? Creating an imperial elite in the eastern Mediterranean', in P. Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: the Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries* (Aldershot, 1994), 11–33.

⁹⁸ *Equites Romani*: M. Ulpianus (CIL VI 3550 = ILS 2759), Q. Gargilius Martialis (CIL VIII 20751), Ti. Claudius Claudianus (CIL VI 2606 = ILS 2758), Helvidius Priscus (CIL III 7416).

⁹⁹ *Canalicularius*: CIL VI 1110; M. Clauss, 'Der *Canalicularius*', *Ancient Society* 6 (1975), 251–6; J.F. Gilliam, '*Canalicularius* and *kananiklarios* (P. Oxy. XL 2925)', *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 13 (1976), 49–52. Paulinianus: AE 1990, 64. Marcellianus: AE 1902, 77.

¹⁰⁰ CIL III 8752.

¹⁰¹ W. Eck, 'The growth of administrative posts', in A.K. Bowman, P. Garnsey and D. Rathbone (eds), *The Cambridge Ancient History, Volume XI* (second edition), *The High Empire, A.D. 70–192* (Cambridge, 2000), 238–65, esp. p. 262.

SOCIAL MOBILITY

Thus far, we have been able to draw two major conclusions regarding Roman soldiers and their access to equestrian rank in the third century. Firstly, it has been argued that these men could not have acquired the equestrian census of 400,000 sesterces of their own accord, even if we allow for Septimius Severus doubling the soldiers' *stipendium* in the early third century. The fact that the phenomenon of soldiers entering the *militiae equestres* begins before Severus's reign also negates any link between military pay and equestrian rank. This leads to the second conclusion, that soldiers and their sons who claimed to be *equites Romani* or *militiae petitores* must have been granted this status as a reward by the emperor himself, even though they did not possess the usual property qualification. These developments played a significant role in the devaluation of equestrian status in the third century. The arguments I have proposed initially might seem to support the traditional scholarly view that municipal aristocrats were withdrawing from military service, and that emperors wanted to create a more professional officer corps. But we have yet to examine this issue from the perspective of the troops themselves. Why did they seek officer posts in the *militiae equestres*? What did equestrian status mean to the soldiers and their families?

The answer to the first question is not initially obvious: the pay of equestrian officer posts was actually no better than that of centurions and *primi pili*, and less secure. Officers in the *militiae equestres* only served three years in one appointment, and continued employment was dependent upon vacant posts being available and the support of well-connected patrons.¹⁰² The attractiveness of the *militiae equestres* undoubtedly lay in the status of being an officer, with all its attendant privileges, and in the possibility of further promotion to civilian administrative positions.¹⁰³ But the traditional route to the *ordo equester* for soldiers from the rank-and-file was through advancement to the post of *primus pilus*, which did not come early in a military career, if at all. In the praetorian guard, soldiers generally would not receive promotion to positions such as *beneficiarius* or *cornicularius* of the praetorian prefects until they had completed approximately fifteen years' service, while the status of *evocatus* was granted after sixteen years in the guard.¹⁰⁴ In the legions, promising *principales* would be promoted to the centurionate after an average of thirteen to twenty years' *stipendia*.¹⁰⁵ Centurions would not reach the status of *primus pilus* until they had served for another fifteen to twenty years.¹⁰⁶ From there, only half of

¹⁰² Birley, 'The equestrian officers' (above, n. 28), 142–3; Dobson, 'Legionary centurion' (above, n. 30), 199–204; Speidel, 'Roman army pay scales' (above, n. 59), 103.

¹⁰³ The prospect of equestrian officers obtaining procuratorships and other positions has been analysed by Duncan-Jones, 'Who were the *equites*?' (above, n. 3), 195–205.

¹⁰⁴ Breeze, 'The organisation of the career structure' (above, n. 42), 256–7.

¹⁰⁵ Breeze, 'The organisation of the career structure' (above, n. 42), 275–8.

¹⁰⁶ Dobson, 'The significance' (above, n. 41), 411.

all serving centurions would achieve the distinction of the primipilate, and even then such a promotion was far from certain, if only because it was unlikely that the majority of soldiers would survive into their fifties.¹⁰⁷ For many troops hopeful of promotion, it would be difficult to secure an appointment as a centurion in the first place. Three of the soldiers in Tables 1 and 2 who sought equestrian commissions were *beneficiarii* (Cassius Timotheus, C. Tauricius Verus and M. Valerius Speratus), and it was extremely rare for men in this post to be promoted to the centurionate.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, if a soldier were to be offered a promotion into the *militiae equestres*, allowing him to bypass the ranks of centurion and *primus pilus*, he probably would have found it difficult to refuse.

The society and culture of the Roman military can assist also in understanding why the equestrian officer posts would have been attractive, despite their lack of permanence. The army inculcated unity and conformity, but it was still a very hierarchical institution, with clearly delineated pathways for promotion. Differences in hierarchy were articulated through a complex language of signs and symbols on soldiers' uniforms.¹⁰⁹ When soldiers died and were commemorated by their tent mates and family members, the images on their tombstones carried the distinctions they bore in life. *Beneficiarii* were depicted on grave-stones with their distinctive lance, while centurions are shown carrying their staff (*vitis*). The monuments were the outward expression of the competition for rank and status that existed within the army itself.¹¹⁰ The consequence of this hierarchical society was that it encouraged soldiers, many of whom came from quite humble backgrounds, to seek promotion and to aspire to the lifestyle of their senior officers, including those of the senatorial and equestrian orders.¹¹¹ This is demonstrated amply by the poems composed by military men, such as those discovered at Bu Njem in Numidia, which were written by centurions without a sophisticated grasp of Latin metre and prosody.¹¹² The desire for social mobility even extended to non-citizens in the auxiliary units, a trend exemplified by the Batavian officers who served at Vindolanda and adopted aspects of the Roman élite lifestyle, throwing sumptuous dinner parties and developing a love of

¹⁰⁷ See Scheidel, *Measuring Sex, Age and Death* (above, n. 44), 93–138, for mortality rates in the army.

