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PROVINCIAL EMPEROR SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS: THE SPREAD OF ROMAN
CITIZENSHIP UNDER THE PRINCIPATE

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ABSTRACT

The spread of Roman citizenship under the Principate culminated with the *constitutio Antoniniana* in 212 CE. The process through which citizenship went from being a privilege held only by a select few, to being held by all free persons of the empire is worthy of discussion. The following thesis will attempt to analyze the importance of this change through several means. First, the process of Romanization needs to be outlined in order to understand how the Roman state spread its influence to the provinces. Furthermore, the idea of Roman identities will be explored in order to explain the variation in Roman culture that is seen throughout the provinces. A significant portion of this thesis is dedicated to the reforms of Septimius Severus and his son Caracalla. The Severan line represents a major paradigm shift in Roman politics and society. Septimius Severus was a truly provincial emperor who seems to have been more comfortable in outside the traditional power base at Rome. His reforms reveal a man who was unstable on the throne. In this regard, his sole reliance on the army was his most significant departure from past emperors. His son Caracalla later gave citizenship to all free persons of the empire. The reasons for this action will be explored in this thesis. Lastly, the consequences of the Severan reforms will be outlined in the third century. In this regard, the spread of citizenship and reforms made by Severus can be seen as setting the stage for the Crisis of the Third Century.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

In the Late Republic, it would not be an overstatement to say Rome was a city with an empire rather than a city within an empire. As the Rome expanded, it had dominion over countless cultures, religions, and peoples. The ability to rule over such a vast amalgamation of societies was a testament to their ingenuity. As empires expand, they inevitably come into contact with foreign cultures. These cultures are influences—and in return influence—the conquering culture. For this reason, the notion of being Roman was never static. It was constantly changing as the empire expanded and new peoples were incorporated into the greater workings of the imperial administration. In this way, Rome became a city in the empire rather than a city with an empire.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore three major points. First, what did it mean to be Roman between the first century BCE and the third century CE? Second, how did the rise of Septimius Severus represent a paradigm shift toward complete provincial integration? Lastly, how did the reforms of Septimius Severus—and his son Caracalla—influence the rise of later emperors and set the path for the rise of the dominate? These questions are important because they relate to a significant difference that Roman imperial culture had to other imperial cultures. The key difference being the lack of any ethnocentric ideology behind the notion of empire for Rome. As we will see in this thesis, Roman society was incredibly inclusive in terms of ethnic origins when it came to imperial power. The provincial elites of the empire were able to reach very high administrative posts within the Roman state. While the idea of an imperial culture can
be seen in many more recent empires, they included an ethnocentric ideology that prevented colonized peoples from achieving high positions within the state. The fact that this type of ideology was absent in Rome makes it worthy of study.

The first chapter will address the idea of Roman identity within the provinces. The first question is very difficult to answer. The hardest part of defining what it meant to be Roman is the simple fact that there was no standard from which to derive a definition. Defining Roman identity assumes that there was a uniform understanding of being Roman. On the contrary, the idea of being Roman and Roman culture was different in every part of the empire. Being Roman to a Gaul would likely have different meaning than to a Greek. There are clear similarities in each case, however. In this regard, it is more useful to analyze Roman culture as a group of Roman identities rather than one monolithic Roman identity. The Romanness that these peoples shared should be looked at as the adoption of an imperial culture rather than complete assimilation into a dominant culture. The creation of this imperial culture will be the cornerstone of the argument presented previously. That being the high levels of inclusion among provincial peoples in the imperial administration. Brought about by the very nature of imperial government, the vast inclusion of non-Italian peoples in the imperial administration was something that sets the Roman imperial state apart from more modern empires. While the notion of an imperial culture can be clearly demonstrated in post-modern empires, there was a clear limit to the heights of power these peoples could achieve. For example, Gandhi considered himself a citizen of the British Empire and received an education in London. However, he had no hopes of reaching the upper echelon of the British imperial government he eventually fought. In Roman society, provincials were perfectly capable and able to reach the highest positions of government. The following chapter will prove this point.
The second chapter will address the rise of Septimius Severus and his climb through the imperial bureaucracy. As for Septimius Severus, he provides a critical case study as the epitomized rise of provincial elites into the imperial administration. The Severan dynasty was not Italic, but Punic in origin. His upbringing and rise to power gives the best example of a provincial aristocrat successfully playing the political game of the Roman imperial system. Through a detailed study of his rise to power, a framework can be created that outlines the necessary steps for provincial elites to be successful in the Roman imperial administration. Furthermore, the reforms that he instituted can provide a further understanding of the aftermath of his rule. The most significant reforms he can be credited with are the complete dependence of later emperors on military support to legitimize their rule, the use of propaganda to draw ties to the good emperors of the past, significantly debasing the silver content of the denarius, and beginning the separation of civil and military administrations within the empire. All of these reforms would prove disastrous in the third century when imperial power was usurped by the military aristocracy. Severus is a unique character due to his strong provincial background. Furthermore, his marriage to Julia Domna would prove to be a decisive factor in the civil war he fought as well as for later imperial succession. The Syrian and African links these two provided revealed the importance of provincial politics in the empire. Furthermore, it demonstrates the metropolitan nature of the third century. Severus was born in Lepcis Magna in Tripoli, married a Syrian woman while stationed in the west, and died in York. Clearly, the empire was very well connected at the time Severus was rising to power.

The final chapter will discuss the results of the Severan reforms and how they played into the political chaos of the third century. The shift toward reliance on pure military influence led to the slow but certain devolution of the Principate. The need to maintain a Republican image was
replaced by pure autocracy both in practice and appearance. The reforms of Severus and his heirs set the framework for the rise of a military aristocracy that would dominate the imperial throne during the third century. The implications were huge as any contender to the imperial title needed the army for any chance of success.
Chapter 2

The Evolution of Roman Identity from the 1st Century BCE to the 2nd Century CE

In order to understand the rise of Septimius Severus, the Severan dynasty in the second century, and the political changes thereafter, the changing interpretations of what it meant to be Roman must be examined. Like any culture, Rome adapted to changing social, political, and economic events. What it meant to be a Roman in the early Republic differed from the understanding of Roman identity in the imperial period. Furthermore, what it meant to be Roman in Italy did not hold true when looking at what it meant to be Roman in North Africa. Similar to differences seen in modern nations, the Roman Empire had unique territorial cultures that could arguably be seen as Roman themselves by the second century C.E. For this reason, the focus of this chapter starts at the Social War around 90 BCE and extends through the second century. The Social War was a conflict between Rome and its Italian allies that resulted in the passage of the *Lex Julia*. The *Lex Julia* granted citizenship to all Italian peoples who did not revolt during the clash. The conflict completely changed the meaning of what it meant to be Roman in the Late Republic. Citizenship was no longer reserved for the inhabitants of the city of Rome. Later, the second century saw major changes to the political and social landscape of the empire. Many of these changes can be linked to the culmination of provincial integration and Romanization throughout the empire. The integration of these diverse regions provided the framework through which Roman culture could develop into an imperial culture.

At this point a working definition of Romanization is needed in order to understand the complexities of provincial assimilation. Defining Romanization is very difficult due to the lack
of any standard through which Roman culture can be measured.\textsuperscript{1} In order to create a better understanding, it may be useful to look at Romanization as the process through which people came to think of themselves as, and became, Roman.\textsuperscript{2} This definition presents some shortfalls that need to be addressed before continuing. First, the diversity seen in Rome makes it difficult to form any coherent standard from which a cultural archetype can be formed. Roman culture had no standard and should not be looked at through the lenses of a comparative study to any definite model.\textsuperscript{3} Furthermore, Romanization did not culminate in cultural homogeneity.\textsuperscript{4} The spread of Roman culture in the provinces did not equate to a complete loss of local identity. Instead, each region of the empire developed its own unique understanding of Roman identity. These local variations coalesce into a singular understanding of Rome as an imperial culture.\textsuperscript{5} This imperial Roman culture could be held in tandem with local beliefs.\textsuperscript{6} For provincials, Roman imperial culture was a cloak to be worn in the presence of the imperial overlords, but could be shed if needed in order to maintain local associations. As Rome advanced from a regional to an imperial power, the understanding of Romanness and what it meant to be a member of Roman society changed.\textsuperscript{7} Out of this redefinition emerged the notion of Roman identity based on an opt-in

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{1} Woolf, Greg. \textit{Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul}. Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004, 7. Rome has always been a melting pot of cultures. Influences can be seen from Etruscan, Samnite, Greek, and Egyptian cultures. Therefore, any standard notion of Romanness falls short.

\textsuperscript{2} Woolf, \textit{Becoming Roman}, 7. Woolf argues that this definition is too simplistic due to the collective nature of Roman Imperial Culture. As such, it is important to acknowledge how the provinces formed part of a whole.

\textsuperscript{3} Explain this point

\textsuperscript{4} Woolf, \textit{Becoming Roman}, 7. Certain regions, such as Greece, maintained their language and culture despite significant Roman involvement.

\textsuperscript{5} Woolf, \textit{Becoming Roman}, 7. Woolf argues that Roman culture must be studied as an imperial culture due to the fact that there is no standard understanding of Roman identity. In this regard, each piece combines to make a whole.


\textsuperscript{7} Arno, "How Romans Became “Roman”, vii, Arno argues that the transition of Rome from a regional to an imperial culture necessitated the redefinition of what it meant to be Roman when referencing conquered peoples granted citizenship.
\end{flushleft}
system that held behavior and service to the state as key indicators of what it meant to be
Roman.8 Living in Rome was no longer necessary nor sufficient when claiming Roman identity.9
Furthermore, citizenship was no longer the prerogative of the original inhabitants of Rome. The
spread of citizenship is of particular importance in regard to Romanization.

Romanization was a particularly complicated and diverse phenomena that occurred over
centuries. When Rome conquered a region they brought with them not only a new culture, but an
entirely new power structure that provincial elites had to learn in order to survive.10
Unfortunately, the development of the new role as intermediaries between Rome and local
peoples left provincial aristocrats in a very dangerous situation.11 The power structure introduced
by the Roman subjugators formed an arrangement whereby the local elites were valued based on
their skill at engaging both the imperial government and local populace. The need to appease
both imperial and municipal forces set the stage for Romanization in the provinces. The result of
these changes was the unification of the ruling class within a conquered province.12 To local
elites, political assimilation and cultural assimilation were one and the same.13 Many elites
simply imitated Roman culture as a means of assimilating.14 One example is the adoption of the
Latin language. Understanding Latin was a necessary attribute of Roman identity. Cicero

8 Arno, "How Romans Became “Roman”, 8. Arno mentions two other definitions of Romanness. The first being a
traditional outlook based on ancestry. The second saw citizenship as a legal status.
9 Arno, "How Romans Became “Roman”, 58. Arno argues that many formerly sufficient indicators of Romanness
either ceased to hold significance or merely became necessary. Language being an example
10 Woolf, Becoming Roman, 24-25.
11 Woolf, Becoming Roman, 22. The danger faced by local elites during civil conflict was exacerbate by their
connection to both the imperial local government. Even if they supported the winning side, the results could still
be deadly.
12 Woolf, Becoming Roman, 18. Rome needed local aristocrats to effectively govern their empire.
13 Woolf, Becoming Roman, 18. By accepting their status in the new Roman hierarchy, local elites were all but
forced to adopt Roman culture in order to stay relevant.
14 Woolf, Becoming Roman, 18. Imitation was based on their own understanding of what it meant to be Roman.
Usually through their contact with the Roman imperial government.
mentions “…it is not so amazing a thing to know Latin as it is shameful not to know it…”15 In another example, Apuleius—a prominent North African roman writer and poet who lived from 125-170 C.E—described how the sophisticated patrons attending his lectures would not forgive a “single syllable of barbarous pronunciation” of the Latin language.16 Linguistic pretentiousness was a tool of exclusion within Roman culture.17 Clearly, the Latin language was important to Roman identity both in Rome and in the provinces. While native Romans would be expected to have a strong command of the Latin language, provincial elites also needed Latin fluency to fulfil their new role as mediators within the provincial government. Another aspect of Romanization was the spread of citizenship throughout the provinces. Citizenship was critical to Roman identity as it was a legal indicator of Romanness. The process by which this legal status was conferred was complicated and often limited in scope. As Roman identity spread throughout the provinces, many cities followed the same path whereby they were granted Latin rights and then citizenship. Latin Rights consisted of a set of legal entitlements and duties that provided limited access to the political process.18 Citizenship was a much more privileged gift reserved for strong allies, or more frequently select elites within a community. The important difference between Latin rights and citizenship was the right to vote.19 Cities that were granted Latin Rights were provided the privileges and duties of citizens with the only constraint being on political participation. To some Roman subjects the difference between the two may have been negligible.

15 Cicero, Brutus 140; Arno, “How Romans Became “Roman”, 58.
16 Birley, Septimius Severus: The African Emperor, 35.
17 Woolf, Becoming Roman, 19. The one consistent aspect of Roman culture was its nature as an us versus them comparison. What made someone a Roman was often them not being a barbarian. In this regard, the Roman language was critically important as an indicator of an individual or regions Romanness. While not sufficient, it was a necessary indicator or Roman identity.
Even those who were granted full citizenship may have been disenfranchised due to the requirement that all voting be done in the city of Rome.\textsuperscript{20} For this reason, any citizens living more than a few hours away from the capital were effectively disenfranchised.\textsuperscript{21} When looking at these cities and regions—whether they were granted full citizenship or just Latin Rights—it becomes very difficult to create one all-encompassing definition of what it meant to be Roman. As mentioned previously, each province assimilated in a different manner and at a different speed.\textsuperscript{22} While Romanization was never a uniform process, the ways in which communities were legally recognized within the Roman state proves a useful point of reference when looking at Romanization within the provinces. Each region Romanized at a different speed and with a different understanding of Roman identity. The story of provincial integration begins with the Italian communities conquered by Rome. A study of these peoples and their integration into the Republic serves as a useful guide when looking at the integration of provinces in the imperial period.

The Italian cities may have been the first to Romanize, but their journey was not without resistance. In 91 B.C.E, the Italian city states rose up in what came to be known as the Social War. The reason for this conflict was directly linked to the failure of Rome to enfranchise the Italian communities.\textsuperscript{23} Many of the Italian communities were thoroughly Romanized by the 1st

\textsuperscript{20} Everitt, \textit{Cicero: The Life and Times of Rome's Greatest Politician}, 18. Only the wealthy could afford to travel great distance in order to vote. Therefore, a large portion of eligible voters were disenfranchised due to a combination of economic status and distance from Rome
\textsuperscript{22} Woolf, \textit{Becoming Roman}, 25.
\textsuperscript{23} Nagle, D. Brendan. "An Allied View of the Social War." American Journal of Archaeology 77, no. 4 (1973): 367-78. doi:10.2307/503306, 367. A tribune by the name of Drusus had introduced legislation granting citizenship to Italian communities. He was murdered. His death is often linked to the outbreak of the Social War by disheartened Italians
century BCE, but were not afforded the legal status of Romans.  

