

Caillan Davenport: *A History of the Roman Equestrian Order*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2019. XXV, 717 p., 42 figures, 9 tables. £ 130.00. ISBN: 978-1-107-03253-8.

Theophanes of Mytilene, who is memorably depicted by Julius Caesar as one of the three most trustworthy counsellors of Cn. Pompeius Magnus at the height of the civil war of 49–48 BC, would end his days peacefully, receiving divine honours from the community that he had represented. Pontius Pilatus, apparently coming from a community in the south central Italian region of Samnium, has been condemned to notoriety by the Gospels' depiction of his decision to condemn to death a rabble-rouser by the name of Jesus of Nazareth; nothing is known about him aside from his time as governor of Judaea in AD 26/27–36/37. Sossianus Hierocles, who presumably came from a community in Syria or Anatolia, served as a provincial administrator under Diocletian and Maximinus Daia, arriving eventually at the honour of *praefectus Aegypti*, but owes his notoriety with posterity to the fact that he composed an anti-Christian tract (*The Lover of Truth*) that offered abundant justification for these emperors' policy of persecution. Coming from quite different milieux, in terms of space and time, these three individuals are united – with thousands of others, equally evanescent – in that they were members of the *ordo equester* and as such played a key role in the administration of the Roman empire. While their specific cases are not discussed by Caillan Davenport in his global survey of the phenomenon of the *ordo equester* over the course of Roman history, anyone seeking to make sense of their contributions or of the variety of roles performed by their peers belonging to that social group will now wish to begin investigation with Davenport's massive contribution of more than 700 pages. Detailed and wide-ranging, it deploys a vast array of different categories of evidence and case studies in order to describe and analyse the composition and role of the *ordo equester* as that social group evolved over the course of some twelve centuries.

Setting the tone, a thorough introduction (1–26) sets forth the book's aims, defines recurring, essential concepts, and outlines the book's structure. It is worth observing that Davenport, in the course of introducing useful hermeneutic instruments such as “occupational status group”, “service aristocracy”, and “monarchical *res publica*”, also offers readers comparativist (e.g. Chinese and Abbasid empires) and long-term perspectives (compris-

ing the Byzantine and western European experiences of the later Middle Ages) on the history of the equestrian order of ancient Rome. Thus the reader receives orientation regarding the larger topic of warrior aristocracies as well as a user's guide to the book itself.

Covering the Regal period in summary fashion and focussing upon the middle and late Republic, Part I (27–153) surveys the prehistory and institution of the equestrian order. Chapter 1 (“Riding for Rome”, 29–69) examines the evidence for the mounted warriors of the earliest centuries of Roman history and how this group evolved into two distinct orders (senatorial and equestrian). Through things such as a focus on the numismatic implications of the literary evidence and the citation of testimony for lost artistic evidence, Davenport reconstructs the gradual affirmation of those symbols that would mark the *equites* as a distinct social entity in its own right. The turning-point came with tribunician legislation in 129 and 123 BC, when senators were removed from the centuries of *equites equo publico* and then replaced as jurors by the *equites*. Chapter 2 (“Cicero’s Equestrian Order”, 70–108) explores the detailed and abundant testimony of M. Tullius Cicero (*cos.* 63 BC) for the *ordo equester*, illustrating how his contradictory evidence reflects the evolving state of affairs in the late Republic. Highlighting the extraordinary fact that T. Pomponius Atticus took a public stance on a political question when he led the *equites en masse* to the *clivus Capitolinus* on the night of 4 December 63 BC, Davenport indeed lays bare the tentative nature of the stages whereby the *equites* came to assume a role in the governance of Empire. As so often, they were reacting to other forces at play in Roman society and politics. Chapter 3 (“Questions of Status”, 109–153) brings the discussion of the *ordo equester* in the late Republic to a fitting conclusion by focussing on the signs of status and their significance for the sociological self-awareness of *equites*. As is finely manifested by their decision to dedicate a statue to L. Antonius as the *patronus* of their *ordo*, it was only at the end of the Republic that they finally arrived at a clear sense of corporate identity. Status symbols (gold ring, *trabea* or *angustus clavus*, shoes) and the privilege of sitting in the first fourteen rows of the theatre (*lex Roscia theatralis*), like appearances in Rome for trials and elections, served to define *equites* as a distinct social group.

