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Chapter 5

Roman emperors and territorial expansion

1. The roles of Roman emperors in the Principate

Although Rome had become an empire before it had an emperor, once autocracy was established, as the first man (*princeps*) the emperor needed to perform various tasks imposed on him by his position as the leading statesman of the empire.¹ On certain works of art, emperors appear as heroic conquerors clad in military attire, but on other objects they are portrayed as benefactors in civic dress. Starting with Augustus, the emperors of the Principate assumed responsibility for keeping the city of Rome adequately supplied with grain, and provincial cities which had been hit by earthquakes or destroyed by fires could ask the emperor for financial support. In the religious sphere, the emperor was the *Pontifex Maximus*, and in the provinces statues of emperors were set up in sanctuaries dedicated to the imperial cult. In brief, an emperor was expected to play a gamut of roles which corresponded to the expectations of various groups of people, ranging from senators, ordinary Roman citizens, soldiers to subjects without citizen rights.²

Again the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* offers some good insights into the multiple roles which Roman emperors were expected to play. Throughout the *Res Gestae*, Augustus emphasizes his excellent relations with the Senate, representing himself as a leading statesman who surpassed his fellow senators not in power but only in authority.³ As revealed in the first chapter, the theme of world conquest occurs mainly in Chapters 3-4 and 25-33 of the text. Although in many cases Augustus and his successors entrusted the army to their senatorial peers who fulfilled their commission under the auspices of the

¹ From countless discussions of these topics, I single out Millar (1977) 355-361 and 422-424.

² Since the main focus of this chapter is the military image of the emperor, I shall not try to provide a detailed discussion of each and every role which a Roman emperor played. My aim is merely to call attention to the fact that the legitimacy of imperial rule depended not solely on the military achievements of emperors and the generals fighting under their auspices. A secondary aim is to allow a broad comparison between the roles played by Roman and Chinese emperors.

³ RG 34,3.

emperor, Augustus was the *imperator* of the Roman army.⁴ In emphasizing his good relations with the army, in Chapters 16-17 Augustus draws attention to the sums of money which he expended on the veterans who had completed their military service and had been settled in colonies. Besides his military functions, Augustus had various civil tasks. In Chapters 5 and 18 of the *Res Gestae*, Augustus lists the distributions of grain and money which he made to the urban plebs of Rome. In Chapters 7 and 10, he focuses on his religious roles as chief priest, augur and member of the board of Fifteen Men (*quindecimvir sacris faciundis*) responsible for the supervision of foreign cults which had been adopted at Rome. Chapter 8 deals with his censorial duties pursuant to membership of the Senate and arranging the holding of the census. Finally Chapters 18-24 are devoted to his role in organizing various games and to the construction programmes which were carried out during his reign.

Augustus' successors were expected to play the same roles, and they were censured if they failed in these tasks.⁵ For example, Suetonius criticizes Tiberius for showing very little interest in holding games or in initiating building projects.⁶ When Nero died in 68, he was detested for his cruelty and immoral way of life not only by senators but also by many ordinary citizens, despite the fact that during his early reign he had enjoyed immense popularity among soldiers and the majority of the Roman plebs on account of his generosity in disbursing large sums of money and the enthusiasm he had displayed for organizing games and spectacles to entertain the populace.⁷ Titus was praised for his endeavours in dealing with catastrophes, first the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 and then a huge fire and a plague in the city of Rome.⁸ Domitian had a deeply problematic relationship with the Senate, but continued to enjoy the support of the army and remained popular both with the Roman plebs and with the provincial population because he organized many shows in Rome and dealt competently with food shortages in the province of Asia.⁹

⁴ RG 4,2. IRT 301, Campbell (1994) 72.

⁵ Zanker (2010) 46.

⁶ Suet. *Tib.* 28.

⁷ For the popularity of Nero and the "bread and circuses" during his reign, see Griffin (1984) 104-112. Mayer (2010) 119-126.