¹⁰⁸ M.P. Speidel, 'Centurions promoted from *beneficiarii*?', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 91 (1992), 229–32.

¹⁰⁹ J. Coulston, 'Art, culture and service: the depiction of soldiers on funerary monuments of the 3rd century AD', in L. de Blois and E. Lo Cascio (eds), *The Impact of the Roman Army (200 B.C.–A.D. 476): Economic, Social, Political, Religious and Cultural Aspects* (Leiden, 2007), 529–65, esp. pp. 533–5; S. James, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos conducted by Yale University and the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters 1928 to 1937, Volume 7: Arms and Armour* (London, 2004), 64–5.

¹¹⁰ Lendon, *Empire of Honour* (above, n. 54), 238–47; Coulston, 'Art, culture and service' (above, n. 109), 545.

¹¹¹ J.E. Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts: a History of Battle in Classical Antiquity* (New Haven, 2005), 276–7.

¹¹² J.N. Adams, 'The poets of Bu Njem: language, culture and the centurionate', *Journal of Roman Studies* 89 (1999), 109–34.

hunting.¹¹³ The sarcophagus of the equestrian officer P. Caecilius Vallianus from Veii embodies this lifestyle in a visual format: on the front, the deceased is shown reclining on a couch and enjoying a banquet, a common funerary motif, while on the rear he is depicted in the midst of a hunt.¹¹⁴ The inscription on the sarcophagus simply states that Vallianus was an officer (*a militiis*) who had lived for 64 years. The *militiae equestres* had bestowed status and military prestige on Vallianus, but he was still able to enjoy a good life without being forced to spend countless years in the army. It is only too understandable that soldiers fighting in the ranks might want to share in this same lifestyle one day.

This competitive culture, in which rank and status were monumentalized in funerary monuments, sheds light on the use of the term *militiae petitor* in inscriptions. As we have seen, the term denoted that a soldier had been granted the right to seek an equestrian commission, and presumably was waiting for a post to fall vacant. Although it did not signify that he had become an *equus Romanus*, the term was used as a way of elevating a man above his peers who had not received this privilege. This is demonstrated by the epitaphs for Aurelius Festinus and Aurelius Secundinus, veterans from the praetorian cohorts, who died aged 42 and 40, respectively, and were commemorated with the title *militiae petitor*.¹¹⁵ Since we will return to it later, it is worth reproducing the text of Secundinus's epitaph in full:

D(is) M(anibus) | M(arco) Aur(elio) M(arci) f(ilio) Secundino vet(erano) Aug(usti) | n(ostri) ex coh(orte) III pr(aetoria) mil(itiae) petit(ori) nat(ione) | Pannonio Aelia Valentina | soror et Aur(elius) Secundus filius | heredes bene merenti fecerunt | qui vixit ann(is) XL m(ensibus) I d(iebus) IIII | M(arcus) Aur(elius) Primus lib(e)rtus viv(u)s fe(cit)

(To the divine shades. To Marcus Aurelius Secundinus, son of Marcus, veteran of our Augustus, from the third praetorian cohort, *militiae petitor*, of Pannonian stock. His heirs, Aelia Valentina, his sister, and Aurelius Secundus, his son, made this for a man who well deserved it, who lived 40 years, one month, and four days. M. Aurelius Primus, his freedman, made this while living.)

Secundinus was a man who died in the prime of his life, without ever achieving an officer post, but his heirs saw to it that his status as a *militiae petitor* was properly noted on his funerary monument. The epitaph for P. Aelius [---], another *militiae petitor*, records that his heirs erected his tomb 'in accordance with the instructions in his will' (*ex praecepto testamenti sui*), and it is probable that the will also included the text to be used on the monument, of which crucial parts unfortunately are missing.¹¹⁶ This argument is supported by comparative

¹¹³ A.K. Bowman, 'Outposts of Empire: Vindolanda, Egypt, and the Empire of Rome', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 19 (2006), 75–93, esp. p. 87.

¹¹⁴ *CIL* XI 3800. The iconography and themes of aristocratic sarcophagi were adopted also by the lower classes, indicating their desire to emulate their social superiors: M. Koortbojian, *Myth, Meaning, and Memory on Roman Sarcophagi* (Berkeley, 1993).

¹¹⁵ Festinus: *CIL* VI 2485 = 32648. Secundinus: *CIL* VI 2488.

¹¹⁶ *AE* 2004, 206.

evidence from senatorial *cursus* inscriptions, for which there are clear indications that many were composed by the senatorial honorands themselves.¹¹⁷

The term *militiae petitor* is confined mostly to epitaphs, presumably because soldiers who were granted this status eventually went on to secure an officer's command, and thus the title became redundant. Our small sample that remains, collected in Table 2, is of those men who died before a post became vacant. The term *militiae petitor* is used only once to refer to a living person, on a monument from Auzia in Mauretania Caesariensis erected by Q. Gargilius Martialis for his mother, Iulia Prima, and father, Gargilius Martialis, *veteranus*, *flamen perpetuus* and *patronus* of the colony.¹¹⁸ The inscription styles the younger Martialis, still very much alive, as *eques Romanus* and *militiae petitor*:

Q(uinto) Gargilio Q(uinti) f(ilio) Q(uirina) Martiali vet(erano) fl(amini) / p(er)p(etuo) col(oniae) pat(rono) curator et dispuncto/ri rei p(ublicae) et Iuliae Primae eius Q(uintus) Gargilius Q(uinti) f(ilius) Q(uirina) Martialis eques Romanus / militiae petitor col(oniae) pat(ronus) filiu[s] eorum / parentibus dignissimis

(To Quintus Gargilius Martialis, son of Quintus, of the tribe Quirina, veteran, *flamen perpetuus*, patron of the colony, official overseer and investigator of the community, and Iulia Prima, his wife, Quintus Gargilius Martialis, son of Quintus, of the tribe Quirina, *eques Romanus*, *militiae petitor*, patron of the colony, son of the above named, (erected this) for his worthiest parents.)