Part of the reason for the hesitance that the Roman Senate and people showed toward granting citizenship was an attempt to preserve Roman identity as they understood it. Citizenship granted the inhabitants of Rome many legal privileges. The most important aspect of Roman citizenship was the ability to vote and as such have a voice in the government. The Republic and people of Rome wanted to maintain these privileges for themselves. Another aspect of resistance to citizenship grants can be seen in the increased resentment over foreign influence on Rome. The beginning of a paradigm shift was taking place that would see significant changes in the notion of Roman identity. For that reason, politics in the Late Republic were increasingly concerned with what it meant to be Roman. The result of the Social War was the passage of the *Lex Julia de Civitas Latinas at Sociis Danda* in 90 BCE which granted citizenship to all the Italian communities that did not revolt. The following year, this grant was extended to those who had revolted as well. These laws effectively granted citizenship to the entirety of the Italian peninsula. While Rome may have won the war, they lost the political game. The Social War forced the Roman Senate to act on legislation that a year earlier had resulted in a Tribune of the Plebs being murdered. The

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24 Everitt, *Cicero: The Life and Times of Rome’s Greatest Politician*, 18. Many Italian communities maintained their local customs and language. However, they were deeply entrenched into the Roman political system through the Patronage system that dominated Rome.

25 Everitt, *Cicero: The Life and Times of Rome’s Greatest Politician*, 34. By the first century, there was much debate over the role of foreign influence within Roman culture. Greek influence being an example a widely accepted foreign aspect of Roman life that came into the spotlight at this time. Cicero’s grandfather was a strong anti-greek proponent. Cicero, on the other hand, supported Greek learning.

26 Everitt, *Cicero: The Life and Times of Rome’s Greatest Politician*, 54. Cicero discusses the topic of Roman identity quite often. Interestingly, he was not a Roman in the traditional sense. However, he thoroughly considered himself Roman.


28 MOURITSEN, "ITALIAN UNIFICATION: A STUDY IN ANCIENT AND MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY."., 6. The failure of legislation backed by Drusus and his assassination later in 91 BCE are often marked as the spark that set off the Social War.
blow to the traditional ruling class was great. Never before had such a significant revolt taken place that forced the hand of the Roman Senate like the Social War. The conflict left the Roman state in shock for almost a decade. When Cicero was born in 106 BCE, there were approximately 400,000 Roman citizens. In 82 BCE, when the shock of the Social War began to subside, there were over 4,500,000 free born inhabitants of Italy. Assuming the *Lex Julia* granted most of these people citizenship, that would be an over tenfold increase in Roman citizenship. A drastic increase like this in a previously exclusive group would definitely change the idea of what it meant to be Roman. The result of the Social War was a significant paradigm shift in Roman identity. Citizenship had previously been reserved for inhabitants of Rome and a few select allies. Now, the entire Italian peninsula was legally Roman.

The imperial nature of Roman culture creates an interesting dynamic. Rather than being based on ancestral background, Roman culture developed into an opt-in system. The career and writings of Marcus Tullius Cicero provide an interesting case study of this process. Cicero was born in 106 BCE; just before the outbreak of the Social War. He was not born in Rome nor was he born to a prominent Roman family. Rather, he was brought up in one of the conquered Italian cities as a member of a tribe that had fought with Rome during its rise to prominence. The prominent aristocrats that could not claim a prestigious family history in the Roman state are

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29 Everitt, *Cicero: The Life and Times of Rome's Greatest Politician*, 37. The Roman Senate was disgruntled by the fact that they had been practically forced to grant citizenship to the Italian states. They attempted to corral the new Italian citizens by giving them few voting blocks, but this was unpopular.
32 Everitt, *Cicero: The Life and Times of Rome's Greatest Politician*, 37. Interestingly, once the grant of citizenship was officiated, the local Italian dialects and cultures seem to have faded into a general Latinity of the peninsula.
33 Everitt, *Cicero: The Life and Times of Rome's Greatest Politician*, 21. Cicero was born to a prominent Italian family in Arpinum. His family had already gained citizenship at this point through their status as Local Elites.
referred to as new men. These individuals were the first in their families to gain senatorial status and high office. As a new man, Cicero was forced to develop new means of legitimacy when competing with the prominent families that dominated the Roman political system. The first signs of the imperial nature of Roman culture can be seen in some of the writings Cicero left behind. In one case, he is describing how much he appreciates returning to his birthplace.35 However, he notes that “We consider both the place where we were born and the city that has adopted us as our fatherland”.36 While Cicero was deeply attached to his ancestral lands, he ultimately owed his loyalty to Rome.37 As a new man, Cicero could not claim to be a natural born Roman. He could, however, create a new understanding of what it meant to be Roman. In this context, he was not only a member of the Volscian tribe but also a Roman. His loyalties lay with the Roman state, but he still felt a strong connection to his birthplace. In order to cope with this dilemma, it became necessary for Cicero to develop what may be understood as dual nationality.38 In his words, Rome merely adopted his homeland. It was now effectively part of the Roman state, as such, so was he. Later in his career, Cicero further developed his understanding of what it meant to be Roman. As a new man, he did not have the ancestral background to compete with the traditional ruling class in Rome. One form of legitimacy could be seen in the defense of Lucius Cornelius Balbus carried out by Cicero.39 In the Pro Balbo, Cicero argued that some provincials are deserving of citizenship and should be afforded the

35 De legibus II.1; Everitt, Cicero: The Life and Times of Rome’s Greatest Politician, 20.
36 Everitt, Cicero: The Life and Times of Rome’s Greatest Politician, 21. Cicero was disappointed that sometimes his love of Rome was not reciprocated, but always found comfort in his birthplace.
37 Everitt, Cicero: The Life and Times of Rome’s Greatest Politician, 21. Cicero was a citizen of Rome and a Senator. He may have lived in Rome, but his writings make it clear that he wanted to be buried in Arpinum
38 Everitt, Cicero: The Life and Times of Rome’s Greatest Politician, 21. Cicero regarded himself as both an Italian and a Roman.
39 Pro Balbo; Arno, "How Romans Became “Roman”, 42. Pro Balbo was a case where the grant of citizenship to a provincial was legally challenged after the fact.
While Cicero argues that citizenship can be earned, he does not mention assimilation to Roman culture as a prerequisite. Cicero states plainly that “They [Generals] have taken in as citizen’s brave men from every country, and have very often preferred merit without birth to nobility without energy”. Furthermore, Cicero argues that of all the gifts that could be given to those who risk their lives defending Rome, Citizenship should be the most worthy. While this may seem to contradict the notion of a behavior based identity, it is important to note that Cicero referenced this case to provincials outside of Italy. For those on the Italian peninsula, acting Roman is what made someone Roman. Interestingly, Cicero still put a high value on ancestry, but in a very different way to traditional norms. Ancestry was used in reference to Roman history and did not relate to a biological relation to the ancestors, but rather a communal connection to these great men. By emulating these great men, an individual could claim to be an *optimates*. The argument brought up by Cicero has important implications with regard to the spread of Roman culture throughout the provinces. As mentioned previously, many local aristocrats who found themselves under Roman rule imitated Roman culture in order to maintain relevance in the new power structures. The argument presented by Cicero regarding the

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40 Arno, “How Romans Became “Roman”, 42. Cicero argues that the grant of citizenship is most deserved by those who toil away at the defense of the Republic. Lucius Balbus was granted citizenship by Pompey while on campaign in the east. The case challenging his grant came to be known as the Pro Balbo.

41 Cicero, Marcus Tullius., and R. Gardner. Pro Caelio ; De Provinciis Consularibus ; Pro Balbo. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958, 697. Cicero further mentions that nationality does not matter in the least. The only thing that matters is merit and service.

42 Cicero, Marcus Tullius., and R. Gardner. Pro Caelio ; De Provinciis Consularibus ; Pro Balbo, 695.

43 Arno, “How Romans Became “Roman”, 42. Cicero believed in the superiority of Italian peoples and made it a point in the Pro Balbos to emphasize the defendant’s exotic culture. In a sense, the grant was a gift given to them, not an obligatory fulfillment.

44 Arno, “How Romans Became “Roman”, 18-21. Arno points out that Cicero identified certain character traits that he linked to Roman identity. Among them are loyalty, self-control, dignity, trustworthiness, and justice. In this context, ancestry could be used to defend a non-Roman while also providing ammunition when confronting a natural born Roman.

merits of acting like a Roman, both culturally and politically, set the path through which the provinces were integrated into the empire. The Social War provided the legal mechanisms through which citizenship could spread. Cicero created the idea of Roman identity based off of action and behavior. While not a radical departure from the status quo, Cicero’s writings laid the groundwork for the Romanization of the provinces in later centuries.

While the arguments presented by Cicero show a clear trend toward broader understanding of Roman identity, his outlook was rather limited in scope. As mentioned earlier, the notion of acting the Roman was only really applicable to Italians. Cicero did not see the other Provinces as deserving of citizenship simply due to cultural assimilation. Speaking Latin and wearing a toga did not give an individual claim to Roman identity. In his many writings, Cicero discusses the nature of Roman identity based on behavior, but also includes proximity to the city as well. In this regard, Roman identity in the 1st century BCE consisted of a confusing mix of behavioral practices as well as geographical proximity to the city of Rome. For Cicero—and many contemporary Romans—not just anyone could become a Roman. Considering the fact that many provinces within the Late Republic had only recently been acquired, it is understandable that an Italian like Cicero would want to distance himself from these relative newcomers.

The shift in greater inclusion of the provinces was closely ties to the development of the Post-Republican Imperial Politics. After the fall of the Republic, Roman identity underwent another change. The model of Roman identity presented by Cicero no longer held true in the imperial period. To begin with, geographical location no longer became a determining

46 Arno, "How Romans Became “Roman”, 43. Arno explains how Roman identity could not be gained through imitation alone in this early period of provincial integration.
47 Arno, "How Romans Became “Roman” Pg. 46 Cicero did a fantastic job of describing what it meant to be non-Roman, but failed to explain why some places were Roman and some were not
factor of Roman identity. Rome conquered or absorbed the vast territory that encompassed the
Roman Empire. Initially, these Italian Romans had a monopoly on high offices within the
bureaucracy. While under the Republic, provincials were largely satisfied with local rule, after
centuries of Romanization and the centralization of the imperial court, high office became much
more attractive to Provincial aristocrats. The increased bureaucratic interference form an
increasingly centralized Imperial structure directly linked the greater integration of the provinces
and the provincial aristocracy. When Domitian was emperor from 81-96 CE, less than twenty
three percent of senators were provincials, but when Antoninus Pius died in 161 CE that number
had risen to forty two percent. By the third century provincial senators were in the majority.
Clearly, provincial aristocrats were seeking office within the imperial hierarchy of Rome.

Before a city was completely integrated, it was common for the local elites to gain
citizenship and imperial recognition early in the process. The rural areas and people of lower
status did not achieve recognition as citizens until well into the process of Romanization. This
phenomenon is easily explained with regard to the practical nature of Roman rule. First, Roman
government in the provinces was decentralized. Local administration was the backbone of
province rule. While there may have been Roman magistrates appointed to these regions, they

49 Hopkins, “Élite Mobility in the Roman Empire.”, 13. If Italian Romanization can be looked at as a rough model in
this case, Cicero would represent the more ambitious generation that attempted to gain higher status within the
Roman State. His grandfather was the opposite and largely remained a local official in their hometown of Arpinum
50 Hopkins, “Élite Mobility in the Roman Empire.”, 23.
51 Hopkins, “Élite Mobility in the Roman Empire.”, 23.
52 Woolf argues that lepcis magna came under influence for hundreds of years, then became municipatum well
after the culture had already been accepted
53 Graham P. Burton. "The Roman Imperial State, Provincial Governors and the Public Finances of Provincial Cities,
were limited in numbers and relied on local elites to maintain order.\textsuperscript{54} Furthermore, the introduction of a hegemon like Rome created the incentive for local elites to accept Roman culture.\textsuperscript{55} Cicero mentions how access to the Senate was the key to recognition and power.\textsuperscript{56} Once Rome conquered or absorbed a region, the value of local elites was based entirely on their usefulness to the imperial state.\textsuperscript{57} In this regard, assimilation of the general population of a region was not incentivized as much as elite integration. While there were incentives to assimilate, provincial elites needed to maintain some semblance of their local identity in order to have relevance in the imperial government. In this sense, rather than completely destroy local practices, Roman administration effectively coopted them into the running of the empire.\textsuperscript{58} The lack of incentive for local peoples to assimilate created a divide within each respective community based on whether an individual was located in an urban center or a rural surrounding.\textsuperscript{59} The divide can be explained very easily and helps explain the process as a whole. As mentioned previously, the elites were the first to accept Roman culture. After that, the spread and adoption of Roman culture is strongly linked to a few key indicators. These indicators included the presence of major roadways, military encampments, and trade centers.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{54} Graham, "The Roman Imperial State, Provincial Governors and the Public Finances of Provincial Cities, 27 B.C.-A.D. 235.", 312. Fewer than 200 regularly appointed administrators were in office at the height of Roman power under the Antonine dynasty.
\textsuperscript{55} Woolf, \textit{Becoming Roman}, 24-25. Many regions remained practically autonomous for most of Roman history. However, once the imperial state became increasingly centralized, local aristocrats began actively seeking imperial positions within the Roman administration. Thus providing an incentive for assimilation into Imperial Roman culture.
\textsuperscript{56} Everitt, \textit{Cicero: The Life and Times of Rome's Greatest Politician}, 12.
\textsuperscript{57} Woolf, \textit{Becoming Roman}, 24. Elites needed to maintain connections with both local and imperial governments. Requiring a balancing act to be performed that required an understanding of both local and Roman culture.
\textsuperscript{58} Graham, "The Roman Imperial State, Provincial Governors and the Public Finances of Provincial Cities, 27 B.C.-A.D. 235.", 313. Provincial rule depended on the active participation of local magistrates and councilors.
\textsuperscript{59} Woolf, \textit{Becoming Roman}, 22. Local elites were the first to assimilate, followed by the urban centers that relied on Roman trade. Rural communities had less incentive to assimilate and therefore did so much more slowly if at all.
\textsuperscript{60} Woolf, \textit{Becoming Roman}, 28.
indicators provided a region with greater contact to surrounding regions as well as with the Imperial government in Rome. Each indicator shows how and why provincials may assimilate. Roadways brought trade and expedited the flow of information. Military encampments—especially permanent ones—allowed direct contact with Romans or Romanized peoples. Trade centers had the same effect. Increased flow of goods and ideas influenced cultures throughout the Mediterranean. A possible reason for this stunted cooption of Roman culture in rural areas could be a lack of these quasi-civic amenities mentioned previously. Without roadways, military encampments, and trade centers it would be unlikely for a region to see a regular Roman presence. If there was no access to Roman culture, it is unlikely that these regions would see the same levels of Roman influence as the major urban centers did. As Rome conquered a territory and reworked the political institutions, they relied heavily on prominent aristocratic families. The prominent families—and future senators—of each city likely began as local magistrates. Such a phenomenon can be seen in Lepcis Magna. The Severii family—the family of Septimius Severus—came from a long line of sufes.\footnote{Birley, \textit{Septimius Severus: the African emperor}, 22. Lucius Septimius Severus held the Sufes as well as his son. Septimius Severus the Emperor was the grandson of Lucius Septimius Severus.} The title of sufes originally held the same prestige of the consulship in the Roman Republic. It was the most important magistracy in the city. A significant local magistracy such as the position of sufes was an easy line of communication to the imperial elite which depended heavily on these local aristocrats to enforce imperial rule. Therefore, it is likely that they were the first to assimilate and gain citizenship. Gaining citizenship set the groundwork through which the children of these local aristocrats could...
compete in the Roman social order. Clearly, the reason the local elites remained significant even after the conquest was due to the governmental structure of the Roman state. The divide between imperial and provincial government was dramatic. While a region may have an appointed imperial bureaucrat of senatorial or equestrian rank, their ability to effectively govern was hampered by limited numbers and resources. Under the Antonines, there were fewer than two hundred imperial officials regularly appointed in the provinces. Those appointees had to govern an empire that consisted of forty to fifty provinces. For this reason, the imperial structures put in place were dependent on provincial elites that held local magistracies to do most of the grunt work involved in governing. Due to the lack of a centralized or permanent bureaucracy, the provincial cities operated as largely autonomous entities within the empire even after the increased centralization seen after the fall of the Republic. The divide between municipal and imperial administration was the result of these shortcomings. In the republic, the Roman government lacked almost all the mechanisms needed to effectively govern a state. In this regard, the need for local elites is easily written off as a matter of practicality. However, as these areas became more Romanized movement could be seen between the imperial and