⁸ Suet. *Tit.* 8,4.

⁹ Suetonius offers a detailed account of Domitian's public entertainments. See Suet. *Dom.* 4,1. For the public shows organized in the reign of Domitian, see Jones (1992) 105.

Olivier Hekster has rightly pointed out that “the popularity of members of the *Domus Augusta* had much to do with the fact that they were the sole beneficiaries of the brilliant glory of the triumph and from Domitian and his successors, the only ones who could please the populace with games and spectacles.”¹⁰ However, in spite of the popularity an emperor might earn for providing bread and circuses, his reputation also depended on the way in which he performed his other duties. Under the Republic consuls, praetors and tribunes had been responsible for carrying out various juridical duties. From the time of Augustus emperors were personally expected to hear cases, to preside over jury sessions and to hand down verdicts.¹¹ Tacitus’ *Annales* are full of references to emperors presiding over trials or investigating cases while presiding over a tribunal either in the Senate House or in the Forum. In the second century, Trajan, Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius are reported to have handed down many judgements.¹²

The administrative duties of an emperor included answering letters sent by his *legati* in the provinces and receiving ambassadors dispatched by cities or envoys from friendly states or tribes. Countless examples are to be found in Tacitus’ *Annales*, in Cassius Dio’s *Histories*, in Pliny the Younger’s *Epistulae* and in the writings of Fronto.

Last but not the least, all Roman emperors were commanders-in-chief of the imperial army. During the Principate, the military title *imperator* usually took pride of place in the emperor’s titlature, even though they were no longer expected to lead each and every military campaign in person.¹³ Images of the emperor as *imperator* were disseminated on coins, in the form of sculptures, on reliefs and through other media, not only for the purpose of reinforcing the loyalty of the legions but also to broadcast the message of their military *virtus* and efficient military leadership to a wider audience.¹⁴ In the city of

¹⁰ Hekster (2001) 21.

¹¹ To give just one example, when Claudius was administering justice in the *Forum Romanum* in AD 51, he was surrounded by an angry mob which complained about the shortage of grain. See Tac. *Ann.* 12,43,1; Suet. *Claud.* 18,2. Millar (1977) 229. For the various legal instructions given and decisions made by Roman emperors, like *edicta*, *mandata*, *rescripta* and *decreta*, see Sirks (2001) 122.

¹² For imperial hearings and the emperor as a judge see Millar (1977) 229-240.

¹³ For the use of the name *Imperator Caesar* by Augustus, see Syme (1958) 172-188.

¹⁴ Recent scholarship has paid a great deal of attention to the role of Roman coins in shaping imperial images and disseminating them to provincial communities. See, for instance, Wallace-Hadrill (1986); Ando (2000); Noreña (2013). In regard to imperial portraits, it is still a matter of contention whether this reflects the interplay between the

innumerable monuments, memorials such as the Arch of Titus and the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius were erected,¹⁵ and statues depicting the emperor wearing military garb are found not only in Rome but in many provincial cities as well.¹⁶ There can be no doubt that the reputation of the emperors of the Principate depended not only on their track record in providing “bread and circuses” to the population of the capital city but also on their ability to create and maintain an image of military prowess by various visual arts and materials.

Ever since the time of Mommsen, the nature of Roman imperialism, and the forces which drove this process, have been fiercely debated.¹⁷ However, in their discussions of this issue scholars have focused mainly on the Republican period, offering various interpretations of the motives and factors lying behind the rise of Roman power in the Mediterranean. Ancient historians have shown far less interest in how the dynamics of Roman imperialism were sustained in the Early Imperial period.¹⁸ It is true that few scholars believe that incentives for Roman aggression had entirely ceased to operate after Augustus, for the simple reason that some further expansion took place and, not least, because Rome maintained its ascendancy over the peoples of the Mediterranean world and North-West Europe for another two hundred years. What is a matter of dispute is exactly how Rome managed to achieve this objective. Did Rome continue to adopt an offensive stance and hence normally take the initiative, or did it develop an essentially passive and defensive frontier policy?¹⁹

emperor and the local communities, following a “centre-periphery” pattern. In any case, there can be no doubt that the reception and reshaping of imperial images by local communities are important topics. See Rose (1997) 108-120; Price (1984) 170-206. For some case studies see Mayer (2010) 114-119, dealing with portraits of Augustus created by Samos, and Osgood (2012) on an altar dedicated to Claudius by the people of Ravenna.