A later inscription informs us that Martialis eventually went on to secure a post as *praefectus cohortis I Asturum* and had a successful career before being killed in 260 during an incursion of the Bavae.¹¹⁹ This second inscription does not include the term *militiae petitor*, because Gargilius's achievements had long surpassed this status. The cases collected in Tables 1 and 2 are therefore representative of the same phenomenon of soldiers entering the *militiae equestres*, the only difference being that most of those in Table 2 had died before obtaining a specific post. But their heirs clearly regarded their status as *militiae petitores* with a certain degree of pride and sufficiently prestigious to note on their epitaphs.

It is particularly revealing that the soldiers in Table 1 who went on to achieve an equestrian officer post did not attempt to hide their humble origins. When P. Aelius Valerius oversaw the erection of an altar by his unit in Sirmium, he recorded his position as *trib(unus) ex veterano*, a phrase that would reveal to all who saw the monument that he had risen from the ranks.¹²⁰ Q. Peltradius Maximus used similar terminology when he made a dedication to the god Cocidius at Bewcastle in northern Britain. Maximus called himself *trib(unus) ex*

¹¹⁷ W. Eck, 'Rome and the outside world: senatorial families and the world they lived in', in B. Rawson and P. Weaver (eds), *The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment, Space* (Oxford, 1997), 73–99, esp. pp. 98–9.

¹¹⁸ *CIL* VIII 20751.

¹¹⁹ *CIL* VIII 9047 = *ILS* 2767.

¹²⁰ *CIL* III 3237.

corniculario praef(ectorum) pr[a]etorio em(inentissimorum) v(ironum), highlighting his service for the praetorian prefects.¹²¹ The use of *ex* to indicate one's former position, rank or unit was standard practice in the Roman army,¹²² but the continued employment of this convention by the new *equites* demonstrates that they were not embarrassed by their former status. Their rise through the ranks was undoubtedly a source of great pride, as it was for those soldiers who were *militiae petitores*, because it meant that they had eclipsed their peers in the competition for promotion.¹²³ By the latter years of the third century, these men from the ranks were in a position to obtain provincial governorships without being adlected into the senatorial order, or even achieving equestrian procuratorial posts.¹²⁴ M. Aurelius Decimus, *praeses* of Numidia in 283–4, recorded his status as a former *princeps peregrinorum* on more than ten inscriptions from the province. His title, expressed as *v(ir) p(erfectissimus) p(raeses) p(rovinciae) N(umidiae) ex principe peregrinorum*, was included in dedications to gods, the *genius* of the *legio III Augusta*, the emperors Carus, Carinus and Numerian, and even on a new temple.¹²⁵ The fact that so many of these inscriptions were erected or dedicated by Decimus himself means that he must have authorized personally the inclusion of his former post. The practice was continued by one of his successors, Flavius Flavianus, previously a *cornicularius* of the praetorian prefects.¹²⁶ While there are certainly examples of new men in the Roman world who were uncomfortable with their humble origins,¹²⁷ these soldiers cannot be counted among them. They were evidently proud of the social mobility that the army had afforded them.

The monuments erected in honour of soldiers' sons who achieved equestrian rank illuminate this same phenomenon, but from a slightly different perspective. Many of these *equites* were only children when they died, and their epitaphs encapsulate their parents' grief at their deaths.¹²⁸ The epitaph of the three-year-old *eques Romanus* Aurelius Claudianus, son of a *protector*, is particularly poignant:¹²⁹

¹²¹ RIB 989 = ILS 4721.

¹²² See, for example, CIL III 1486; CIL III 3846; AE 1976, 600.

¹²³ Lendon, *Empire of Honour* (above, n. 54), 243–7.

¹²⁴ For a summary of these developments, see E. Lo Cascio, 'The emperor and his administration: the government and administration of the Empire in the central decades of the third century', in Bowman, Garnsey and Rathbone (eds), *The Cambridge Ancient History ... The Crisis of Empire* (above, n. 5), 156–69.

¹²⁵ CIL VIII 2529 = ILS 2291; CIL VIII 2530; CIL VIII 2663; CIL VIII 2670; CIL VIII 4578; CIL VIII 7002; CIL VIII 18288; AE 1919, 26; AE 1919, 28; AE 1973, 630; AE 1993, 1769a–b.

¹²⁶ CIL VIII 4325; AE 1916, 18; AE 1916, 21.

¹²⁷ The senator Larcus Macedo, the subject of a memorable letter by Pliny the Younger (*Epistula* 3.14), comes to mind.

¹²⁸ Iulius Victorinus, the fifteen-year-old son of a centurion, is described as *filius karissimus* (CIL III 8156), Tacitius Dubitatus is styled *filius optimus et piissimus* (CIL VI 2477), while the ten-year-old Aelius Marcellinus is *scholasticus* (CIL XIII 11834).

¹²⁹ CIL VI 1595.