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62 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 23. Lucius Septimius Severus, the grandfather of the Emperor, held the cities highest magistracy when the grant of citizenship was given. Putting the Severii at the forefront of provincial politics.
65 If a middle ground is taken, that comes out to roughly 4.5 administrators per province.
68 Everitt, Cicero: The Life and Times of Rome’s Greatest Politician, 11. Under the Republic and even into the Empire, Rome lacked any form of permanent civil service, judicial system, penal system, or tax collection system. The latter was often contracted off to tax farmers.
provincial levels of government, especially once the imperial administration began to centralize the political structures of the Empire.

Spain is an early example of provincial integration. Spanish aristocrats were the first non-Italian provincials to gain membership in the Roman Senate.69 This was largely due to the urbanized nature of the southern coast of Spain and its strong relations with Rome. Later, two Emperors traced their origins to Spain, Trajan and Hadrian. Trajan earned the distinction of being the first non-Italian emperor of the Roman Empire.70 He was born in the city of Italica located in the Roman province of Hispania.71 Hadrian also had ties to the city of Italica. His father was a cousin of Trajan.72 Both Trajan and Hadrian had a strong military background.73 Trajan served as a military tribune for a long time and also gained command of legions in Syria, and Germany as well. Hadrian began his military training at the age of fifteen upon completing his education. Both of them commanded the respect of the army and as such were key players in the Roman Empire. Trajan was appointed by Nerva to maintain order and secure the support of the military. Hadrian was noteworthy for spending most of his reign outside of the city of Rome visiting the provinces. He was often seen in military garb despite his reign being a peaceful one. The functioning of the military and civil administrations of the empire were meticulous under his watchfulness. Clearly, the Imperial period saw an increased integration of the provinces, so much

69 Arno, "How Romans Became “Roman”, 7.
72 Life of Hadrian 1.1; Birley, Anthony Richard. Lives of the Later Caesars, 57.
73 Life of Trajan; Birley, Anthony Richard. Lives of the Later Caesars, 39. The Historia Augusta mentions Trajan as having spent a long time serving as a military tribune. He was appointed the governor of upper Germany by Nerva for his experience in this regard. Hadrian is also mentioned as having started his military training promptly upon completing his education at age 15
so that non-Italian peoples were able to compete for and gain high offices within the Roman government.

It is important to note once more that the adoption of Roman culture in the provinces did not equate to a complete deterioration of local customs; Rather, Roman culture was simply supplementary to local culture. In this regard, it may be more appropriate to look at each region of the Roman Empire as having developed its own unique culture that falls under the umbrella term Roman imperial culture. Thus the development of Roman identities becomes paramount to understanding provincial integration into the larger power structures of the empire. A good example of this a phenomenon can be seen in the adoption of Roman gods in local worship.\footnote{Birley, \textit{Septimius Severus: the African emperor}, 34.} Rather than eliminate the provincial religion, Roman religion appropriated it. Clearly, Roman culture was influencing and had an effect on conquered peoples. However, as these peoples assimilated they created their own unique understanding of what it meant to be Roman. Culminating in the formation of an Imperial culture that allowed for the integration of a vast empire.

Romanization on the individual level is difficult to analyze due to many key shortcomings, primarily the lack of any written record through which such a transformation can be studied. Furthermore, Romanization took a few generations to take full effect. In many cases the process of Romanization took even longer. For that reason, studying a region is more helpful when attempting to develop an understanding of Romanization in the provinces. Lepcis Magna will serve as a case study through which the process of assimilation will be observed.
Lepcis Magna

Having discussed the process of Romanization in Italy and the provinces, we may now turn to the experience of Septimius Severus’ own region and city Lepcis Magna. Lepcis Magna was a prominent trade center in North Africa. As such, it likely had access to most if not all of the above mentioned indicators of enhanced Romanization. It certainly saw the presence of a Roman legion in the area—specifically, Legio III Augusta—and the creation of a highway system.\(^7^5\) A brief history of the city may be useful in order to understand the upbringing that a man like Septimius Severus may have gone through. In 112 B.C.E, conflict in Numidia led the city of Lepcis to seek a treaty with Rome. It therefore became a treaty state or civitas foederata.\(^7^6\) Not long after, veteran settlements were set up in the region.\(^7^7\) Lepcis is not mentioned for some time, but emerges again during the civil wars that wreaked havoc on the late republic.

Unfortunately, Lepcis threw in its lot with the republican forces. Caesar punished the city harshly for this, instituting a fine of three million pounds of olive oil per year.\(^7^8\) Such a fine indicates that Lepcis Magna must have been a significant economic center as such a demand demonstrates its production capabilities. North Africa continued to be a favored location for veteran colonies as Caesar Augustus later formed some in the region of Nova Africa.\(^7^9\) Previously, Marius had settled veterans in the region around 105 B.C.E, clearly demonstrating the importance of North Africa as a settlement for retired soldiers. Likewise, large numbers of Italians moved to the area during the forties and twenties B.C.E.\(^8^0\) Oddly, Lepcis Magna was largely excluded from these

\(^7^5\) Birley, *Septimius Severus: the African emperor*, 12.
\(^7^9\) Birley, *Septimius Severus: the African emperor*, 9.
colonization efforts and thus displayed a strongly Punic heritage. Nevertheless, it would have been difficult for the city to remain completely unaffected by these developments. Contact through trade and the nature of the city as a treaty state would have certainly insured its participation in the local Roman efforts. At this point, Lepcis Magna still maintained sovereignty over its own affairs as a treaty state. However, by 8 B.C.E the first Latin inscriptions can be seen on public structures. The appearance of Latin in municipal inscriptions occurred little over one hundred years after accepting status as a treaty state. Unsurprisingly, the inscriptions appear in both Latin and Punic. It remained so for the next hundred years. Furthermore, Lepcis Magna was notable for its devotion to the Julio-Claudian family. Shrines were set up honoring Augustus and Tiberius. When the nomadic peoples of the south started a guerilla war, Lepcis Magna doubled down on it loyalty to the emperor and the empire. In return, Lepcis Magna became a favored city in the region of Tripolitania. In terms of religion in Lepcis Magna, the gods Melquart and Shadrapa were equated with the Roman gods Hercules and Liber. Temples were dedicated to these two deities, who were considered the patrons of cities. While not always being direct counterparts, they were similar enough to create a common connection through which Roman rule could be expressed. Besides Roman gods, the city also benefited from wealthy Roman elites as well. Many of its patrons included high ranking members of the Roman senate and military command. Under Caligula, an unusually high number of people were granted citizenship. These new citizens were easily identified since many adopted the name of their patron.

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81 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 8-9.  
82 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 9.  
84 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 34.  
85 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 14.  
86 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 16.
Interestingly, in Lepcis Magna there was a dedication to Caligula toward the end of his rule. The inscription includes a large number of Latin names, but none of them are citizens. Evidently, the process of Roman cultural assimilation did not start with citizenship. Some of these individuals served as sufes—the highest office in Lepcis Magna—and other high positions.

Clearly, Lepcis was becoming more and more integrated into the empire as a whole. Beginning in the 60s A.D., the governmental structure of Lepcis began to model that of Rome. Shortly after that Roman names took over government altogether. In 78 A.D Lepcis Magna became a municipium with Latin rights. A community that was considered Latinitas was allowed to maintain some form of independent rule that was framed after those found in Rome. Lepcis Magna is an excellent example this adoption of Roman governmental structures. Gaining Latinitas was important for the local elites as it provided a quick path to citizenship. Once a city was granted Latin rights, citizenship was offered to elected office holders in the city.

Furthermore, it was a recognition of Lepcis as a Romanized city rather than an alien community. An interesting anomaly is that Lepcis Magna retained the traditional name of sufes for its highest office. Latin names had replaced all others in the early 60s C.E. The grandfather of Septimius Severus—Lucius Septimius Severus—was sufes when Lepcis Magna became a colonia and all its inhabitants were granted citizenship under the emperor Trajan. Thus provincial elites were able to maintain some form of self-rule while also being the first to gain the benefits of Roman citizenship. By the time Lucius Septimius Severus was serving as sufes, Lepcis Magna had been

87 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 15
88 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 14
89 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 17
90 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 16
91 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 17
92 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 18
Romanized thoroughly. Exemplified by his education in the city of Rome and contemporary sources commenting on his assimilation.\textsuperscript{93}

Roman culture went through a series of significant changes beginning in the 1\textsuperscript{st} century BCE. The full integration of the Italian peninsula into the Roman Republic created the foundation for future expansion of Roman identity. The result of Italian integration was the redefinition of Roman identity based on behavior. Proper behavior always referenced traditional Roman statesmen, but no longer looked at biological ancestry as an indicator of Romaness. The only obstacle left in the path of large scale Romanization was the notion of geographical location being a necessary determinant of Roman identity. The newly integrated Italian communities did not want their special status to be threatened. As such, men like Cicero helped redefine Roman identity based not only off of proper behavior, but also proximity to Rome. Later, the fall of the republic and rise of the Principate allowed for the notion of geographical determinants to fade. As the imperial government centralized, local elites fought for a place in the growing power of the Imperial state. Culminating in the eventual integration of the provinces into the Roman state. Lepcis Magna has shown how that process played out over a period of three centuries. Every aspect of Roman cultural assimilation can be observed in the North African city. The assimilation of this region set the stage for the rise of Septimius Severus in the late 2\textsuperscript{nd} century.

\textsuperscript{93} Birley, \textit{Septimius Severus: the African emperor}, 18.
The ascension of Septimius Severus to the Imperial title had significant implications for the social and political development of the Late Empire. The process of Romanization outlined in his hometown of Lepcis Magna created the conditions whereby Severus could achieve high rank in the imperial administration. By his time, Romanization had reached a point where a provincial from North Africa could adequately engage the imperial state to a degree where the imperial throne was within reach. This chapter will outline the background from which Severus rose to prominence. Furthermore, the official mechanisms through which a Roman citizen could prepare themselves for a life of service in the imperial government were a key factors that contributing to Severus’ understanding of his Roman identity. The chapter will further argue that Severus’ background as a provincial gave him unique insight into the workings of both the imperial and provincial sides of the Roman state. His reign was a major step toward the complete integration of the provinces into the Roman Empire, ultimately coalescing in the third century.

Unfortunately, primary source material from the second century is seriously lacking. Three major sources cover the life of Severus, the Historia Augusta, Roman History, and History of the Roman Empire since the Death of Marcus Aurelius; these writings were compiled by an unknown author, Cassius Dio, and Herodian respectively. Source material for this chapter will be focused on the works of Cassius Dio and the Historia Augusta. Herodian is largely dependent on Cassius Dio in his writings and lacks chronology and in many cases accuracy.

94 Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 8.
95 Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 8.
sources for this chapter, the works of Cassius Dio are generally accepted as a more reliable source and can be depended on to be a reliable depiction of the events that unfolded in the second century. Dio was a contemporary of Severus and likely witnessed, or had access to people who witnessed many of the events he describes in his history of Severus. However, not everything he wrote can be taken as the whole truth. Cassius Dio was a member of the Senate and clearly disliked many of the reforms that Severus was making at the Senate’s expense. In many instances, he is very clear about his contempt for Severus. As for the Historia Augusta, the source presents itself as a history written over the course of the second and third centuries by many authors. Recent scholarship has concluded that the source was most likely written by one man in the late fourth century.\footnote{Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 8.} Furthermore, the Historia Augusta makes many claims that are at best a gross exaggeration and at worst complete fabrication. However, the accounts of the emperors from the late second century and early third century seem to be the most accurate sections of the Historia Augusta.\footnote{Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 13. A notable exception is the lives of minor figures of this period. These included heirs, usurpers, and other minor figures. Many of them are composed almost completely of fiction} Much of the information provided in the histories of these emperors—including Severus—is not included in other sources of the time.\footnote{Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 13.} Nevertheless, much of the information that the Historia Augusta provides for these histories can be proven by epigraphic and archeological evidence.\footnote{Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 13.} Due to the lack of material for this era, the Historia Augusta cannot be avoided. While many of its histories are largely fabricated, the life of Severus and his heirs are thought to be predominantly truthful. The scope of this chapter requires its inclusion and analysis. For this reason, the Historia Augusta can cautiously be used as a primary

\footnote{Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 8.}
\footnote{Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 13. A notable exception is the lives of minor figures of this period. These included heirs, usurpers, and other minor figures. Many of them are composed almost completely of fiction}
\footnote{Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 13.}
\footnote{Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 13. Birley gives the example of Hadrian’s Wall as one such instance. It is not mentioned in any other literary source, but can be proven by archeological records with certainty.}
source when investigating the rise and reign of Septimius Severus. The approach that will be
taken in this chapter in regards to these sources will be largely based on corroboration either
through outside sources, or with each other.