¹⁵ Arch of Titus: Hannestad (1988) 124-132; Trajan’s Column: Hannestad (1988) 154-167; Coarelli (1999) and below. For a discussion of the city of Rome as a theatre for representations of imperial power, see Wallace-Hadrill (2003) 189-206. On the military imagery of Roman emperors in the city of Rome, see Koortbojian (2010).

¹⁶ Statues of emperors wearing cuirasses have been found throughout the empire, but it is difficult to say how many of these were created in provincial cities. For a general discussion of the military imagery on the basis of statues found in the provinces, see Højset (2005) 182-184.

¹⁷ I have addressed this point in the first chapter of the thesis.

¹⁸ Sidebottom (2005) 317.

¹⁹ Two starkly different opinions in scholarship held by Millar and Isaac can be observed here. Both Millar and Isaac refute the theory of a Roman grand strategy put

The principal aim of this chapter is to explore the incentives for territorial expansion in the Early Roman empire (AD 14-AD 211). I shall argue that some key features of the bellicose culture of the Republican period, including a martial ethos and the pursuit of military glory and prestige, continued to play an important role during the Principate.²⁰ One of my points is that this ideology was not merely a rhetorical device or a tool of imperial self-presentation, but also had an important bearing on foreign policies. In many cases considerations of martial glory and prestige do actually appear to have been the main reason for territorial expansion. On the other hand, while some important continuities in values can be observed, there is no reason to think that these continuities ever led to the creation of a long-term, scientifically based “grand strategy”. As the research shows, the imperial decision making of the emperors of the Principate remained quite elastic. As a general rule, Roman emperors launched their campaigns whenever they thought such an undertaking might be useful or necessary. The reason this flexible approach could be maintained was that Rome’s power in the Mediterranean world remained unchallenged.

2. Military values as incentives for expansion: from Augustus to Septimius Severus

The role of military honour and *virtus* in shaping Roman imperialism can hardly be overestimated.²¹ Although Roman politicians of the Middle and Late Republic subscribed to the theory of the just war (*bellum iustum*), war generally tended to be heavily eulogized.²² Pragmatically, a successful campaign not only

forward by Luttwak, but Millar maintains a relatively traditional view in terms of imperial policy making in the early empire. Taking into account the limited means of communication and lack of information, he concludes that, “the (Roman) imperial power was largely static or inert, and its activity stimulated by pressures and initiatives from below.” Whereas Isaac believes that the Roman government was highly autonomous in the issue of imperial policy making. According to Isaac, down to the reign of Diocletian at least the stance of the Roman army in the East was on the whole quite aggressive; see Millar (1966) 156-166; (1982) 1-23; Isaac (1990) 372.

²⁰ David Potter (1996) 55, attempts to distinguish the Roman ideology of war, world conquest and pragmatic military policies and activities.

²¹ On *virtus* as a key element in the aristocratic ethos during the Republic, see Rosenstein (2007) 133-136.