*D(is) M(anibus) / Aur(elio) Claudiano / eq(uiti) R(omano) qui vix(it) / annis III m(ensibus) X
/ die(bus) XXVIII / Fla(vius) Viator / protector / pater / filio dulcissimo / b(ene) m(erenti) fecit*

(To the divine shades. To Aurelius Claudianus, *eques Romanus*, who lived three years, ten months, 28 days. Flavius Victor, *protector*, his father, made this for his sweetest son who well deserved it.)

On the monument itself, Claudianus is shown riding a horse with a wreath in his hand, a scene that was designed to portray the life he would have had, had he survived. This was a particularly common practice on tombs and epitaphs for deceased children.¹³⁰ The sarcophagus of the nine-year-old *eques Romanus* Domitius Marinianus, although not a soldier's son, shows the same value system at work. Marinianus is depicted in the centre of the sarcophagus in the dress of a military officer, a position that he never achieved.¹³¹ Mouritsen has argued that the epitaphs erected by Roman freedmen for their children not only conveyed their heartfelt grief, but also a profound sense of loss for their family's future and potential rise through the social hierarchy.¹³² The inscriptions for these young *equites* reveal that a similar phenomenon occurred in the world of the Roman army: the soldiers were not only mourning their dead sons, but also their ambitions for higher status in future generations.

The nature of these epitaphs, and the wider epigraphic evidence for promotions to equestrian rank, emphasizes the need to consider the soldiers' own perspectives in this matter. In the hierarchical world of the Roman army, the troops competed with each other for promotion and higher status. Direct grants of equestrian rank offered these men greater opportunities for social mobility than waiting for promotion to the posts of centurion and *primus pilus*. Their pride in their achievements is demonstrated eloquently by the way in which the honour of equestrian officer posts, or even simply the right to seek such a command as a *militiae petitor*, is highlighted on honorific and funerary inscriptions. In many cases the soldiers themselves would not be granted the *equus publicus*, but their sons received the honour instead, enabling the family to climb the social hierarchy in future generations. As I have argued, these opportunities came about not because soldiers could now qualify for the equestrian census, but because they received the honour from the emperors without regard to their wealth. In the next part of this paper, I shall examine why emperors chose to make such grants in the late second and third centuries. Was it to solve a recruitment crisis or professionalize the army, as scholars have suggested, or were there other factors involved?

¹³⁰ B. Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy* (Oxford, 2003), 356–63.

¹³¹ *CIL* VI 41432. Note also the Concordia 'battle sarcophagus', created for a promising young senator or equestrian in the Antonine period: J. Francis, 'A Roman battle sarcophagus at Concordia University, Montreal', *Phoenix* 54 (2000), 332–7.

¹³² H. Mouritsen, 'Freedmen and decurions: epitaphs and social history in Imperial Italy', *Journal of Roman Studies* 95 (2005), 38–63, esp. pp. 61–2.

EMPERORS AND SOLDIERS

The entrance of soldiers into the *militiae equestres* traditionally has been associated with the army reforms of Septimius Severus.¹³³ The historian Herodian recorded that the emperor introduced a series of measures favourable to the troops, including the right to legal marriage with their wives, and the privilege of wearing a gold ring.¹³⁴ As we have already noted, in the early Empire the *anulus aureus* was regarded as a symbol of the *ordo equester*, and such a ring can be seen clearly on the earliest extant depiction of an equestrian military officer.¹³⁵ Following Herodian's account, Mommsen proposed that the award of the gold ring meant that all soldiers were given equestrian status on discharge, a thesis subsequently modified by Domaszewski, who argued that the privilege was confined to *principales*.¹³⁶ The epigraphic evidence does not support either of these interpretations, as there are too few examples of soldiers attested with equestrian rank to suggest that it was granted to all veterans, or even to all *principales*. As Table 3 demonstrates, in many cases it was not the soldiers themselves who were advanced into the *ordo equester*, but their sons. A further objection to the arguments of Mommsen and Domaszewski was raised by Stein, who pointed out that the *anulus aureus* was no longer exclusively granted to equestrians, but had been bestowed on freedmen, who were not subsequently allowed to enter the *ordo equester*.¹³⁷ As the gold ring evidently had ceased to confer equestrian rank by the late second century, another explanation must be sought.

The funerary monuments of third-century soldiers shed some light on the problem. M. Aurelius Secundinus, a *militiae petitor* whose career was discussed in the previous section, is depicted on his tombstone wearing a ring on the third finger of his left hand, in which he is holding a *rotulus*.¹³⁸ This iconography is paralleled on two third-century grave-stones of the *equites singulares*: the accompanying inscription has been lost in both cases, so we cannot determine the ranks of these men.¹³⁹ But despite the fact that Severus gave soldiers permission to wear gold rings, the majority of military men is not depicted with them. There are many instances of soldiers with a *rotulus*, but they do not

¹³³ Birley, 'Septimius Severus' (above, n. 31), 63–4; Handy, *Die Severer* (above, n. 45), 206; R.E. Smith, 'The army reforms of Septimius Severus', *Historia* 21 (1972), 481–500, esp. p. 496.

¹³⁴ Herodian 3.8.4–5.

¹³⁵ *CIL* XIV 3948; Devijver and van Wonterghem, 'The funerary monuments' (above, n. 30), 63.

¹³⁶ T. Mommsen, *Römisches Staatsrecht* (Leipzig, 1887–8), IIA, 894; A. von Domaszewski and B. Dobson, *Die Rangordnung des Römischen Heeres*, revised edition (Cologne, 1967), 42.

¹³⁷ Stein, *Der Römische Ritterstand* (above, n. 6), 46–7; Duncan-Jones, 'Who were the *equites*?' (above, n. 3), 215–16.

¹³⁸ *CIL* VI 2488; D.E.E. Kleiner, *Roman Imperial Funerary Altars with Portraits* (Rome, 1987), no. 121.