Septimius Severus was born in Lepcis Magna almost a century after it had been culturally
and politically integrated into the Empire. His ancestral history stems from a long line of
assimilated family members that served in both local and imperial positions. The Romanization
of the Severii is clearly demonstrated by Septimius Severus’ grandfather. The grandfather of
Septimius Severus offers an interesting contrast to the emperor himself. Ironically, Lucius
Septimius Severus was seemingly more culturally integrated than his grandson Septimius
Severus. The former was taken to the family estate a Veii where he was completely
assimilated into Roman culture.  

A Roman poet named Statius who refused to believe that Severus had been born in Tripolitania expresses his Romanness in a poem he wrote. In one instance,
Statius proclaimed to Lucius Severus “Your speech is not Punic, nor your dress. Your mind is
not foreign: you are Italian, Italian!” Following the model Cicero had described a generation
earlier, it was clear that Lucius Severus definitely fit the framework of a true Roman. This
integration can be contrasted with Septimius Severus, who was far less conformed into the
traditional Roman culture that his grandfather had accepted. The Historia Augusta mentions
Septimius Severus having an accent into old age. While the accuracy of the Historia Augusta
is somewhat speculative, other sources mention his lack of fluency as well. An anonymous writer

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100 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 18.
101 Septimius Severus, Roman Bureaucrat, 141-142.
102 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 20; Statius, Silvae 4.5.29-48. Non sermo Poenus, non habitus
 tibi, externa non mens: Italus, Italus
103 Life of Severus, 19.8; Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 220.
describes Severus as “adequately trained in Latin literature…more fluent in Punic eloquence”.104 The claim by the Historia Augusta could be complete conjecture. However, it holds some credibility when taken in the context of his upbringing and the commentary of other sources. While an accent is not a determining factor when looking at cultural acceptance, it is telling in some regards. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Apuleius—a fellow North African—described how the sophisticated patrons attending his lectures would not forgive a “single syllable of barbarous pronunciation”105, displaying the importance refined Romans put on properly spoken Latin. While his supposed accent may be an undeniable display of his origins in the provinces, it does not necessarily mean that he was less Roman or any less educated than other provincial leaders of his day. Like his grandfather, Severus was proficient in Greek, Latin, and his local Punic language.106 He was familiar with Greek and Roman literature and undoubtedly went through the standard system education every aspiring statesman followed.107 The major difference between Severus and his grandfather was that the former grew up in Lepcis Magna while the latter grew up in Rome. While Severus grew up in a town heavily influenced by its Punic past, his grandfather was completely assimilated into traditional Roman culture. Cassius Dio mentions that Severus was eager for more education than he received, but to claim Severus was lacking in education would be an overstatement.108 Interestingly, Cassius Dio makes no mention of a provincial accent in his histories. Since Cassius Dio knew Septimius Severus

104 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 35; Epitome de Caesaribus 20.8 “Latinis litteris sufficienter instructus, Graecis sermonibus eruditus, Punica eloquentia promptior, quippe genitus apud Leptim provinciae Africae.”
105 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 35; Apologia 24.1; Cicero also declared that lack of Latin proficiency was an embarrassment.
106 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 35.
107 Paideia refers to the educational upbringing of Roman aristocrats. Enabling them to partake in the bureaucratic structures of the Roman State.
108 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 34; Dio 76.16.1
personally, it would make sense that he would have mentioned it. Perhaps Cassius Dio’s background made him less concerned with Severus’ possible accent. After all, Dio was Greek himself and many senators were provincial by this point as well. Interestingly, Severus seems to have taken Latin proficiency very seriously. The *Historia Augusta* mentions an interesting case in which the sister of Septimius Severus came to visit him in Rome in order to present her son to the court, but was barely able to speak Latin. During this encounter, Severus was so embarrassed by his sister that he paid her a great sum and ordered her to leave Rome.109 In another example of Severus’ very outward display of Romanness, the Historia Augusta mentions an encounter in which Severus had returned to Lepcis Magna around 171 C.E before taking up his legateship in Sardinia. When he was walking the streets of his hometown, a man whom he had been acquainted to hugged him in public. Severus ordered the man beaten and had his herald proclaim “Let no plebian embrace a legate of the Roman people with such impunity”.110 The encounter with a plebian in Lepcis Magna can be interpreted as arrogance on the side of Severus. However, the root of that arrogance is itself found within his need to perform the act of being Roman. As a provincial, Severus had to navigate both worlds, but in this case he clearly chose Rome. The actions taken against his sister and a former friend possibly show that Severus was insecure among the cultural elite of senatorial society. Nevertheless, Severus seems to have been adequately prepared for a future in the Roman imperial government. His accent—if it existed—cannot be looked at as a foreign accent, but rather a provincial one.111

109 *Life of Severus*, 16.1; Birley, *Lives of the Later Caesars*, 215. Clearly, Severus had an adequate and even articulate understanding of Latin. Even if he had an accent, he clearly had disdain for a lack of ability. Cicero mentioned how not knowing Latin was an embarrassment. Here we see proof of that argument nearly several centuries later.
Even though Severus may have been less culturally refined than his grandfather, he was clearly adequately prepared to engage the imperial elite, and unquestionably considered himself a Roman. A simple rundown of his background would make this claim certain. First, citizenship was a primary indicator of being Roman. Severus had citizenship through his familial background.\textsuperscript{112} His family had been prominent in Lepcis Magna all the way back to its Punic past and they likely gained citizenship while serving in the local government.\textsuperscript{113} Second, the system of education that elites followed was another important aspect. Severus was educated in Latin, Greek, and Punic.\textsuperscript{114} He definitely underwent the traditional education system and absorbed the ideals of paideia whereby aristocrats were prepared for public life.\textsuperscript{115} Lastly, the gradual rise through the Cursus Honorum can be seen throughout his early career.\textsuperscript{116} All three of these processes fed into the development of what could be considered a well-rounded Roman. They also fit into the understanding developed by Cicero regarding behavior. Severus was learning how to act Roman. While Septimius Severus is unique in certain aspects of his rise to— and retention of—power, he had to climb the \textit{Cursus Honorum} just like any other Roman citizen of the time. Under the republic, the \textit{Cursus Honorum} was a legal ladder that had to be climbed in order to gain high office in the Roman government. For senators under the Republic, that meant ultimately gaining the consulship. Under the imperial government, the system still played an important role in qualifying for high office. However, the consulship no longer held any significant grant of authority since practically all executive power was vested in the emperor.

\textsuperscript{112} Birley, \textit{Anthony Richard. Lives of the Later Caesars}, 201.  
\textsuperscript{114} Birley, \textit{Septimius Severus: the African emperor}, 35.  
\textsuperscript{115} In this context, paideia refers to the education Roman Elites underwent to prepare for a life in the civil service.  
\textsuperscript{116} Birley, \textit{Septimius Severus: the African emperor}, 39. The emperor would not make appointments to high office without sufficient merit. The only exceptions were the imperial family and some close advisors.
Nevertheless, the consulship retained the prestige the office had held under the republic and acted as a pathway to power rather than a grant of power in and of itself.\textsuperscript{117} Under the Republic, there was a very strict legal process through which Romans qualified for and gained offices. Under the empire, the traditional climb remained largely intact. While the imperial structure of the period enabled leniency for those close to the emperor, the emperor would not make appointments without sufficient merit.\textsuperscript{118} With the exception of some close advisors and the imperial family itself, it was still expected that a Roman of senatorial stock would follow the systematic climb up the bureaucracy of the Roman State. Septimius Severus followed this process. Like many others, he had to endure the frustrating wait between each step of the ladder after undergoing the traditional education of a young aristocrat. In this regard, Severus took part in all the processes through which Roman elites climbed the \textit{Cursus Honorum} and gained political and military positions. Once more, we see that Severus was educated as a Roman, behaved like a Roman, and eventually became emperor through his ability to adequately engage the military and governmental institutions of the empire.

The relationship between patrons and clients was an important part of Roman society. It was absolutely necessary for every aspiring statesman to be able to adequately engage in this system. Cultural paideia played a critical role in this regard. Paideia referred to the educational upbringing of all Roman elites. By studying \textit{liberales artes}, provincial aristocrats gained access to the language and literary culture of the traditional power base in Rome.\textsuperscript{119} Such a system allowed a North African to become a governor in Syria, or a Gaul to govern Britain. The

\textsuperscript{117} Potter, \textit{The Roman Empire at Bay}, 100.
\textsuperscript{119} Woolf, \textit{Becoming Roman}, 70.
somewhat standard education that these aristocrats received allowed for the administration within the empire to be standardized to an extent. All of these elites were proficient in Latin and Greek and as such could communicate with each other easily. Furthermore, they all had a similar cultural understanding that relates directly to the spread of Roman imperial culture within the provinces. Paideia was the education that taught Romans how to be Roman. In relation to Severus, the system of Paideia played out just like any other Roman of senatorial stock. In his youth, Severus studied in Rome, likely living in his family estate in Veii. He continued his education in Athens, but according to the Historia Augusta he had a terrible time there. Any elite perusing education in this form was preparing themselves for a career in the civil service and bureaucratic institutions of the Roman Empire. The education received by Septimius Severus was excellent and was not inconsistent with the typical education of the day. One sign of his origins in the provinces was the supposed accent that he maintained throughout his life. A criticism such as this is not that especially important when considering the presence of different dialects in all regions of the Empire, even Italy.

The climb of Severus through the various positions of the Roman state are remarkably standard. Nothing about his participation in the imperial bureaucracy is particularly out of the ordinary or unique in any way. As a matter of fact, it would have been more unusual if he had opted out of service at this time. Unfortunately, the rise of Severus through the Cursus Honorum is not well documented. The information that is available does allow for some logical

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120 Life of Severus I.5; Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 202.
121 Life of Severus 3.5; Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 204.
123 Hammond, "Septimius Severus, Roman Bureaucrat.", 147.
assumptions to be made regarding his early career. Severus arrived in Rome around the death of Antonius Pius in 161 CE, which had significant implications for his early career. The war with the Parthians under Marcus Aurelius between 161 CE and 166 CE practically eliminated any chance of a military tribunate. In times of war, rotations in military commands were generally avoided in order to preserve the integrity of the legion. For this reason, Severus had to forego the military tribunate. It is not clear whether he was unable to gain a position, or if he willingly chose to forego the tribunate of his own accord. After all, Severus had an uncle serving as governor of Lower Germany in the early 160s. Furthermore, his brother Geta was able to gain a tribunate in Britain under *Legio II Augusta*. Whether or not the decision was his, Severus likely served in other capacities during this interlude. He was likely *vigintivir* in 164 while waiting to reach the age requirement of twenty five to become a *Quaestor*. The *vigintivir* were a group of twenty officials that were tasked with mildly important administrative tasks such as road maintenance and coin minting. It is also likely that Severus served as *Quaestor* in 169 as one of the ten elected to serve in the city of Rome. Afterward, he was appointed to serve under

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124 Birley, *Septimius Severus: the African emperor*, 39. Birley outlines the probable rise of Severus in these early years by relying on our understanding of the *Cursus Honorum* and public office.

125 Birley, *Septimius Severus: the African emperor*, 40. Birley mentions that many prominent Romans were able to hold the military tribunate for multiple terms. The practice seems to have been exaggerated during times of war, where the young tribunes may actually have to exercise command.

126 *Life of Severus I.5; Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars*, 202. “His Quaestorship he held with diligence, having omitted the military tribunate”. Severus certainly held the office, but the date is up for speculation.

127 Birley, *Septimius Severus: the African emperor*, 39. This appointment likely put Geta in contact with Pertinax. The relationship between Pertinax and the Severi was a critical reason for the Rise of Severus to the imperial throne.

128 Birley, *Septimius Severus: the African emperor*, 40-41. The exact duty Severus may have served in the *vigintivir* is not recorded, but his participation in this body is almost certain. The position of Quaestor held an age requirement of twenty four.


130 Birley, *Septimius Severus: the African emperor*, 46-47. The legions returning from the Parthian war brought plague with them. Birley argues that this likely limited his competition for the position. Furthermore, Birley mentions that the lack of specificity in the *Historia Augusta* likely menas that Severus would have served in Rome.
the proconsul of Baetica, but Moorish invaders forced the Emperor Marcus Aurelius to transfer the region from Senatorial control.\(^{131}\) To compensate the Senate, the province of Sardinia was transferred and Severus was subsequently appointed there.\(^{132}\) In 173 C.E, C Septimius Severus was appointed proconsul of Africa and selected Septimius Severus as his legati pro praetore.\(^{133}\) After his service in Africa came to an end, Severus had gained the attention of the imperial administration. He was appointed tribune of the plebs in 174 with the honor of being one of the imperial candidati.\(^{134}\) In 176 Severus was made praetor, but he did not finish his term. He was sent to Spain under imperial orders to assist in the pacification of the Moors. In 180 CE, Severus gained command of a legion in Syria under the governorship of Pertinax.\(^{135}\) Two years later, Pertinax would be fired from this position and the following year Severus would be removed as well.\(^{136}\) He was shortly called back into public life through the patronage of Cleander.\(^{137}\) In 190 CE, Severus held the consulship. He was one of twenty five men to hold the title of consul that year.

The ability of Severus to rise through the *Cursus Honorum* can be directly associated to his understanding of the traditional Roman practices of patronage and paideia. Patronage and

\(^{131}\) *Life of Severus* I.5-3.5; Birley, *Lives of the Later Caesars*, 202-203. The transfer of land from the Emperor to the Senate is interesting as it shows the continuity of the notion of shared power with the Senate that was put in place by Augustus. While the reality may have been different, the image of shared authority is what marked the principate.

\(^{132}\) Birley, *Septimius Severus: the African emperor*, 50. Sardinia was a relative backwater and held very little importance.

\(^{133}\) Birley, *Septimius Severus: the African emperor*, 51. C Septimius Severus was the uncle of Septimius Severus.

\(^{134}\) Birley, *Septimius Severus: the African emperor*, 52. Birley mentions that the Tribunate was even more eroded than other functions of government at this time. Virtually all of the tribunical powers were held by the emperor.