Part II (“The Empire”, 155–369) is dedicated to the developments arising from the decision of the Princeps to co-opt the *ordo equester* as a partner in rule and a counterbalance to his peers in the Senate. Chapter 4 (“Pathways

to the Principate”, 157–203) explores the changes introduced with the establishment of the monarchical *res publica*, highlighting the new *potentia* (as opposed to *potestas* [168]) that might be wielded by individuals such as Maecenas and Sallustius Crispus. New institutional roles that were dependent upon the figure of the Princeps emerged, most notably those of the four “great prefectures”: the *praefectus praetorio*, the *praefectus annonae*, the *praefectus vigilum*, and the *praefectus Aegypti*. This development, coupled with the elevation of the Senate at the expense of juries, redimensioned equestrian power and made the Princeps the ultimate arbiter. Chapter 5 (“An Imperial Order”, 204–252) shifts the focus of investigation to equestrian status and its redefinition with the coming of the Principate. The standard markers of equestrian status that existed as of the late Republic (e.g. census of HS 400,000 and *anulus aureus*) did not undergo formal change, but the liberality of the Princeps in terms of money and the enrolment of increasing numbers of *equites equo publico* meant an effective change. Status was now a benefaction of the Princeps. This reality informed the commemoration of equestrian status whether at Pompeii (e.g. M. Holconius Rufus) or Ephesus (e.g. C. Vibius Salutaris; cf. “Young Togatus” of Aphrodisias). Chapter 6 (“*Cursus* and *Vita* (I): Officers”, 253–298) looks at the military careers of *equites* as they are revealed in the literary sources (e.g. the correspondence of Pliny the Younger) and the epigraphic record (which is far more extensive and detailed). Thanks to the wealth of detail offered by funerary and honorific inscriptions, which adopted the epigraphic habit of senatorial *novi homines* in inscribing an individual’s *cursus honorum*, it is possible to reconstruct to a meaningful degree career patterns and individual histories. The union of literary with epigraphic and artistic evidence allows us to visualise Roman military officers in the round as it were, highlighting those cultural, military, and civic achievements that were deemed most significant. Chapter 7 (“*Cursus* and *Vita* (II): Administrators”, 299–369) complements the preceding chapter by looking at the civilian careers of *equites* in provincial administration, *officia palatina*, and the governance of the city of Rome itself. Again the combination of literary, epigraphic, and artistic evidence allows for a rounded, detailed work of reconstruction. Issues such as seniority and pay-scale (e.g. *sexagenarius*, *centenarius*, *ducenarius*, *trecenarius*) are treated in detail by means of specific examples (e.g. C. Postumius Saturninus Flavianus). So, too, a sense of proportion is maintained by noting both the limited number of individuals involved and ambivalent attitudes on the part of individuals such as Lucian of Samosata.

Focussing on the three centuries of the Principate, Part III (“Equestrians on Display”, 371–481) explores the involvement of *equites* in the public life of Rome and Latium, leaving aside administration so as to examine parades, spectacles, and worship. Chapter 8 (“Ceremonies and Consensus”, 373–417) investigates the three public circumstances in which the *ordo equester* operated as a corporate entity and enjoyed the role of protagonist in public life. Although they had no assembly peculiar to them, the *equites* seem to have used their gatherings in the first fourteen rows of the theatres in Rome to make public statements from time to time (e.g. acclaiming Augustus *pater patriae*). Through the *transvectio equitum* (15 July) and the *decursio equitum* (at the death of an emperor or heir apparent) they collaborated in the ideological construction of the monarchical *res publica*, actively expressing their consent. Chapter 9 (“Spectators and Performers”, 418–445) looks at the relationship of *equites* to the world of entertainment, with especial attention given to the developments of the late Republic and early Principate. The full array of evidence (documentary and literary, or legal, honorific, and anecdotal) is deployed to illustrate the significance of claiming a seat in the *XIV ordines*. That same concern for status is likewise clearly on view when discussion turns to *equites* performing on stage or in the arena or circus. Wealth and fame, or popularity if one prefers, were to be had and might shore up a precarious hold on one’s status, in spite of potential *infamia*. Chapter 10 (“Religion and the Res Publica”, 446–481) is dedicated to the priesthoods that were transferred to or created for the *equites* at Rome and in Latium with the advent of the monarchical *res publica*. Exploration of the fact that the *luperci* were only from the *ordo equester* subsequent to the Lupercalia’s “restoration” by Augustus, for instance, illustrates how this festival now served as an initiation rite integrating *equites* within the new ideology. Focus upon the *pontifices* and *flamines minores* complements this vision of corporate life, delving into the individual experiences of people such as Hadrian’s *ab epistulis* C. Suetonius Tranquillus and the third-century *centenarius* P. Flavius Priscus.