¹³⁹ Speidel, *Die Denkmäler* (above, n. 79), 290–2, nos. 531, 533.

generally have a ring on their left hand.¹⁴⁰ Since the ring was featured only on selected grave-stones of members of the praetorian guard or the *equites singulares*, few soldiers may have been able to afford to purchase an *anulus aureus*, even though they had been granted permission to wear one.¹⁴¹ It is unlikely that the *anulus aureus* automatically gave a soldier the right to seek a commission in the *militiae equestres*. The grave-stone of Secundinus is the only example I have been able to find of a *militiae petitor* depicted with a ring. There are other monuments of Severan date in which soldiers are shown wearing rings, such as those belonging to Damianus, a *beneficiarius*, and Vitalis, a soldier in the seventh praetorian cohort. But the accompanying inscriptions do not mention that these men were *militiae petitores* or had any claim to equestrian status.¹⁴² The archaeological evidence therefore indicates that Severus's decision to give soldiers the right to wear gold rings was an important privilege, but it did not necessarily grant automatic entrance into the *militiae equestres*.

This conclusion is supported by the chronological distribution of the epigraphic material, which shows that the term *militiae petitor* appears on inscriptions before the reign of Septimius Severus. The earliest example is the funerary monument of M. Ulpus Silvanus, who was awarded the *equus publicus* by the emperor Commodus, as discussed above (p. 102).¹⁴³ The practice of bestowing equestrian status on soldiers' sons also pre-dates Severus: Aurelius Sabinus, son of a centurion in the *equites singulares*, possessed equestrian rank in the early years of Commodus's reign.¹⁴⁴ Several other examples of equestrian sons collected in Table 3 cannot be dated more closely than the late second and early third centuries. The palaeography of some of these inscriptions, such as that belonging to C. Iulius Nepotianus, suggests a

¹⁴⁰ For example, note *CIL* III 3970; *CIL* III 5631; *AE* 1958, 66; Speidel, *Die Denkmäler* (above, n. 79), 288 no. 528, and 292 no. 534. See also the images in Coulston, 'Art, culture and service' (above, n. 109), 550 (fig. 1), 555 (fig. 6), 556 (fig. 7): these are all third-century grave-stones in which the soldier is grasping a *rotulus* in his hand but there is no evidence of a ring. A ring also appears on the left hand of Iulius Terentius, *tribunus cohortis XX Palmyrenorum*, in a fresco at Dura Europos dated c. 239. The object generally is assumed not to be the *anulus aureus*, and may in fact be a red seal ring. See F. Cumont, *Fouilles de Doura-Europos (1922–1923)* (Paris, 1926), 93; James, *The Excavations* (above, n. 109), 63.

¹⁴¹ There are some inscriptions that refer to grants of the gold ring by specific emperors (*CIL* VI 1847 = *ILS* 1899; *CIL* V 4392 = *ILS* 5631), but it is unlikely that Septimius Severus personally bestowed actual rings on all soldiers throughout the Empire. Instead, he would have given them permission to wear such objects. I am grateful to one of the journal's referees for this point.

¹⁴² Damianus: *CIL* III 6601, discussed in E. Schallmayer, K. Eibl, J. Ott, G. Preuss and E. Wittkopf, *Der Römische Weihebezirk von Osterburken I: Corpus der Griechischen und Lateinischen Beneficiarius-Inschriften des Römischen Reiches* (Stuttgart, 1990), 568–9. Vitalis: *AE* 1990, 752, originally published by M.P. Speidel and B. Scardigli, 'Neckarschwaben (Suebi Nicrenses)', *Archäologisches Korrespondenzblatt* 20 (1990), 201–7.

¹⁴³ *CIL* VI 3550 = *ILS* 2759.

¹⁴⁴ *CIL* VI 273.

date before the third century.¹⁴⁵ From this evidence, it is clear that the promotion of soldiers to equestrian commands, the award of the right to seek such a position (as indicated by the title *militiae petitor*), and the elevation of soldiers' sons to equestrian rank, are all different manifestations of the same phenomenon. I would argue, therefore, that emperors granted soldiers greater access to equestrian rank from the late second century onwards as a way of rewarding selected members of the army, either by promoting them into the *militiae equestres*, or conferring the *equus publicus* on their sons.

These honours and promotions were a new way of strengthening the relationship between the *princeps* and the army. Various Roman emperors had tried to court popularity with the troops in different ways, from Domitian's pay rise, proudly commemorated on coinage, to Marcus Aurelius parading his son Commodus before the troops during the revolt of Avidius Cassius.¹⁴⁶ Even the most unwarlike rulers needed to cultivate the support of the soldiers, and emperors who failed to pay sufficient attention to their demands suffered accordingly.¹⁴⁷ The most effective way of ensuring military loyalty was the bestowal of donatives when a new emperor came to the throne, with further supplements on significant imperial anniversaries.¹⁴⁸ These became more extravagant over the course of the second century: the largest single donative on record is the 20,000 sesterces given by Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus to the praetorian guard in 161.¹⁴⁹ The Antonine period also witnessed the granting of honorific epithets deriving from the emperor's own name to legions and auxiliary units. This began during the reign of Commodus with the award of the title *Commodiana*, and the practice became widespread in the third century, with units bearing epithets such as *Antoniniana*, *Maximiniana* and *Gordiana*.¹⁵⁰ It is impossible to determine which emperor first granted soldiers a commission in the *militiae equestres* (though Commodus is a likely candidate), but the move undoubtedly marked an attempt to reward the troops and cultivate their support. This conclusion enables us to place Septimius Severus's grant of permission to wear gold rings in context. The emperor was

¹⁴⁵ AE 1976, 494.