\(^{135}\) Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 100. He commanded legio IV Sythica which was stationed close to the regional capital of Antioch. Effectively making Severus the deputy to the Governor and second in command of the province

\(^{136}\) Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 100. Severus most likely remained in place in order to take over command of the province while a replacement was being sent for Pertinax

\(^{137}\) Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 100. A rebellion in Britain forced Pertinax back into imperial service and shortly after Severus as well.
paideia were critical aspects of any Romans rise to power. Patronage offered provincial aristocrat’s access to the social networks that developed as conquered regions were absorbed into the empire. In his study of Gaul, Woolf identified the emergence of the Roman system of patronage in the provinces.\(^\text{138}\) While the system of rule in pre-Roman Gaul is largely speculative, patronage was a distinctly Roman feature that Woolf is able to expand on when describing the adaptation of local elites to the changes incurred by imperial rule. The importance of such a system cannot be underplayed. Woolf explains how a man named Titus Sennius Solemnis mentioned his patrons on a funerary tablet alongside his official positions.\(^\text{139}\) In a sense, Patronage was as essential a political institution as magistracies were. These changes would have a profound influence on provincial culture. Septimius Severus can be seen following the same pattern of behavior. He sought after and gained the support of significant players in the Roman Empire. In particular, his service under Pertinax would play a pivotal role in his rise to power. Septimius Severus served under Pertinax while the latter was Governor of Syria from 181 CE-182 CE.\(^\text{140}\) Pertinax provides a more useful and contemporary outline of patronage in the Roman Empire. Pertinax was the son of a freedman who eventually rose through the ranks of the military, then the administrative bureaucracy to become emperor. The rise of a man from such humble origins was not entirely unprecedented, but still brought disapproving attitudes from some.\(^\text{141}\) Pertinax was able to gain prominence through his contact with Tiberius Claudius Pompeianus who served as the leading military advisor to Marcus Aurelius.\(^\text{142}\) Pompeianus was

\(^\text{138}\) Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 25. Gallic provincial by name of Titus Sennius Solemnis showed extensive use of system of patronage by attaining a recommendation from the Praetorian Prefect in Rome.

\(^\text{139}\) Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 26. On Titus’s tomb, the writing explains his rise through the legal structures of Gaul and depicts a copy of a letter of recommendation from a Praetorian Prefect.


\(^\text{141}\) Birley, *Septimius Severus: the African emperor*, 64.

so important to Marcus Aurelius that he was married to his daughter Lucilla. Thus, Pertinax was only once removed from direct contact with the emperor. Unfortunately, after the death of Marcus Aurelius the patronage network began to fall apart as Commodus began eliminating men from the previous administration. Pompeianus was connected to an assassination attempt carried out by his wife, which unfortunately left him alienated from the emperor. As a result, Pertinax was removed as governor of Syria and shortly after Septimius Severus was dismissed as Legate of legio IV Sythica. While Pompeianus may not have been directly involved in the plot against the emperor, it clearly affected those that owed him patronage all the way down the chain. Fortunately, circumstances can change very quickly. A few years after the removal of Pertinax and Severus, they were recalled when the British legions rebelled. Pertinax was sent to Britain with orders to pacify the rebellious legions there and Severus to Gallia Lugdunensis to act as governor. Not long after his appointment to Britain, Pertinax was back in favor with the Emperor. He served as proconsul of Africa in 188 CE and then Prefect of Rome in 189 CE. A few years later in 191 CE, all the major military governorships along the Danube and Rhine began to be filled by African provincials. The promotion of African men to legionary

143 Levick, Julia Domna: Syrian Empress, 69.
144 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 70.
145 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 73.
146 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 74. Severus owed patronage to Pertinax, who owed patronage to Pompeianus. The latter was forced into retirement after this incident and the two below him lost their positions in the imperial administration.
147 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 74-75.
148 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 75. The position given to Pertinax was purely a military appointment. He was charged with pacifying the rebellious legions. Severus was given an administrative position in a province with no legions.
149 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 78. Pertinax owed his redemption to Cleander, who was the closest advisor to the Emperor.
150 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 78. The time Pertinax spent in Africa is important later as he began working with Laetus
151 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 83. Through the efforts of Pertinax and Laetus, eight of the northern legions were under the command of Africans.
commands in the Danube and Rhine may be the result of Pertinax and Laetus promoting men that they could trust.\footnote{Birley, \textit{Septimius Severus: the African emperor}, 83. Pertinax served as Proconsul of Africa and Laetus was of African origins.} The emperor was becoming increasingly unstable and there had to be some assurances put in place in case of crisis.\footnote{Levick, \textit{Julia Domna: Syrian Empress}, 33. Praetorian prefects had an unfortunate track record under Commodus. Before Laetus was appointed, Perennis and Cleander had been executed by the Emperor.} Laetus was of African origin and Pertinax had connections to the province through his service in the imperial administration. For this reason, it is not surprising that an influx of African provincials began to take command in the regions along the Danube and Rhine. These regions contained the vast majority of the legions within the empire.\footnote{Potter, \textit{The Roman Empire at Bay}, 103. Later, when Severus and Niger were contending for the throne. Severus could muster sixteen legions form the Danube alone. Niger could only call on sic from the eastern provinces.} The appointment of Severus to the governorship of Upper Pannonia is a clear example of loyalty being a key factor when it came to administrative appointment. Before this position, Severus had only held military command under Pertinax in Syria. By all accounts, Severus was unqualified to hold such an important province that housed a large army close to Rome.\footnote{Birley, \textit{Septimius Severus: the African emperor}, 83.} Clearly, his connections with both Laetus and Pertinax secured him an important post. After the death of Commodus, the patronage network seems to have been maintained all the way back to Pompeianus. At the death of Commodus, Pertinax urged his old patron to take the imperial title, but Pompeianus refused.\footnote{Life of Pertinax 4.3; Birley, \textit{Lives of the Later Caesars}, 182.} Whether or not this was a serious offer, it hints at the importance of the patron client relationships in the Roman Empire. Later, when Pertinax was murdered, Severus would march on Rome claiming to be the avenger of his slain patron. His relationship to Pertinax gave him power and a cause to use it.
The death of Commodus in 191 CE began a crisis that would lead to the year of the five emperors. The men claiming the throne included Pertinax, Didius Julianus, Septimius Severus, Precennius Niger, and Clodius Albinus. After the assassination of the previous emperor, Pertinax served as emperor briefly before he was eventually assassinated by the Praetorian Guard. The title of emperor was then claimed by Didius Julianus. To Severus, who owed patronage to Pertinax, this was unacceptable. Shortly thereafter, Severus was raised to the imperial title after gaining the support of the Legions in Pannonia. Upon being declared emperor by his troops, Severus immediately marched on Rome to depose Didius Julianus. He marched the army under the guise of being the avenger of Pertinax. In retaliation, Julianus ordered the Roman Senate to declare Severus a public enemy. An interesting side note here is that Severus seems to have been very concerned with the decree made by the Senate. The *Historia Augusta* mentions how he went to great lengths to prevent the messenger from reading the news to his troops. What ensued was an attempt by Julianus to assassinate, then negotiate with Severus. These efforts failed and he was deposed. Severus then had the Praetorian Guard disbanded and banished in disgrace. Afterward, he replaced them with legionaries from around the empire. Previously, only Italians could serve in the Praetorian Guard. This action was the first of many that would see Severus open positions previously reserved for Roman Italians to the provincials as well.

While Julianus may have been deposed, there was another claimant to the imperial title in the

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157 *Life of Severus 5.5*; Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 205.
158 *Life of Severus 5.5*; Birley, Anthony Richard. Lives of the Later Caesars, pg. 206 According to the *Historia Augusta* the Senate decree initially caused him much concern. However, he prevented the messenger sent from Rome from speaking to his troops.
159 *Life of Severus 5.5*; Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 206
160 Cassius Dio 74.1.1
east, Pescennius Niger. The attempt by Niger to take the throne was flawed from the beginning. He could only call on six legions to support his cause, while Severus had the loyalty of over sixteen legions from the Danube frontier.\textsuperscript{162} In May 194 CE, Niger was defeated by Severus at the battle of Issus. The most interesting aspect of this conflict has less to do with the armed conflict between each contender and more to do with the behind the scenes work that took place. Pescennius Niger was born in Italy while Severus was a provincial.\textsuperscript{163} Perhaps due to his connections to the region through imperial service and his wife Julia Domna, Severus was able to exploit the rivalries between provincial towns in the region.\textsuperscript{164} The hometown of Julia Domna defected from Niger and joined Severus as a result of these connections. Severus also effectively politicked the governor of Arabia to join his cause, which likely brought another legion to his side. Severus was unique in that he held an in depth understanding of both Roman and provincial politics. He used the former to take the imperial title and maintain control in the capital and the latter to control the provinces.

At this point, it is appropriate to address the cosmopolitan nature of second century Roman society. Septimius Severus was born in North Africa, married a woman from Syria, and died in York. He was well traveled and connected to the broader empire. His wife, Julia Domna, provides an excellent example of the highly integrated nature of Roman elite society. Julia Domna and Septimius Severus likely married in 187 CE.\textsuperscript{165} Interestingly, Severus was serving as governor of Gallia Lugdunensis.\textsuperscript{166} Therefore, it would have been necessary for him to

\textsuperscript{162} Potter, \textit{The Roman Empire at Bay}, 103.
\textsuperscript{163} Potter, \textit{The Roman Empire at Bay}, 100-101.
\textsuperscript{164} Potter, \textit{The Roman Empire at Bay}, 104.
\textsuperscript{166} Birley, \textit{Septimius Severus: the African emperor}, 75. Clearly the empire was interconnected in many regards.
communicate his intent to marry from across the empire. Severus most likely grew familiar with Julia when he was acting as legate in Syria. Julia Domna was sent west for the marriage to take place. Though she was born into a noble eastern family, Julia Domna was just as comfortable in the west as she was in the east. Clearly, the empire must have had a basic level of Roman social and cultural adoption. When Severus and Julia met, the pair probably communicated in Greek since their native languages were Punic and Aramaic. Julia Domna provided Severus with two sons, Caracalla and Geta. She would eventually become a significant actor in the Roman imperial administration. While the power of women in this age was entirely unofficial, they could still wield significant influence. The ultimate source of that power was the influence she held over her husband. This was not unlike any other individual in the imperial administration. Proximity to the emperor was key to achieving political goals within the Roman Empire. So much so, that as the emperor was on campaign the administration would follow him wherever he went. Thus, Roman empresses were uniquely situated to hold considerable power through their husbands. Another aspect of Severan rule was his extensive use of propaganda. Julia Domna was particularly important in this regard and remained so after the death of Severus as a sign of continuity within the imperial state. One of the ways Septimius Severus exploited the prestige of the last of the five good emperors was through art. An image bearing his family

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167 Levick, *Julia Domna: Syrian Empress*, 31. Hadrian had been described as traveling through both the east and west of the empire, but never feeling comfortable in either. Julia Domna could comfortably exist in both

168 Levick, *Julia Domna: Syrian Empress*, 57. The notion of the Augusta holding official authority did not evolve until much later. The key aspect to an Augusta’s influence was proximity to the Emperor


172 Levick, *Julia Domna: Syrian Empress*, 92. Widowed Empresses were usually kept around as a sign of continuity from the previous administration.
shows very similar features to Marcus Aurelius, Faustina, Commodus, and Annius Verus.\textsuperscript{173} These similarities show a conscious effort by the newly seated emperor to build the foundations of legitimacy through connections to past emperors. He also began spreading stories about dreaming of becoming emperor, or having omens present that signified his eventual rise. One such story was related specifically to his wife Julia Domna. Severus sought her hand in marriage because of a horoscope that said she would marry a king.\textsuperscript{174} These omens and dreams may have given him some sort of religious legitimacy when they were publically announced. As a result of his father’s decision to remain in Lepcis Magna rather than pursue a career in the imperial administration, Severus was a largely unknown figure before his rise to power. In this sense it is clear why he would need to create legitimacy, even if some of the methods were farfetched.

The aftermath of the civil war led to an interesting change in the traditional socio-political system of the time. While during the civil war Severus was willing to promote powerful and competent senators to military office, the period after saw a stark decline in the practice.\textsuperscript{175} The reign of Septimius Severus increased the importance of military positions while simultaneously decreasing the importance of the Senate.\textsuperscript{176} Later, in the third century, senators were all but expelled from military posts.\textsuperscript{177} However, in the second century they can still be

\textsuperscript{173} Asante, "Rediscovering the "Lost Roman Caesar", 611.
\textsuperscript{174} Birley, \textit{Septimius Severus: the African emperor}, 75.
\textsuperscript{176} Mennen, "HIGH-RANKING MILITARY OFFICERS: SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS VERSUS GALLIENUS.", 194.
\textsuperscript{177} Hopkins, Keith. "Élite Mobility in the Roman Empire." Past & Present, no. 32 (1965): 12-26. \url{http://www.jstor.org/stable/649954}, 18. As the Crisis of the Third Century unfolded, the necessity for competent commanders led to the exclusion of the traditional aristocracy from military commands. Ultimately laying the groundwork for the formation of a separate military aristocracy.
seen serving in significant military posts.\textsuperscript{178} The Severan reforms began the process that culminated with Senatorial exclusion within the military bureaucracy and the eventual separation of civil and military administrations.\textsuperscript{179} Under his reign, there was a clear effort to prevent military rank and status in the Roman Senate from combining.\textsuperscript{180} Any combination of these factors could prove disastrous for Severus. Eliminating this possibility made the threat of a coup less likely. Consolidating his grip on the Roman army was critical to his power base. Traditionally, Roman emperors had primarily depended on three support bases through which they maintained power.\textsuperscript{181} These power bases included the Senate, citizens of the empire, and the military. Severus abandoned this idea and instead invested all of his time and energy into the military. Cassius Dio was shocked that Severus was “…placing his hope of safety in the strengths of his army rather than in the good will of his associates in the government”\textsuperscript{182} As Emperor, Severus seems to have had an inherent distrust of the traditional aristocracy in Rome. One example can be observed when he reformed the Praetorian Guard. Previously, they had been selected from Italian families. Severus eliminated this long standing tradition and began to incorporate peoples from all the legions serving the Empire.\textsuperscript{183} Furthermore, after the corruption of the traditional Italian guard, Severus was justified when he removed the requirement that all

\textsuperscript{178} Mennen, "HIGH-RANKING MILITARY OFFICERS: SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS VERSUS GALLIENUS.", 212. Septimius Severus reign is an example of the aristocracy maintaining military posts. However, his reforms were the beginning of the end of this practice.