²² On the subject of the glory of imperial expansion in the late Republic and Early Empire, see Brunt (1990) 288-333. On the Roman concept of the “just war”, see Cicero, *de officiis* 1,34–36. Cf. Albert (1980); Brunt (1990) 305-314.

brought land, slaves and other types of booty, it was also the most immediate way for Roman aristocrats to acquire glory and gain access to high office.²³ It has been argued that the existence of this highly militaristic culture fuelled the territorial expansion which ultimately resulted in the establishment of Roman hegemony in the Mediterranean world during the second century BC.²⁴ Remarkably, the pace of conquest was maintained during the civil wars of the period 90 BC-45 BC. As the careers of Sulla, Pompey, Caesar and Crassus show, aggravated competition between ambitious Roman generals, mingled with traditional bellicose values, acted as a catalyst for further territorial expansion.²⁵

Augustus established a dominant position in the state, but did everything in his power to stress the continuity of republican values and traditions. In the *Res Gestae*, he emphasizes his military *virtus* in order to highlight the continuation of the ancestral martial ethos.²⁶ He even claims to have surpassed the *summi viri* (best men) of the Republic by achieving victory over Parthia. In reality, he had only managed to persuade the Parthians to return the Roman standards by means of diplomacy. In the *Forum Augusti*, the figures of Aeneas and the other most prominent members of the *gens Iulia* were displayed, reflecting Augustus's aspiration to link "himself and his family to the gallery of Republican *duces, triumphatores*, as heir to the grandest martial traditions of the state."²⁷ Cogently, the statue from Prima Porta shows Augustus as a grandiose

²³ See Hopkins (1978) 25-47; Harris (1979) 9-53; Rosenstein (2006) 366-367. In his insightful book *Imperatores victi*, Rosenstein shows that ultimately many unsuccessful commanders still managed to reach high office. See Rosenstein (1990). But this does not contradict the view that military honour was an important asset for young aristocrats trying to obtain high office. For a good discussion of the military ethos of the aristocratic elite of Republican Rome and its relationship with the political aspirations of this group, see Rosenstein (2007) 132-147, esp. 136f. In her *Triumph in Defeat* (2014), Clark argues that, during the middle Republic, "the outcomes of Roman wars were not decided solely on the battlefield, but ultimately by the Senate's verdicts." See Östenberg's review (2014). This suggests that the Roman senatorial elite during the middle Republic did not see military defeats as a source of irreparable damage to the reputation of the commanding general. But Clark also points out that, after the mid-second century, the Senate gradually lost patience with defeated generals.

²⁴ See Chapter 1.

²⁵ For an analysis on the relationships between the "great individuals" of the late Republic and the Roman Senate, see Christian Meier's influential monograph, Meier (1980).

²⁶ On attitudes regarding the Republican tradition under Augustus, see Eder (1990) 71-122; Gowing (2005) 17-27. For a discussion of aristocratic honours during the Empire, see Lendon (1997) 30-106.

²⁷ Ovid, *Fast.* 5,563-566; Suet. *Aug.* 31,5; Dio 55,10,3; For the *Forum Augusti* see Zanker

general wearing a cuirass and stretching his right arm as he addresses his soldiers.²⁸ On a practical level, Augustus reinforced his relationships with the army by looking after the material interests of both serving soldiers and veterans. In the *Res Gestae* he draws attention to the many veteran colonies he established.²⁹ In AD 6 he set up the *aerarium militare*, from which military pay and the costs of retirement schemes could be covered.³⁰

During the first decades of the empire, territorial expansion was driven by various factors and considerations. Nevertheless, unquestionably the pursuit of military prestige was a crucial element. If this were not so, it is hard to explain why Augustus went to the trouble of sending his armies to such remote areas as Ethiopia, Arabia and Free Germany. Posing as the guardian of traditional Roman values, Augustus skillfully shifted public attention away from the painful civil war at home to the periphery of the world where Romans sacked towns, subdued peoples and achieved important victories.³¹

In the reign of Tiberius, the boundaries the empire remained more or less stable. It can be speculated that Tiberius decided to follow Augustus's posthumous advice, but it also seems relevant that, as one of Augustus' most successful generals, Tiberius had already covered himself with substantial military glory before he became emperor.³² When Tiberius ascended the throne in AD 14, he was already fifty-six years old and decades of campaigning and declining physical strength might have diminished his enthusiasm for further direct involvement in military affairs.³³ According to Suetonius, after Tiberius' retreat to Capri some new military and administrative offices were left vacant

(1968); (1988) 213, f.166; Hannestad (1988) 83-89; Brunt (1990) 412-413.