¹⁴⁶ Campbell, *The Emperor* (above, n. 50), is the standard work, see esp. pp. 17–156. Domitian: Suetonius, *Domitian* 7.3; C.M. Kraay, 'Two new *sestertii* of Domitian', *American Numismatic Society Museum Notes* 9 (1960), 109–16. Marcus Aurelius: *Historia Augusta, Commodus* 2.2–3; A.R. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius* (London, 1987), 187–9.

¹⁴⁷ Note especially the threats made by the praetorian guard to Nerva (Cassius Dio 68.3.3–4), and the death of Pertinax (Cassius Dio 74.8–10).

¹⁴⁸ R.P. Duncan-Jones, *Money and Government in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 1998), 82–90, appendix 7.

¹⁴⁹ *Historia Augusta, Marcus Aurelius* 7.9.

¹⁵⁰ M.P. Speidel, 'Commodus the god-emperor and the army', *Journal of Roman Studies* 83 (1993), 109–14; O. Hekster, *Commodus: an Emperor at the Crossroads* (Amsterdam, 2002), 164–8; Campbell, *The Emperor* (above, n. 50), 49–51. For epithets, see J. Fitz, *Honorific Titles of Army Units in the Third Century* (Budapest, 1983), and *CIL* VIII 3163 (*Commodiana*); *CIL* III 3907 (*Antoniniana*); AE 1975, 701 (*Maximiniana*); AE 1958, 239 (*Gordiana*).

acutely aware that the legions had brought him to power in 193, and that their support was integral to the longevity of his regime.¹⁵¹ He therefore granted soldiers further concessions, increasing their pay, allowing them to marry legally, and giving permission for serving *principales* to form *collegia*.¹⁵² The monuments erected by these *collegia* include references to the *anularium*, a payment made on a soldier's retirement or promotion to a post in another legion.¹⁵³ These benefits were the direct result of Severus's generosity towards the soldiers, a connection made by the men themselves in several inscriptions.¹⁵⁴ Severus not only continued to award equestrian commissions to particular soldiers, but also granted permission for military men to wear the *anulus aureus*. This did not confer equestrian rank, but marked a soldier as an *honestior*, with all its attendant legal privileges.¹⁵⁵ All these various promotions and honours — veterans in the *militiae equestres*, young *equites Romani* in military families, the gold rings — were the result of emperors responding to the soldiers' desire for social mobility as a way of consolidating their own bond with the troops.

This conclusion places greater emphasis on the viewpoints and experiences of the soldiers who gained equestrian rank than has been the case hitherto. My argument does not necessarily exclude the predominant scholarly explanation for the grants of equestrian rank to soldiers, namely that there was a deficit of candidates from the municipal aristocracies willing to serve in the *militiae equestres*. A shortage of equestrian officers is not inherently implausible in and of itself: the lack of volunteers for the *decuriae* in the Julio-Claudian period is well-known, and Augustus is reported to have turned to Italian townspeople when he required men to serve as *tribuni militum*.¹⁵⁶ But I would argue that the evidence that has been presented thus far to support a similar crisis under Severus and his successors is somewhat limited. The shortage theory primarily arises from Jarrett's interpretation of the epigraphic material from Africa, which shows an increase in the percentage of equestrian officers from the militarized regions, especially in Numidia and Mauretania, in

¹⁵¹ See the account of A.R. Birley, *Septimius Severus: the African Emperor* (London, 1999), 97–104. Severus's deathbed advice to his sons Caracalla and Geta was: 'Be harmonious, enrich the soldiers, and scorn all other men' (Cassius Dio 76.15.2).

¹⁵² M. Ginsburg, 'Roman military clubs and their social functions', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 71 (1940), 149–56, esp. pp. 151–2. These *collegia* were not open to the common soldiers: Smith, 'The army reforms' (above, n. 133), 497–8.

¹⁵³ Ginsburg, 'Roman military clubs' (above, n. 152), 153.

¹⁵⁴ The *optiones* erected their *schola* with statues and images of the imperial family 'from the plentiful pay and grants which they bestowed on them' (*ex largissimis stipend[is] et liberalitatib[us] quae in eos conferunt*, CIL VIII 2554 = ILS 2445). See also CIL VIII 2553 = ILS 2438; ILS 9099; ILS 9100.

¹⁵⁵ Duncan-Jones, 'Who were the *equites*?' (above, n. 3), 215–16. For gold rings denoting *honestiores*, see P. Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1970), 245–51.

¹⁵⁶ *Decuriae*: Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 33.33, discussed by Duncan-Jones, 'Who were the *equites*?' (above, n. 3), 188. Tribunes: Suetonius, *Augustus* 46.

the third century.¹⁵⁷ His explanation of this phenomenon is that equestrians from the more urbanized, coastal areas were reluctant to serve, and thus recruitment was focused on the former military colonies. This argument is somewhat prejudiced, as it supposes that emperors would turn to these military regions only if they lacked sufficient recruits from more ‘Romanized’ areas.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, the evidence speaks against such a shortage. It has been well established that the ranks of the senate were renewed through the regular promotion of *novi homines*, who increasingly came from the provinces rather than Italy itself.¹⁵⁹ The *ordo equester* likewise incorporated new men, with entrants from Africa, the Balkans and the eastern provinces compensating for the shortages of the Julio-Claudian period. By the mid-third century, only 21 per cent of equestrian officers came from Italy, in contrast with 70 per cent under Augustus and his immediate successors.¹⁶⁰ We can trace this process throughout the third century, especially in the eastern Mediterranean. In 212, the Emperor Caracalla granted citizenship to all free inhabitants of the Empire under the terms of the so-called *Constitutio Antoniniana*.¹⁶¹ Many wealthy families in the eastern provinces were not enfranchised before Caracalla’s edict, and citizenship now made them eligible for equestrian rank and service in the *militiae equestres*.¹⁶²