\textsuperscript{179} Potter, The Roman Empire at Bay, 170. The separation of military and civil positions would not be completed until much later, but the reign of Severus was a significant shift toward the practice

\textsuperscript{180} Mennen, "HIGH-RANKING MILITARY OFFICERS: SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS VERSUS GALLIENUS." 215. Severus did not trust men with both social and military standing


\textsuperscript{182} Dio 74.2.2

\textsuperscript{183} Dio 74.2.3
recruits be Italian.\textsuperscript{184} In order to replace this traditional recruiting base, Severus opened up the possibility of promotion to the standard legionaries.\textsuperscript{185} Cassius Dio cites this reform as the reason for the degradation of the Italian youth.\textsuperscript{186} When the civil war ended, an interesting trend can be observed in the leadership of Severus’ government and military. None of the generals that had been fighting for him against Niger were recalled for the British campaign.\textsuperscript{187} Many of them seem to have disappeared from the records shortly after the civil war ended.\textsuperscript{188} Those that did remain in the government were given positions in the civil service and distanced from military commands. It seems that Severus did not want to be challenged by any of his former commanders. He had taken the throne by force and wanted to make sure that the same did not happen to him. The end result was an overall decrease in the Senate’s influence over the military. Thus creating the foundation for the separation of civil and military career paths in the Empire seen during the Dominate.

By throwing in his lot with the army alone, Severus was more inclined than any previous emperor to keep his soldiers happy. If anything, he was afraid of the army because he knew, and they knew, that his position depended on their backing. Almost immediately after taking Rome, the soldiers under his command demanded a bonus.\textsuperscript{189} Severus was unable to give them what they wanted, but was able to console them with a lesser amount. From this point on he made sure

\begin{enumerate}
  \item Hammond, "Septimius Severus, Roman Bureaucrat.", 170.
  \item Hammond, "Septimius Severus, Roman Bureaucrat.", 170.
  \item Dio 74.2.1-5 Dio mentioned that the Italian peoples, now expelled from imperial service, were left to fight as gladiators or become brigands. The remarks made by Cassius Dio may reveal a greater conflict between Severus and the aristocracy.
  \item Mennen, "HIGH-RANKING MILITARY OFFICERS: SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS VERSUS GALLIENUS.", 215.
  \item Many of the original leaders may have simply retired after the campaign ended. A few in particular were appointed at an age when they would be close to doing so anyway. Some may have voluntarily retired to private life, but others were clearly pushed into civil positions
  \item Life of Severus 7.5; Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 208.
\end{enumerate}
to take care of the soldiers first and foremost. Unfortunately for men like Cassius Dio, doing so was often at the expense of the Senate and people of the empire. When he took Rome he had promised not to kill any Senators and even went so far as to have a decree enacted that would name him a public enemy for doing so. This gesture did not last long. Shortly after defeating Clodius Albinus, Severus returned to Rome to deal with anyone who he thought remotely connected to the cause of Albinus. He had captured Albinus’ correspondence and began using it as evidence to purge many senators who he considered enemies. Severus gave a speech before the senate that denounced its treatment of Commodus and demanded his deification. At the time of his speech, around sixty-four of the six hundred members of the senate were arrested. Though it is not explicitly stated, the Historia Augusta hints that many of these nobles were killed so that Severus could confiscate their property. Cassius Dio also mentions how ruthless Severus was when it came to raising money. Particularly that he cared little for what people thought or said about his actions. He needed funds for his campaign against Niger and to secure the full backing of the Army. After stabilizing his financial situation, Severus raised the pay for soldiers significantly. After the Parthian war, the soldiers pay was raised again. The reforms

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190 Life of Severus 11.5; Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 212. The Historia Augusta described the expansion of the privy purse through the confiscation of Senate property very soon after Severus’ close call in Rome.
191 Dio 74.1.3 Dio mentions the promise made by Severus in great detail. However, he also mentions that the Emperor was the first to break this promise.
193 Dio 76.7.1-5
194 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 128. Almost half of these men were later released, but the other half were executed. According to Briley, many of those released may have been granted a pardon in return for information no other senators.
195 Life of Severus 11.5; Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 212.
196 Dio 74.8.1
197 Life of Severus 11.7; Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 212. The H.A. describes the raises given to the legions as rates never before reached by previous emperors.
198 Life of Severus 16.1; Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 216.
regarding promotion and pay are not necessarily as significant as they appear at face value. In particular, the increased pay most likely accounted for inflation during the second century. Additionally, the extension of the title of *Equites* to the lower officer corps was justified by the cheapening of the title through grants from previous emperors. The reforms of Severus in this regard—while still a clear attempt to gain the support of the Army—were largely an attempt to update the status of the military to the changing times. Under Commodus, there had been relative peace on the frontiers of the empire. The army needed some type of assurance that they would be adequately compensated.

A seemingly contradictory fact to the decision made by Septimius Severus to depend on the army as a power base was his lack of any substantial military career before gaining the imperial throne. Many of the posts he held before being appointed governor of Upper Pannonia were strictly civil service positions. It seems strange that a career bureaucrat who left the equestrian order to peruse a senatorial career would turn on the senate to the degree that Severus did. Perhaps Severus was angered with the Senate for favoring his adversary Clodius Albinus. More likely, Severus realized like Tiberius, Domitian, and Hadrian that securing the

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199 Hammond, "Septimius Severus, Roman Bureaucrat.", 171.
200 Hammond, "Septimius Severus, Roman Bureaucrat.", 171. The gold ring of the equestrian order was often bestowed upon freedmen in the service of the emperor. Therefore, the extension of this title to the lower officer corps of the army is not as radical as it may sound.
201 Hammond, "Septimius Severus, Roman Bureaucrat.", 171. By the time Severus gained the Imperial throne, the military was in need of these reforms. Inflation had devalued most of their earnings and the inability to gain status as an *Eques* for lower officers was troubling.
202 Hammond, "Septimius Severus, Roman Bureaucrat.", 171.
203 Hammond, "Septimius Severus, Roman Bureaucrat.", 166. Even as governor of Upper Pannonia, Severus’ role as a military leader was limited. The frontier had been relatively tame due to the treaty signed by Commodus shortly after the death of Marcus Aurelius.
204 Hammond, "Septimius Severus, Roman Bureaucrat.", 153. Hammond argues that the equestrian orders had recently gained increased access to significant power through service to the Emperor. The role and scope of the senatorial career path was already diminishing before Severus took power.
support of a conservative body like the senate was nearly impossible when pursuing major reforms.\textsuperscript{205} At his core, Severus was a bureaucrat rather than a soldier.\textsuperscript{206} He may have risen to power with the backing of the military, but his reforms suggest a person deeply unsatisfied with the existing structures of state.\textsuperscript{207} Therefore, he changed what needed to be changed in order to adapt to external and internal threats. In the end, creating a highly centralized government with the backing of a powerful military.

The reign of Severus also saw an unprecedented level of integration concerning the provinces. To say that Italy was reduced to the statues of a province at this point is not appropriate. It would be more reasonable to look at the developments of the Late Principate as if the provinces were raised to the same status as Italy.\textsuperscript{208} In order to undermine the traditional elite, Severus opened up positions previously reserved for Italians to the provincial elites.\textsuperscript{209} According to the \textit{Historia Augusta}, the provinces loved the reign of Severus.\textsuperscript{210} He made it a point to prosecute Roman magistrates that abused their position at the expense of their subjects.\textsuperscript{211} At his death, Severus was deeply loved by the provincials.\textsuperscript{212} The reforms he had made brought them one step closer to complete integration into the Roman Empire. The final act

\textsuperscript{205} Hammond, "Septimius Severus, Roman Bureaucrat.", 168-169. Severus had no need to meddle with the Senate when he began enacting his reforms. The Severi period saw an increased participation of Provincials in the Senate as well as a heightened position.

\textsuperscript{206} Hammond, "Septimius Severus, Roman Bureaucrat.", 166. Most of his posts in the imperial administration had very limited military responsibility.

\textsuperscript{207} Hammond, "Septimius Severus, Roman Bureaucrat.", 172. Hammond argues that the experience Severus earned as a civil bureaucrat made him acutely aware of the shortcomings of the Imperial Government. Thus, the reforms he passed and the dependency on the Army were a logical solution to the issues at hand.

\textsuperscript{208} Hammond, "Septimius Severus, Roman Bureaucrat.", 170.

\textsuperscript{209} Lewis, "The Humane Legislation of Septimius Severus.", 104.

\textsuperscript{210} Life of Severus 3.5; Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 203. The H.A. mentions that “Rome and the Provinces singing together”

\textsuperscript{211} Life of Severus 7.5; Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 208. Interestingly, this notion of treating subjects well was emphasized by Cicero. In effect, by punishing those that treated allies poorly Severus was embodying the values of a true Roman that Cicero emphasized

\textsuperscript{212} Life of Severus 23.6; Birley, Lives of the Later Caesars, 224.
would be carried out by Caracalla in the *Antonine Constitution* which bestowed citizenship to all free men of the Empire. The reign of Severus and his son can be seen as a quantum leap in social and political change for the Empire. The effects of these changes would play out in the Third Century and had an immeasurable impact on the chaos that followed the end of the Severan line.

The death of Septimius Severus revealed a lot about his outlook on Roman government and how he fit himself into Roman society. To start with, Severus died in York in Britain while on campaign with his sons Geta and Caracalla.\(^{213}\) Interestingly, there was no need to go on such a campaign. The empire was stabilized and largely at peace. Potter mentions several reasons for this campaign. First, Severus never seems to have been comfortable with senatorial society.\(^{214}\) For this reason, he spent a significant portion of his rule away from the city either on campaign or visiting the provinces. The reign of Severus was dominated by insecurities related to his provincial background. Seen earlier in the harsh actions he took against people that embarrassed him or insulted his official position in the administration.\(^{215}\) Furthermore, his exclusionary stance toward the senate reinforces the idea that he never felt comfortable within that group. While he may have been a member of the dominant culture, he was not a member of the traditional cultural elite. The other possible reason for the camping to Britain was to rectify the hostility is sons had for each other. Perhaps Severus had hoped that campaigning would act as a strange family bonding exercise. It did not work out that way and Severus died without achieving anything militarily or familial. However, on his deathbed he told his sons “Get along, make the

\(^{213}\) Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 122.
\(^{214}\) Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 123.
\(^{215}\) Examples include flogging a friend that embraced him when he was serving as a legate and banishing his sister from Rome due to her terrible Latin.
soldiers rich, and don’t give a damn for anyone else”. His sons followed the second two pieces of advice, but could not rectify the first. The latter two points would prove to be significant in the third century as the military rose to prominence. Interestingly, the role of the regular army in the ascension of new emperors became inflated in the third century. The senate was gradually pushed aside by Severus and his heirs. Ultimately, the senate was completely sidestepped by the military aristocracy that developed in the third century.

In conclusion, Septimius Severus presented a major paradigm shift in Roman political and social norms. His family had been citizens for at least seven years before his birth and clearly had connections to the Imperial administration due to their status as *Eques* before the general grant of citizenship to their homeland by the Emperor Trajan. He followed the *cursus honorum* like any other Roman aristocrat. He gained the patronage of many significant figures at the time, which gained him prestigious positions in the Imperial Government. These posts allowed him to be in position to take the throne after the murder of Pertinax. His subsequent reforms changed the social and political structures of the Roman State. Military and civil service positions began to be separated under his reign. The military emerged as the most important power base of the new centralized government. Due to his distrust of the traditional elites, the reign of Severus saw unprecedented inclusion of the provinces within both the military and governmental structures of the Empire. His dependency on the Army as a sole source of power effectively revealed the Principate for what it was. A military dictatorship under the command of a de facto monarch. The rise of soldier emperors during crisis of the third century can be directly

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216 Dio 76.15.2.
217 Hammond, "Septimius Severus, Roman Bureaucrat.", 141.
linked to the reforms of Severus and his descendants. Inevitably leading to the formation of a military aristocracy that would come to dominate the Late Empire.
Chapter 4

The Consequences of the Severan Reforms

While the rise of Septimius Severus was not incredibly unique, nor was it a significant change in the status quo of aristocratic rule, the reforms he made during his reign significantly influenced the political and social landscape of the later imperial period. In the late second century, the rise of Pertinax from the son of a freedman to the imperial title was almost unheard of. The reforms that can be linked directly to Severus and his heirs enabled the rise of men like Pertinax to become the norm in the third century. The third century saw the roles reverse and men like Pertinax became much more common, while men like Severus were largely removed from positions of power. The reforms of Severus and his heirs set the stage for major changes in the political and social landscape of the empire. The reliance on the army and issuance of the Antonine constitution were massive divergences from the previous imperial practices of the principate. The death of Severus led to the slow decline in the stability of the imperial state and by 235 CE the empire was in crisis.\textsuperscript{218}

The death of Septimius Severus was an important moment in Roman history. He left the empire in a stable state with two sons to take his place. Unfortunately, the stability he fought for during his reign would not last. At this point, it is necessary to discuss the importance of the Syrian women in the post Septimius Severan dynasty. In particular, Julia Domna played an important role in the administration of her son Caracalla. By the time Caracalla ascended to the imperial throne, Julia Domna had been at the center of power for more that sixteen years.\textsuperscript{219}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{218} The death of Severus Alexander usually marks the beginning of the Crisis of the Third Century.\textsuperscript{219} Levick, \textit{Julia Domna: Syrian Empress}, 87.}
Interestingly, her position under Caracalla seems to have commanded more authority than under her husband Septmiius.\textsuperscript{220} Several key factors enabled her influence to grow after her husband’s death. First, Julia Domna was a powerful symbolic figure largely due to the propaganda that had perpetuated the prestige of the Severan line.\textsuperscript{221} Second, she was only person Caracalla trusted after he assassinated his brother Geta.\textsuperscript{222} The first point made her a key form of legitimacy for Caracalla as he attempted to stabilize his foothold within the imperial court. When he headed east to begin his Parthian campaign, he made sure Julia Domna traveled with him.\textsuperscript{223} Her influence in the east was critical to gaining a foothold in the region. Severus had used her connections during the Year of the Five Emperors in order to secure the region. Having her present was an indispensable asset that Caracalla could not forego. By traveling with him on campaign, the soldiers and populace would be given a physical display of continuity between Caracalla and Severus.\textsuperscript{224} As for the second point, Caracalla was very distrustful of the bureaucracy after he assassinated his brother. For this reason Julia Domna emerged as a major, yet unofficial, player in the imperial government. Caracalla spent the majority of his short rule on campaign and outside of Rome.\textsuperscript{225} He needed someone he could trust to handle some aspects of the imperial court while he was among the troops. For this reason, Julia Domna began to handle all of the Greek and Syrian correspondence for the emperor.\textsuperscript{226} How much influence she wielded in this regard is unclear, but there is one contemporary source that hints at her sway over the emperor. Cassius Dio mentions that Julia Domna complained to her son that the increased

\textsuperscript{220} Levick, \textit{Julia Domna: Syrian Empress}, 91.
\textsuperscript{221} Levick, \textit{Julia Domna: Syrian Empress}, 88.
\textsuperscript{222} Levick, \textit{Julia Domna: Syrian Empress}, 92.
\textsuperscript{223} Levick, \textit{Julia Domna: Syrian Empress}, 100.
\textsuperscript{224} Levick, \textit{Julia Domna: Syrian Empress}, 100.
\textsuperscript{225} Levick, \textit{Julia Domna: Syrian Empress}, 92.
\textsuperscript{226} Levick, \textit{Julia Domna: Syrian Empress}, 96.
army pay was bankrupting the state.\textsuperscript{227} While he did ignore her complaint, the implication that she had access to the imperial revenues and was willing to confront the emperor is significant. Whether or not this story is true is an entirely separate issue, but clearly Dio understood her position in this light. Julia Domna held so much weight as a symbol of continuity that when her son was assassinated, his successor Macrinus did not dare have her executed from fear that the army would revolt.\textsuperscript{228} Either due to grief, political pressure, or the cancer that began to re-emerge; Julia Domna committed suicide in Antioch shortly after Caracalla was murdered.\textsuperscript{229} Unfortunately for Macrinus, the death of Julia Domna did not secure his position as emperor. What emerged was a conflict between the women of the house of Severus and Macrinus that virtually represented a conflict between the equestrian bureaucracy and the court.\textsuperscript{230} The Severan women would dominate the imperial court for the next twenty years. Eventually deposing Macrinus and putting several emperors of their choosing on the throne.