Part IV (“The Late Empire”, 483–606) is concerned with the visible transformation that the *ordo equester* underwent in the mid-third century and the subsequent dismemberment and disappearance of this corporate entity. Chapter 11 (“Governors and Generals”, 485–552) deals with the changes in recruitment and status of equestrian officials and administrators that can be observed as having taken place in the course of the third century AD. A

review of the epigraphic evidence offers a corrective to the literary tradition (viz. Sex. Aurelius Victor). It reveals that incipient phenomena such as the substitution of senatorial governors and generals by equestrians and the opening of the *ordo equester* to soldiers (and their sons) who served in close proximity to the emperor (e.g. the rank and file of the Praetorian Guard, *equites singulares*, and *legio II Parthica*), picked up speed in the 250s and 260s in response to multiple, more or less simultaneous military crises of invasion and usurpation. Chapter 12 (“The Last *Equites Romani*”, 553–606) brings the story to a close with a discussion of the changes that occurred subsequent to the reign of Gallienus, tracing the gradual disappearance of the *ordo equester* from the late third to the mid-fifth century AD. Inflation (in conjunction with fiscal reform), civil war, and the perennial competition for status within the new “community of honour” together eliminated the traditional markers of equestrian status and careers and led to a redefinition of the Senate that included those (e.g. C. Caelius Saturninus) who would have normally remained *equites* in the past. As the *navicularii* found, the status had now become a gilded cage.

A brief conclusion (607–621) summarises this historical survey and its salient features, setting in relief both the changes and the continuities and highlighting key turning-points in the evolution of the *ordo equester*. A glossary of technical terms (620–633), a bibliography of works cited (634–686), and an index (687–717) complete the volume.

As can be seen from the foregoing description, this volume offers a global survey of the history of the equestrian order that is extraordinarily rich in terms of detail and a wide range of examples ensuring a sophisticated historical texture. From the anachronisms of Livy for the fifth and third centuries BC (39) to the sophisticated ridicule of Philostratos of Lemnos in that author’s *How to Write Letters* (364) to *scholia* on the poems of Horace and Juvenal (559), the deployment of the testimony of literature is constant, varied, and highly informative. No less so is the use of epigraphic and papyrological evidence, ranging from bureaucratic records such as the *Papyri Euphratenses* (501) and legal texts such as the *Tabula Bembina* (61) or the *Edict of Maximum Prices* (560) to simple, prosaic dedications such as that set up at Ephesus for L. Agrius Publeianus by Italian businessmen (135) and poetic endeavours on funeral monuments such as that of the widowed Valeria for her spouse Dassianus (594). While practical considerations of cost and availability understandably limited the use of photographs to illus-

trate the visual and material evidence, those coins and statues and monuments that are depicted are often presented to very good effect thanks to a wise reliance on institutional archives and their use of professional photographers. Objects such as the Augustan *aureus* depicting Gaius and Lucius Caesares as *principes iuventutis* (fig. 8.7) and the Tiburtine funeral monument of Ti. Claudius Liberalis (fig. 8.3) with its depiction of the deceased participating in the Lupercalia and the *transvectio equitum* will long remain impressed in readers' minds once they have seen them. The poetry of Ovid and Martial, the letters of Pliny the Younger, the potted histories and anecdotes of Pliny the Elder and Suetonius all have their place here, but Davenport goes far beyond the literary record in working to provide readers with a rounded vision of the evolution of the *ordo equester* over the centuries.

In view of the special focus of *Plekos*, a few words on the subject of Late Antiquity are in order. Davenport offers a sensible – and largely condivisible – synthesis of the material and the developments that took place during the third to sixth centuries AD. Abreast of recent work of revision, he adopts a pragmatic view of the background to the “Gallienic transformation” that took place in the middle of the third century (e.g. 529, “the essential adaptability of the imperial system”; 536, “probably a gradual process”), he illustrates in detail the subsequent evolution in administration that led from Diocletian to Constantine and beyond (e.g. 576–578, C. Caelius Saturninus *signo Dogmatius*¹), and he formulates cogent observations regarding the survival of the *ordo equester* conceivably as far as the reign of Justinian I (603, where “criteria for conclusion” ought to read “criteria for inclusion”). Nothing remotely heterodox is to be found here (e.g. the handling of Censorius Datianus is far too safe and anodyne: 585 n. 194; significant advances have been made since *PLRE* 1.243–244). Students can safely be referred to this monograph in the expectation that they will learn what the current consensus in scholarship is. On the other hand, it is the obligation of the scholar to seek to extend the confines of knowledge, and one frequently encounters what seem missed opportunities here. So, for instance, in the wake of the work of Timothy D. Barnes, Davenport limits himself to affirming that the office of *magister militum* “came into being by

1 However, “dated to around 324” is a misleading description of the statue as it must have been erected after Constantine’s adoption of the style *Constantinus Victor Augustus* in the wake of his final, definitive victory over Licinius in late 324.