The evidence of papyri and the late Roman law codes shows that members of the curial classes continued to seek positions in the *militiae equestres* until the system came to an end in the mid-third century. For example, Claudius Theon, an equestrian tribune from Egypt, is named as one of four siblings who each received one-quarter of an estate in the Hermopolite nome in 268.¹⁶³ One of Theon’s brothers, Claudius Eudaemon, was a member of the senate in

¹⁵⁷ Jarrett, ‘The African contribution’ (above, n. 45), 225–6. His argument is followed by Birley, ‘Septimius Severus’ (above, n. 31), 76; Birley, ‘A Roman altar’ (above, n. 45), 83; Devijver, ‘Veränderungen’ (above, n. 45), 229–30; H. Devijver, ‘Equestrian officers from north Africa’, *L’Africa Romana* 8 (1990), 127–201, esp. p. 190.

¹⁵⁸ Jarrett, ‘The African contribution’ (above, n. 45), and Devijver, ‘Veränderungen’ (above, n. 45), both explicitly use the word ‘Romanized’. This term is inherently problematic, and the way it is employed by these scholars implies that the ‘Romanized’ equestrians from the urbanized areas were superior to the military recruits. For critical reflection on the appropriateness of this term, see the essays collected in D. Mattingly (ed.), *Dialogues in Roman Imperialism (Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 23)* (Portsmouth (RI), 1997).

¹⁵⁹ Hopkins and Burton, ‘Ambition and withdrawal’ (above, n. 48), 120–200.

¹⁶⁰ H. Devijver, ‘The geographical origins of equestrian officers’, in Devijver, *The Equestrian Officers of the Roman Imperial Army* (above, n. 46), 109–28; Duncan-Jones, ‘Who were the *equites*?’ (above, n. 3), 189–90.

¹⁶¹ Cassius Dio 77.9.5; A.N. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship*, second edition (Oxford, 1973), 380–94.

¹⁶² P. Garnsey, ‘Roman citizenship and Roman law in the late Empire’, in S. Swain and M. Edwards (eds), *Approaching Late Antiquity: the Transformation from Early to Late Empire* (Oxford, 2004), 133–55.

¹⁶³ *P.Flor.* 50; H. Devijver, *De Aegypto et Exercitus Romano sive Prosopographia Militiarum Equestrium quae ab Augusto ad Gallienum seu Statione seu Origine ad Aegyptum Pertinebant* (Leuven, 1975), 54.

Alexandria, demonstrating the family's high standing.¹⁶⁴ Another contemporary, M. Aurelius Corellius Alexander, president of Hermopolis, had also served in the *militiae equestres*.¹⁶⁵ By the late third century, the institution of the *militiae equestres* itself effectively ceased to exist, but the positions of which it was composed continued to form part of the structure of the later Roman army.¹⁶⁶ The testimony of the late Roman legal codes, the *Codex Justinianus* and *Codex Theodosianus*, demonstrates that military service, particularly in the corps of the *protectores*, remained an attractive option for members of the municipal aristocracy who wished to avoid the heavy burdens of curial service.¹⁶⁷ Since this problem continued throughout the fourth century, it suggests that less well-off members of the curial élites, for whom high equestrian or senatorial status was unattainable, saw the army as a possible means for social mobility. This argument, that municipal aristocrats continued to seek military commissions, firstly in the *militiae equestres* and then later with the *protectores*, is in keeping with recent studies on the transformation of the curial classes in the later Roman Empire, which have emphasized the on-going participation of these men both in their cities and the wider imperial administration.¹⁶⁸ There were undoubtedly some members of the curial classes who eschewed military posts, but there is little evidence to suggest a major shortage or a need for significant changes in recruiting practices along the lines argued by Jarrett. Instead, I would propose that the increasing percentage of officers from the military regions of Africa indicates the desire for social mobility among army families and their descendants, as they actively sought to emulate the lives of municipal aristocrats through appointments in the *militiae equestres*.

What, then, should we make of the related proposal that the soldiers were promoted to equestrian rank in order to professionalize the ranks of the officer

¹⁶⁴ M.A.H. El-Abbadi, 'P. Flor. 50 reconsidered', *Proceedings of the XIV International Congress of Papyrologists, Oxford, 24–31 July 1974* (London, 1975), 91–6; J. Banaji, *Agrarian Change in Late Antiquity: Gold, Labour, and Aristocratic Dominance*, revised edition (Oxford, 2007), 110. A significant proportion of equestrian officers from Egypt came from the Alexandrian aristocracy: H. Devijver, 'The Roman army in Egypt (with special reference to the *militiae equestres*)', in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.1 (Berlin, 1974), 452–92, esp. p. 489.

¹⁶⁵ Devijver, *De Aegypto* (above, n. 163), 32. For further examples, see the catalogue in H. Devijver, 'A new papyrus (P. Egypt. Mus. Inv. S.R. 3055) and the equestrian officers from Roman Egypt', *Ancient Society* 25 (1994), 233–48.

¹⁶⁶ This process is discussed in detail in my doctoral thesis: C. Davenport, *The Senatorial and Equestrian Orders in the Roman Army and Administration, AD 235–337* (University of Oxford, D.Phil. thesis, 2009), 240–62.

¹⁶⁷ *Codex Justinianus* 12.33.2 (Diocletian and Maximian), *Codex Theodosianus* 12.1.38 (Valentinian and Valens). See the discussion of F.G.B. Millar, 'Empire and city, Augustus to Julian: obligations, excuses and status', *Journal of Roman Studies* 73 (1983), 76–96, esp. p. 86.