The death of Septimius Severus set up an inevitable crisis that ended with blood and betrayal. Severus had left his sons Geta and Caracalla as equal inheritors of the imperial title. Unfortunately, they were unable to fulfill his final wish that they get along. The boys hated each other to an extreme and it was not a surprise that their co-rule would end in bloodshed.\textsuperscript{231} Perhaps Severus was not convinced that Caracalla, with his short temper and arrogance, could adequately rule the empire. In addition, Severus was very aware that disinheriting one of his sons would likely lead to their death. The struggle between his sons reveal a few noteworthy changes

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item 227 Dio 77.10.4; Levick, \textit{Julia Domna: Syrian Empress}, 97.
  \item 228 Potter, \textit{The Roman Empire at Bay}, 149.
  \item 229 Potter, \textit{The Roman Empire at Bay}, 149.
  \item 230 Potter, \textit{The Roman Empire at Bay}, 148-149.
  \item 231 Potter, \textit{The Roman Empire at Bay}, 134.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
to the imperial succession. First and foremost, the role of the regular army in selecting a new emperor had changed. The pay raises given under Severus earned not just himself but his dynasty the love and affection of the soldiers.\textsuperscript{232} In these early stages, it appeared as if the army was more committed to the Severan dynasty than Caracalla or Geta. It is important to note that upon the death of Severus, the army in Britain refused to take an oath to only Caracalla.\textsuperscript{233} They insisted on taking an oath to his brother Geta as well because he resembled his father so much.\textsuperscript{234} Unfortunately, disagreement within the imperial family was extremely dangerous as it would permeate all the way down the patronage networks of the empire and infect both civil and military institutions.\textsuperscript{235} The brothers were unable or unwilling to patch up this feud. While his assertion is most likely fiction, Herodion mentions how the Empire was almost split between east and west due to their hostilities.\textsuperscript{236} Accordingly, it was only the intervention of Julia Domna that prevented the division. After a few months of co-rule, Caracalla had grown tired of sharing the imperial title with his brother. He asked his mother to set up a meeting between the two in her quarters.\textsuperscript{237} When Caracalla arrived, he brought several centurions with him and had his brother killed in his mothers arms.\textsuperscript{238} The death of Geta provides us with our first example of a major change in Roman political and social norms. Like emperors before him, Caracalla went to the Praetorian Guard to gain their approval. Like many emperors before him, they gave Caracalla

\textsuperscript{232} Potter, \textit{The Roman Empire at Bay}, 134.  
\textsuperscript{233} Levick, \textit{Julia Domna: Syrian Empress}, 86.  
\textsuperscript{234} Levick, \textit{Julia Domna: Syrian Empress}, 86. On coins of the era, the image of Severus is virtually indistinguishable from that of Geta.  
\textsuperscript{235} De Blois, Lukas. "The "constitutio Antoniniana" (AD 212): Taxes or Religion?" Mnemosyne, Fourth Series, 67, no. 6 (2014), 1018.  
\textsuperscript{236} Levick, \textit{Julia Domna: Syrian Empress}, 87. It was reported by Herodian that Julia Domna broke down into tears upon hearing this plan in an attempt to preserve the Empire as a continuous body.  
\textsuperscript{237} Potter, \textit{The Roman Empire at Bay}, 135.  
\textsuperscript{238} Potter, \textit{The Roman Empire at Bay}, 135. Caracalla had effectively used the agency of his mother to trick his brother into a trap. She would never forgive him for this treachery.
their blessing. The major difference seen under Caracalla was that he did not go to the Senate next. Instead, he had to go visit Legio II Parthica stationed in Alba. Severus had left this legion in place in order to counter the Praetorian Guard and it was still present under the rule of his sons. Unlike the Praetorians, the legionaries were much less receptive to Caracalla’s claims that Geta’s murder was justified. They actually refused the Emperor admittance to the camp. The soldiers had taken an oath to both Emperors and were disgusted that Severus’ wishes were not been followed. Inevitably, after repeated appeals and the promise of a large donative, the legionaries opened the gates and affirmed Caracalla as Emperor.

The initial refusal by Legio II Parthica reveals the evolving role of the regular army in the succession of Roman Emperors. Usually, it was the Emperor who would hesitate to accept the title in order to appear as if he were the servant of the senate, people, or army. In this encounter, the roles had reversed. It was the army that hesitated to accept Caracalla until their concerns were addressed. The Praetorians used to be the representatives of the army, now the army itself could assert its will on the imperial administration. Furthermore, the importance of the Roman Senate had fallen to the point that it was the last place Caracalla went to secure his legitimacy. Clearly, things had changed since the early days of the Empire. Geta had been favored by the senate because of his more aristocratic behavior, while the senate despised Caracalla for his habit of acting like a soldier. Caracalla had made the calculated decision to throw in his lot with the

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239 Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 135-136. Caracalla went so far as to give Geta’s assassins a bonus
240 Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 136.
243 Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 137. Caracalla only visited the Senate the day after his brothers murder and with a contingent of armored soldiers
army. It paid off, though not without some backlash as discussed earlier. When given the choice between senatorial support and the support of the legions, emperors clearly preferred the latter.

The evolving role of the army is important in this regard. It is appropriate at this time to outline a few key changes that took place within the military administration of the empire form the time of Augustus through the third century. These changes played an important role in the Crisis of the Third Century. Furthermore, they highlight the importance of the Severan reforms.

To begin with, it is important to note that the Roman Army was never a complete meritocracy. The strict hierarchy of Roman society permeated military structures just as much as it had political structures. Within the Roman army, there were distinct class structures that made it impossible for the institution to be risen through from the bottom up. Furthermore, while the army demanded unity and conformity, it still had clearly delineated pathways for promotion that depended on social class well into the principate. Under the early empire, the highest position a Plebian enlistee could hope to achieve was that of Primus Pilus. This was the uppermost level of the centurion rank and held high prestige. Here too it is clear that the likelihood of a legionary soldier reaching the centurion rank was very slim. Of all the legionaries in the Roman Army around one percent became centurions and far fewer reached the status of Primus Pilus. Once again it is abundantly clear that in terms of reaching higher social status, the army offered little opportunity in its early imperial and republican form. In the end, the Roman legions were

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247 Pavlov, "The Roman Army and Social Mobility in the Pincipate.", 4-5. These figures assume that the legions were kept at full strength and as such cannot be completely accurate. However, they offer insight into the limit of mobility within the Roman army.
practically a mirror image of limited interclass mobility seen within regular Roman society and contained very rigid conditions of career movement among its patrons.\textsuperscript{248}

It was not impossible for the Roman Army to facilitate class change among its soldiers. A good example would be those who reached the rank of Primus Pilus. Upon retirement, a Primus Pilus would be granted a significant donative of six hundred thousand sesterces, which accounted for more than the requirement to enter the equestrian order.\textsuperscript{249} While this may not necessarily translate to entrance into the equestrian ranks, it provided the framework for the centurion’s children to climb the social ladder. In other words, military service provided the children of soldiers with better opportunities than otherwise would have been available.\textsuperscript{250} There seems to be a clear relationship between soldiering and familial security. By reaching the peak of centurion rank, a Plebian could effectively facilitate the transition of his family into the equestrian ranks in the next generation. Though he himself may never be recognized as such, his sons and their sons would have a distinct advantage. Gaining equestrian rank or a commission into the militae equestres offered soldiers the possibility of a better life.\textsuperscript{251} Human nature is all that is needed to explain why this would be so appealing. Especially to those who made the Army a lifelong career.

Though mobility within the upper strata of Roman society was highly unlikely, the Roman military was still the best chance for poor citizens to better themselves. The Roman army clearly provided the best route for social mobility because it gave the poorest citizens the chance

\textsuperscript{248} Pavlov, "The Roman Army and Social Mobility in the Pincipate.", 5.
\textsuperscript{249} Pavlov, "The Roman Army and Social Mobility in the Pincipate.", 5.
\textsuperscript{250} Pavlov, "The Roman Army and Social Mobility in the Pincipate.", 5.
\textsuperscript{251} Davenport, “SOLDIERS AND EQUESTRIAN RANK IN THE THIRD CENTURY AD.”, 123.
to receive regular pay and upon departure a release bonus. Soldiers serving in the Roman Legions had security in their retirement as well as prospects for loot from campaign. It is clear that patriotism was not as much a factor for army recruitment as the success of the army was, since it provided not only material benefit, but the potential for social mobility within one's social sphere. This point will become very relevant later when the success of the army began to diminish in the third century.

The third century offered the greatest chance for mobility among Roman soldiers. Previously, the aristocracy had held a monopoly on high military and government posts. However, the constant invasion and conflict of the third century put the non-aristocrat army commanders in a position to reject armature commanders. The trend toward a separate military and civil administration had already started under Severus, but was not completely enacted until much later. By the middle of the third century aristocrats had been excluded from military and then high government posts. The trend here is one that reveals an increasing reliability on merit and ability as the pressures surrounding the empire continued to strangle it. The difficulties of the third century created the conditions whereby ability began to outweigh the significance of aristocratic tradition.

The third century was a special case. The promotion of a merit-based administration that excluded aristocrats was the exception, not the norm. The hold of aristocratic traditions were strong enough to endure periods of unrest in which ability outweighed heritage. Once

255 Hopkins, “Élite Mobility in the Roman Empire.”, 17.
256 Hopkins, “Élite Mobility in the Roman Empire.”, 18.
257 Hopkins, “Élite Mobility in the Roman Empire.”, 1.
Constantine the Great came to power and restored order to the empire, he began to reenlist the traditional aristocracy into high office and awarded equestrians based on the honor system of the past. This was largely because the emperors legitimacy was too fragile to ignore aristocratic families even when he was supreme general and in complete control of the unified empire.259

Another argument for the increased role of equestrian officers in the third century was the shortage of municipal aristocrats in the third century.260 As mentioned before, the third century presents a distinct case in which military and political crisis paved the way for abnormal levels of mobility among the soldiery. Thus enabling non-aristocratic families to seize the imperial throne with the backing of the army as their sole source of legitimacy.

The reforms of Septimius Severus are directly linked to the increased social mobility seen in the third century. First and foremost, the increased pay Severus gave to the soldiers was followed up by his son Caracalla.261 In order to pay for these pay increases, the imperial government had to make some significant changes to the monetary system of the empire. A significant change that occurred under Severus and his heirs was the decrease in silver content found in coinage. Roman coinage was primarily minted in bronze, silver, and gold. Bronze encompassed most everyday transactions, silver was used for administrative expenses, and gold was primarily used to pay high officials in the administration.262 The devaluation of the silver coinage reveals two things that are extremely significant. First, the imperial administration could not keep up with the increased pay of the legionaries under Severus and later Caracalla.263 This

258 Hopkins, “Élite Mobility in the Roman Empire.”, 18.
259 Hopkins, “Élite Mobility in the Roman Empire.”, 18.
261 Levick, Julia Domna: Syrian Empress, 89.
262 Potter, The Roman Empire at Bay, 138.
263 Potter, The Roman Empire at Bay, 137.
time period was marked by a shortage of silver within the Roman government. The most effective way to combat this shortage was to recall currency and reduce its silver content.264 Under Trajan, the silver content of the denarius had been ninety percent. Under Severus, the silver content had dropped to sixty-six percent early in his reign, and fifty-five percent by the time he died.265 Under Caracalla, the denarius hit an all-time low of around fifty percent in 212 CE.266 Interestingly, the devaluation of the silver coinage did not result in inflation under Caracalla or any emperor before him.267 That leads to the second major development under the Severan line; the willingness of the Roman people to accept the debasement of the denarius. The severity of the silver debasement under Severus and Caracalla reveals that the Roman people were willing to accept the standard exchange rate of the denarius to the aureus.268 That willingness was contingent on the stability of the imperial administration. Similar to how modern currency functions, the full force of the Roman imperial government backed the denarius. The strength of that statement meant different things at different times. The full force of the imperial administration of Marcus Aurelius would likely inspire more confidence than the imperial administration of Pupienus Maximus.269 For this reason, the near collapse of the Roman government in the third century led to rapid inflation because the integrity of the denarius could no longer be based on the integrity of the imperial state, but rather the silver content. The practice of devaluing the denarius in order to pay for administrative expenses no longer worked.

264 Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 136.
266 Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 138.
268 Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 138. That being twenty-five denarius to one aureus
269 Pupienus Maximus was emperor for three months in 238 CE. His reign was short, like many rulers in the third century.
in the third century. This was one of many factors that played into the crisis that troubled that era.