the 340s at the latest” (595 n. 264), citing Fl. Bonosus (*cos.* 344)² and Fl. Eusebius (*cos.* 347) as “[t]he first examples”. Looking more closely at the evidence, one discovers slight, but telling evidence that the traditional attribution of the office’s creation to Constantine is probably correct (Zos. 2.33.2, testimony that is manifestly soiled by religious polemic, but not for that reason to be lightly discarded). While it is true that a rescript of Constantius II that was addressed to Bonosus and dates to 11 May AD 347 clearly indicates that that general was termed *magister equitum* (Cod. Theod. 5.6.1) and another rescript by Constantius II that dates to 18 January AD 360 clearly refers to the deceased Eusebius as *exmagistro militum et peditum* (Cod. Theod. 11.1.1; with the date correctly emended by Otto Seeck), there also exists contemporary documentary evidence that Fl. Salia (*cos.* 348) was termed *magister equitum* in AD 348 (BGU 2.405, 456; Stud. Pal. 20.98; BGU 3.917). Whereas Bonosus and Eusebius served in the East under Constantius II, Salia served in the West under Constans. That elementary fact renders it virtually certain that the innovation was introduced by Constantine prior to his death in AD 337. Indeed, reflection further suggests that the innovation is probably to be linked to the conduct of civil war and the need to leave a clearly designated *alter ego* of the emperor in command of a field army in one theatre while the emperor was away fighting a civil war in another theatre. If that be accepted, then the innovation is to be dated to 323/324 or conceivably 311/312 (in the wake of the unhappy experience with Maximian as well as in conjunction with the civil war in Italy against that emperor’s son). The likelihood that Constantius II emulated Constans (or vice versa) in making such an innovation is virtually nil. In any case, as the fundamental changes implemented under Gallienus (like those earlier under Augustus) highlight the role that civil war³ played in the changes in

- 2 It is somewhat surprising that Davenport does not cite Iulius Sallustius (*cos.* 344), whose position as *magister peditum* is attested by a document dated to AD 344 (*P. Abinn.* 2.10). Indeed, from that and other contemporary evidence, it emerges that it was actually Sallustius, and not Bonosus, who shared with the praetorian prefect Fl. Leontius the honour of serving as *consul ordinarius* in AD 344: B. Salway: Roman Consuls, Imperial Politics, and Egyptian Papyri: The Consulates of 325 and 344 CE. In: *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1, 2008, 278–310, here 300–309; D. Woods: Flavius Bonosus and the Consuls of A.D. 344. In: *CQ* 62, 2012, 895–898.
- 3 No entry appears in the index for this phrase, which indeed seems studiously avoided in the text. As the recent work of Johannes Wienand, William Harris, and Adraos Omissi has highlighted, civil war lay at the root of the late antique transformation of the Empire.

the administration of the Roman empire and the evolution of the equestrian order. The gains in status enjoyed by members of the *ordo equester* under the last of the Antonines and the early Severans, under Gallienus, and under Diocletian can all be readily explained in terms of fashioning consensus anew under the threat of or in response to civil war, and the same holds true for the reign of Constantine (590). Much more might easily be said, but perhaps the above suffices to illustrate both the fundamentally useful and insightful work of Davenport and the need for further work and a closer cross-examination of the surviving witnesses.

It is therefore to be regretted that the execution does not always match and exalt the potential of this monograph. From things such as the entry for the Julio-Claudian emperor Claudius (693), it is clear that a substantial amount of effort went into the creation of the index. However, it is also clear that the creation of the index was a lost opportunity to catch various mistakes. So, for instance, the same figure receives entries as both (correctly) “L. Cornelius Balbus” (694) and (incorrectly) “L. Antonius Balbus” (688), in spite of the fact that Davenport is talking about the same horrific episode at Gades that was immortalised in a letter of Asinius Pollio to Cicero in 43 BC, and the true Antonius Balbus who lived two centuries later instead receives an entry as “Antoninus Balbus” (688). Aside from such errors in the text and index, the index provides extensive (not exhaustive) coverage of individuals and topics, but really does not help anyone with a serious interest in the sources that were used to write this book or the modern discussions used to interpret those sources. For a work such as this, there need to be multiple indices, they need to be complete, and they need to be carefully compiled. Otherwise, the reader seeking to find something again or merely wishing to know whether a subject has been discussed is reduced to looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack.

Overall, this volume is highly successful in achieving what its author sets out to do. The goal of writing a history of the equestrian order is an ambitious one. Potentially extremely useful if successful, it is also one that is far from easy to realise, requiring as it does mastery of a number of ancillary disciplines (e.g. epigraphy, prosopography, and art history). Drawing upon a vast array of evidence and providing a critical synthesis of scholarship dedicated to the various stages in the existence of the *ordo equester*, Davenport offers a readable and thoughtful investigation of the role that *equites* played in the history of ancient Rome. His work merits a place on the shelf

next to the contributions of Hans-Georg Pflaum, Claude Nicolet, Ségolène Démougin and Hubert Devijver.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

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