¹⁶⁸ M. Whittow, 'Ruling the late Roman and early Byzantine city: a continuous history', *Past and Present* 129 (1990), 3–29; P. Heather, 'Running the empire: bureaucrats, curials, and senators', in D.M. Gwynn (ed.), *A.H.M. Jones and the Later Roman Empire* (Leiden, 2008), 91–119, esp. pp. 115–16.

corps?¹⁶⁹ It is difficult to see how grants of the *equus publicus* to soldiers' sons, many of whom were mere children, would have helped in this regard. The veterans who were promoted directly to the *militiae* would have been more experienced in the sense that they had spent many years in the army, and filled a wide range of positions as *beneficiarii*, *decuriones* and *cornicularii*. However, commissioning these men in the *militiae equestres* would not have been an effective way to create a more professionalized middle cadre of officers: the military commands themselves lasted three to four years, but the prospect of further employment depended on senatorial patronage. It might be supposed that men who served in four of the *militiae* were selected for successive posts because of their aptitude and experience. But the statistical evidence for these appointments, as compiled and analysed by Duncan-Jones, does not support such rational reasons for promotion. Instead, it reveals that officers who held four army posts went on to have very successful careers as equestrian civilian administrators, and were often promoted into the senate.¹⁷⁰ Likewise, *primipilares* who had spent most of their lives in the army were advanced directly to the second grade of procuratorships with a salary of 100,000 sesterces.¹⁷¹ This evidence suggests that there was no inherent bias in the system designed to promote excellent soldiers to further military posts, but that the aim was to nurture the careers of equestrians who would be able to fill a wide variety of roles. The fact that our soldiers sought commissions in the *militiae equestres*, positions that did not guarantee further commands in the army, suggests that they were consciously rejecting a lifetime of military service. If that were their goal, they would have remained in the ranks of the army, seeking promotion to the posts of centurion and *primus pilus*. Instead, they wanted the opportunity to share in the life of the municipal aristocrats, men who served a term as a *tribunus* or *praefectus* arranged by a senatorial patron, before returning to their home communities to bask in the glory.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined a group of honorific and funerary inscriptions from the late second and third centuries, which reveal that in this period soldiers were being promoted to officer posts in the *militiae equestres* and that equestrian status was being conferred on their sons. The total number of inscriptions in these categories may seem small compared to the vast quantities of epigraphic material that survive today, but their importance is demonstrated by the fact that they attest significant changes in the Roman military hierarchy. In the early Empire, it would have been

¹⁶⁹ Handy, *Die Severer* (above, n. 45), 207–8; Devijver, 'Les milices équestres' (above, n. 47), 184.

¹⁷⁰ Duncan-Jones, 'Who were the *equites*?' (above, n. 3), 199–205.

¹⁷¹ Dobson, 'The significance' (above, n. 41), 402. There is no significant rise in the number of former centurions or *primipilares* in such posts in the early third century: Campbell, *The Emperor* (above, n. 50), 408–9.

unheard of for such men — praetorian guardsmen and *evocati*, or soldiers and *principales* from the legions — to be directly advanced to the *militiae equestres* without having to work their way up to the posts of centurion and *primus pilus* over the course of many years. It also would have been extraordinary for the sons of military men to be granted the status of *equites Romani* at a very young age, given the stringent requirements for entrance to the *ordo equester*. Yet the inscriptions discussed in this paper reveal that both these changes took place in the late second century, innovations that would prove to be representative of the larger transformation of the Roman army and administration over the course of the following hundred years.

I have proposed that the promotion of soldiers and their sons to equestrian rank was the result of two interrelated factors. The first was the desire for greater status on the part of the soldiers themselves, a perspective that thus far has been neglected by scholars. A close examination of the epigraphic evidence has demonstrated the great pride felt by soldiers who were awarded commissions in the *militiae equestres* or whose sons were elevated into the *ordo equester*. In the competitive culture of the Roman army, these status designations allowed soldiers to advance beyond their peers and gave them a chance to share in the lifestyle of their officers. The second factor is that Roman emperors needed to cultivate their military credentials and consolidate their support in the ranks of the army, which they accomplished through the award of cash bonuses, victory titles and other honours. By granting soldiers greater access to officer posts and equestrian rank, emperors were offering their troops further recognition of their importance to the imperial regime. I have argued that the veterans honoured in this manner could not have amassed the equestrian fortune of 400,000 sesterces during their years of service. Therefore, the property qualification must have been waived in these cases, and the men eventually awarded equestrian rank by virtue of their commissions in the *militiae equestres*. The relaxation of the census requirement for membership of the *ordo equester* contributed to the overall devaluation of equestrian rank in this period, so that by the end of the third century, it is probable that this criterion had disappeared altogether.

This process of granting equestrian rank to soldiers seems to have begun in the late second century, rather than the third, possibly during the reign of Commodus (though this is subject to modification by future epigraphic discoveries). It is important to emphasize the second-century origins of this phenomenon, as it allows us to set the reforms of Septimius Severus in their proper context. With selected soldiers already receiving permission to seek an officer commission (as *militiae petitores*), Severus introduced further benefactions, such as the right to wear the *anulus aureus*, an honour that gave men the higher status of *honestiores*. The generosity of Severus and other emperors was recognized by the soldiers and their families, who proudly included their promotions or status symbols on honorific and funerary inscriptions. We need not suppose that these promotions came about as the result of members of the curial classes withdrawing from service, as this is a somewhat élitist perspective that neglects

the aspirations of the soldiers. The supposed professionalization of the Roman army in the third century has likewise exercised a powerful hold on the scholarly imagination, but it is doubtful whether all soldiers desired to be permanently wedded to the army. Promotion to equestrian rank or a commission in the *militiae equestres* offered something more: the opportunity of a better life.¹⁷²

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