The most significant reform of the Severan dynasty is without a doubt the issuance of the *Constitutio Antoniana* in 212 CE by Caracalla. The Antonine constitution effectively gave citizenship to every free person of the empire. There were a few notable exceptions to this grant of citizenship. These were the *dediticii*, which included certain freed slaves and subjects of Rome who had surrendered as a result of war. The motive behind this vast grant of citizenship is unclear, but there are a few theories that make the most sense given the political and economic state of the empire at this time. First, it has been argued that Caracalla issued the Antonine constitution in order to promote some form of nationalism within the Roman state. Evidence for this argument is provided on a fragmentary piece of papyrus whereupon his edict is inscribed. The inscription refers to the “victory of the Roman people” of which everyone was now a citizen. A more pragmatic reason for doing so may have been to garner support after assassinating his brother Geta. The Antonine constitution linked the success of the empire to that of the emperor. Severus had equated the welfare of the solders with that of his own rule. Caracalla took that a step further by closely identifying the imperial title with the imperial state. Furthermore, some have argued that the grant of citizenship was supposedly some form of empire wide thanksgiving aimed at honoring the emperor. It was issued as a means through

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270 Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 139.
271 Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 139.
272 Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 140.
273 P. Geiss, col. 1.1-12; Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 139.
274 Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 140.
275 Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 140.
276 De Blois, "The "constitutio Antoniniana" (AD 212): Taxes or Religion?", 1018.
which the conflict caused by the murder of Geta could be finally closed.\textsuperscript{277} It has been reasoned that the religious coinage issued at the time as well as the commentary from primary source material warrant the study of the \textit{constitution Antoniniana} as a religious edict that allowed all inhabitants of the empire to participate in honoring the emperor.\textsuperscript{278} An even further pragmatic view of the grant of citizenship was that it was nothing more than a money grab.\textsuperscript{279} By granting citizenship to everyone in the empire, all inhabitants were now liable for the inheritance tax and other duties owed only by citizens.\textsuperscript{280} The notion of passing such a vast grant of citizenship in order to raise funds is not completely ridiculous. After all, the silver content of coinage under Caracalla proves that the imperial coffers were struggling to keep up with the increased demand for silver coinage brought about by the massive pay raises given to the legions. Furthermore, taxes for citizens were nearly doubled under Caracalla and contributed to the military treasury, which facilitated the emperor’s vast grants to the legions.\textsuperscript{281} Now, the emperor could call on all free inhabitants of the empire to pay taxes that had previously only been reserved for citizens.\textsuperscript{282} This would be in line with Cassius Dio’s argument that the grant was merely a means through which the imperial coffers could be replenished.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Antonine Constitution is the way the primary source material from the time treats it. Cassius Dio makes a brief reference to it, Herodian omits it completely, and the \textit{Historia Augusta} loosely alludes to it.\textsuperscript{283} Cassius Dio in particular only

\textsuperscript{277} De Blois, "The "constitutio Antoniniana" (AD 212): Taxes or Religion?", 1019.
\textsuperscript{278} De Blois, "The "constitutio Antoniniana" (AD 212): Taxes or Religion?", 1019.
\textsuperscript{279} Dio, 78.9.5; De Blois, Lukas. "The "constitutio Antoniniana" (AD 212): Taxes or Religion?" Mnemosyne, Fourth Series, 67, no. 6 (2014).
\textsuperscript{280} Birley, \textit{Septimius Severus: the African emperor}, 190.
\textsuperscript{281} Birley, \textit{Septimius Severus: the African emperor}, 190.
\textsuperscript{282} De Blois, "The "constitutio Antoniniana" (AD 212): Taxes or Religion?", 1019.
\textsuperscript{283} Birley, \textit{Septimius Severus: the African emperor}, 190.
references the grant of citizenship in a list of fundraising edicts passed by the emperor. He saw it as an attempt to raise revenues in order to pay for the extravagant donatives promised to the army. The utter disregard the source material shows the Antonine constitution is significant in that it was not perceived as a major cultural change within the empire. None of the sources reference it in any fashion that would make it appear revolutionary. As discussed in the previous chapter, by the end of the second century the provinces of the Roman Empire were completely integrated into the social, political, and economic functions of the state. The grant of citizenship by Caracalla must be understood in this context. Some scholars argue that under Caracalla, the Italian peninsula was reduced to the status of a province. After all, the traditional privileges that were reserved for Italian inhabitants were largely stripped away under Severus. Furthermore, the grant of universal citizenship removed the only difference that was left between the Italian peninsula and the rest of the empire. The Roman Empire ceased to be centered on the Italian peninsula and instead began to be run as a cohesive empire with a single imperial culture that enabled social mobility within the non-Italian elites. There distinction between provincial and Roman was completely torn down by the time Caracalla passed his edict. Cassius Dio makes this clear in his writings by describing how the Roman Empire was a single commonwealth with Rome as the Astu and all the other provinces—Italy included—falling under the category of chora. Perhaps a more accurate explanation may be that the provinces were brought up to the same status as Italy. After all, the reigning dynasty had its roots in the provinces and many members of the senate and military administration were of provincial origin. Thus a grant of

284 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 190.
285 Dio 78.9.5
286 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 191.
287 Dio 74.11.3 In the context of city states, the Astu represents the city and the chora represents the countryside.
citizenship on this scale may not have been as incredible as it sounds. The privileges of citizenship had been eroding for quite some time by this point, but holding citizenship still had a prestigious connotation.288

Once again, the significance of Julia Domna within the imperial court is worth mentioning. Even though she never forgave Caracalla for killing Geta in her arms, Julia remained a significant force within the imperial administration. She traveled with Caracalla everywhere he went—just like she had done with Severus—and acted as a close advisor to him during this time.289 When Caracalla was murdered, Julia was treated very well out of fear that the army would revolt.290 She was an extremely popular figure and maintained that status. Interestingly, Julia Domna was able to retain her influence over the span of three emperors. In this regard, it is easy to see one of the key powers that an Empress held. That of continuity from the previous regime.291 Macrinus was so fearful of losing that link to the previous regime that he allowed Julia to live. It was not until she began plotting that he had her exiled, which along with the news that her son’s death brought rejoice throughout the empire led to her suicide.292 Clearly, women were not idle when it came to the reins of power. Later, Julia Domna’s sister would play a critical role in the rise of later emperors.

After Caracalla was murdered, Macrinus was raised to the imperial title. Interestingly, he was also a North African like Severus.293 He was primarily a part of the administrative side of the imperial government acting as Praetorian Prefect under Caracalla. Macrinus was not a

291 Levick, Julia Domna: Syrian Empress, 92.
292 Birley, Septimius Severus: the African emperor, 192.
293 Potter, The Roman Empire at Bay, 146-147.
senator and came from far outside the traditional ruling class of Rome. He actually had a pierced ear like the men from his tribe traditionally bore. Macrinus had spent most of his career in the palace as a legal advocate and became praetorian prefect because of these credentials. The most significant aspect of Macrinus’ rule in regards to this paper was the fact that he did not seek permission from nor wair for the blessing of the senate when he took imperial power. Clearly, the status of the senate had drastically decreased in a short period of time. As described in a previous chapter, when Severus was fighting for the throne the senate was still sought after and treated with respect. It was only after his opponents had been defeated that he began stripping the senate of its importance. Now a man from completely outside the senatorial class was able to seize the throne and cared little for what the senate had to say about it. He would not be the last to do so.

Unfortunately for Macrinus, the Severan dynasty was as much Syrian as it was North African. For this reason, the continued provincial influence on the imperial government is made abundantly clear. After Julia Domna committed suicide, her sister, Julia Maesa began plotting to have her grandson Elagabalus put on the throne. She claimed that Elagabalus was the illegitimate son of Caracalla. This information, along with a significant bribe, led to Legion III raising Elagabalus to the purple in 218. The conflict between the Severan women and Macrinus is significant in that it represents a power struggle between two vying forces. The traditional elite and the equestrian bureaucracy. The resulting victory by the Severan women

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294 Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 147.
295 Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 147.
297 Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 148.
298 Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 151.
299 Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 151.
300 Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 149.
proved that the traditional elites still maintained considerable power, but also proved that the equestrian bureaucracy was beginning to rise up and challenge that authority. After Macrinus was killed, many high ranking administrators were executed in order to bring the equestrian bureaucracy under control.\footnote{Potter, \textit{The Roman Empire at Bay}, 152.} Afterward, the Severan women would dominate the imperial administration until the end of the dynasty.

The last Severan emperor was Severus Alexander, who was brought to power through the politicking of his mother Julia Mameia. Luckily, for him, the Roman Empire experienced an abnormal period of peace due to the military actions of his predecessors.\footnote{McHugh, John S. \textit{Emperor Alexander Severus: Rome’s Age of Insurrection}, AD222-235. Pen and Sword, 2017, 176} Unfortunately, that peace would not last long. The Parthian Empire to the east was in the process of collapsing early in his career. They were replaced with the far more centralized and aggressive Sassanid Empire.\footnote{Potter, \textit{The Roman Empire at Bay}, 213.} The wars of Severus and Caracalla had left the empire stretched to its limits. The third century was marked by a passive military stance that was largely reactive in nature.\footnote{Potter, \textit{The Roman Empire at Bay}, 224.} Severus Alexander was no different in this regard. The military actions of under his reign were exclusively reactive in nature.\footnote{McHugh, \textit{Emperor Alexander Severus: Rome’s Age of Insurrection}, 176.} When combined with his lack of any practical military ability, a dangerous combination begins to emerge. As mentioned earlier, one of the primary ways soldiers in the Roman army supplemented their income was through pillaging. The reactive conflicts of Severus Alexander’s era eliminated this source of income and led to resentment among the army. Furthermore, Alexander Severus’ lack of martial ability led the army to see him as lacking \textit{virtus}.\footnote{McHugh, \textit{Emperor Alexander Severus: Rome’s Age of Insurrection}, 240. \textit{Virtus} can be understood in this context as the emperor’s martial ability. Bad military leaders did not last long.} Severus Alexander had been dominated by his mother for the majority of his rule.
Unfortunately, this left him vulnerable in regards to the army. He did not participate in any large military action until he was forced to in the east. The disastrous attempt made by Severus Alexander lost him any credibility he may have had as a military commander.\textsuperscript{307} Later, when he reacted to barbarian insurrections in the west he was overthrown by Maximinius Thrax after attempting to negotiate a peace.\textsuperscript{308}

The fall of Severus Alexander marked the beginning of what is now called the Crisis of the Third Century. Maximinius Thrax was the first of many barracks emperors. These men were born into insignificant families and came to power through rising up the military structures of the time. The third century was dominated by men like Maximinius Thrax, who were able to gain the support of the army by virtue of their position in it. Taking the imperial throne was the easy part, keeping it was an entirely different task. Many of these emperors would reign for less than a year. Those who managed to hang on longer still suffered excruciatingly short reigns. The quick turnover rate for emperors led to a near collapse of the imperial administration. This resulted in rampant inflation as the silver content in currency became more important and near constant civil war. The fact that the empire was able to emerge the crisis intact is a miracle in itself.

\textsuperscript{307} McHugh, \textit{Emperor Alexander Severus: Rome's Age of Insurrection}, 226.
\textsuperscript{308} McHugh, \textit{Emperor Alexander Severus: Rome's Age of Insurrection}, 227.
Chapter 5

Final Thoughts

In conclusion, the process of Romanization in the provinces was a long and slow process. The initial use of decentralized local government to maintain order created a system whereby local elites needed to keep ties with their own tribes, but also create links with Roman elites. In this sense, provincials were forced to walk a narrow line between local and imperial administrations. As the Imperial state became more centralized, the attractiveness of imperial positions became much more apparent. Provincial elites were no longer satisfied with local governance. In order to be competitive in the imperial government, provincials had to be able to adequately emulate Roman behavior. Therefore, many underwent the traditional system of education in order to gain position in the imperial government. Citizenship was the most important aspect of Roman identity. Having it was a mark of prestige.

The rise of Septimius Severus saw the use of gained citizenship, paideia, and military service coalesce into gaining the ultimate title: Emperor of Rome. Severus was unique in his approach to rule as he relied solely on the military for support. He cared little for the opinions of the Senate, or people of Rome. He could rule through brute force alone and was perfectly willing to use it. He maintained the support of the military by instituting many critical reforms that would change the political landscape of Rome in the late empire. Under Severus, the split between civil and military administrations started to form. Later, as the empire came under pressure during the crisis of the third century, these functions would be separated completely. Furthermore, he used propaganda to appeal to the soldier’s love of Marcus Aurelius and his son
Commodus. The use of propaganda was not unique to Severus, but many of the ways in which it was enacted were. All of these actions gave him the loyalty of the Army and the ability to purge political enemies in the Senate. He spent most of his rule away from the city and even died far away from Rome in the city of York.

Lastly, the reforms instituted by Severus had major implications for the empire after his rule. Caracalla granted citizenship to all free peoples of the Empire. While contemporary writers did not see this development as a major change, it clearly was. Now nearly all free inhabitants of the Roman world were citizens. Previously, this distinction had been reserved for Italians and certain provincial elites. Furthermore, the lack of trust given the senate led to the professionalization of the officer corps. These professional officers were able to dominate the political sphere on the third century when civil war, invasion, and economic trouble almost collapsed the empire. Combined with the universal grant of citizenship, these professional officers had never been in a better position to seize power. Unfortunately, that opportunity was extended to many people and the disorder of the third century revealed how destructive that could be. The instability also led to a rabid inflation which wrecked the economic systems in place. Previously, the value of currency was partly based on the stability of the Imperial government. Now, with emperors coming and going with the winds, it was impossible for the monetary system of the Empire to cope.

The result of these developments culminated in the third century. After the death of Severus Alexander, the imperial throne became an extremely dangerous position to hold. Emperors were killed and replaced at an alarming rate. The Crisis of the Third Century is an excellent example of this chaos that pure military dictatorships create. All of the Severan forms came together in the perfect storm which completely destroyed the constitutional camouflage of
the imperial state. What emerged after the crisis ended was significantly different from what existed before. With the death of Severus Alexander, the principate effectively ceased to exist due to these chaotic events. Eventually, the crisis ended with the establishment of the dominate under Diocletian and the partition of the empire into eastern and western sectors. There was no longer any attempt to maintain the image of princeps, but rather the acceptance that the emperor was the master of the Roman world.


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EDUCATION
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- **Accolades:** Schreyer Honors College, Paterno Honors Fellowship, Academic Excellence Scholarship recipient, Phi Eta Sigma National Honor Society, Phi Alpha Theta History Honor Society, Pi Sigma Alpha National Political Science Honor Society, National Society of Collegiate Scholars

EXPERIENCE
Pennsylvania State University – Honors Thesis
2018--Nov 2018
- Studied the spread of Roman citizenship from the 1st century BCE to the 3rd Century CE
- Required extensive use of primary source material

Pennsylvania State University – Genocide and Tyranny
2018—May 2018
- Studied the relationship between organized extermination camps and genocide kill rate
- Comparative study between the Holocaust and Rwandan Genocide

Centre County Planning and Human Development Office
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Pennsylvania State University – Survey of Japanese History
Oct 2015—Dec 2015
- Studied the continued effect of Bushido on contemporary Japanese Society

Pennsylvania State University – Rhetoric and Civic Life
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- Researched a Paradigm Shift relating to gender studies
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ORGANIZATIONS / LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Kensington Aquatic Services
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- Managed five swimming pools as the Pool Operator on Call
- Scheduled staff and kept inventory of pool equipment/chemicals

Campus Advocates at Penn State
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- Web coordinator for Campus Advocates at Penn State
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