²⁸ Hannestad (1988) 50. On the statue of Prima Porta, see Hannestad (1988) 50-56, fig. 34 in 52; Zanker (1989) 175-176, 188-189.

²⁹ RG, 16.

³⁰ Cass. Dio 55,25,1.

³¹ Of course, Augustus also highlights the peace and order which he had brought the Roman people. But, as mentioned in Chapter One, he took care to remind the readers of the *Res Gestae* that the *pax Augusta* had been established by military victories.

³² Tiberius as a beloved general was favoured by his soldiers, see Vell. Pat. 2,104. For Tiberius' military success during his early years, see Levick (1972) 21. Tiberius mentioned his military glories in one letter which he sent to Germanicus in AD 16, see Tac. *Ann.* 2,26,1.

³³ As a member of the imperial house, Tiberius had had a glorious military career before he retired to Rhodes in 6 BC. This is also one of the reasons Augustus, after losing several intended successors (first Marcellus, followed by Gaius and Lucius), decided to recall and adopt him in AD 4. For the imperial succession, see Sattle (1953) 486-530; Levick (1972) 779-781; (1976) 31-47; Swan (2004) 86.

for many years.³⁴ Nor does Tiberius seem to have been concerned about the fact that some parts of Roman territory were *de facto* occupied by barbarian peoples.³⁵ Tiberius' apathy to affairs of state and foreign policy stood in sharp contrast to the activist policies of his predecessor and elicited some sarcastic comments from Tacitus.³⁶

The reigns of Gaius (Caligula) and Claudius witnessed a revival in imperial interest in the pursuit of military prestige. Unlike Tiberius, both Gaius and Claudius lacked military experience when they ascended to the throne. When he was only two to three years old Gaius had accompanied his father, Germanicus, during the latter's campaigns in Lower Germany, and Germanicus' enormous reputation enabled Gaius to raise support from the army at the critical moment when Tiberius died in AD 37. Nevertheless, the family connection with Germanicus did not fully compensate for the fact that, unlike almost all other men of the Julio-Claudian family, the young Caesar had never undertaken any military duties.³⁷ Shortly after Gaius had oppressed Gaetulicus' conspiracy, he left Rome in 39, travelling first to Gaul and then to the German frontier.³⁸ Since Tacitus' account of Gaius' military actions on the Rhine frontier during AD 39 and 40 does not survive, the motives behind the young emperor's northern expedition must remain a matter of speculation.³⁹ What can be said is that there is nothing either in the literary sources or in the archaeological record to suggest that the Rhine frontier was under serious threat after the revolt of the Frisii in 28.⁴⁰ Suetonius' account of Gaius' campaign is sarcastic, while Tacitus dismisses it as a *ludibrium* (farce). The most likely reading of the situation is that Gaius' advance into Germany and his

³⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 1,80.

³⁵ Tac. *Ann.* Suet. *Tib.* 37,1; 41.

³⁶ Tacitus criticizes Tiberius' indifference to the provocation of the Parthians. See Tac. *Ann.* 3,74; 4,31-2. Mann (1976) 177.

³⁷ Augustus' closest relatives, like his nephew Marcus Marcellus, his right-hand man (and son-in-law) Marcus Agrippa, his two grandsons Gaius and Lucius, as well as Tiberius and his brother Drusus were all military men.

³⁸ Gaius' hopes of attaining military prestige are revealed by his fantasy of riding in a chariot dressed as a *triumphator* or as Alexander the Great. As Barrett comments, he "was not immune to the attractions of military glory, and it was inevitable that he would feel the need to emulate his forebears". See Barrett (1989) 125; Suet. *Cal.* 19,2,52; Cass. Dio 59,7,1;17,3.

³⁹ On Gaius' military activity in 40, see Bicknell (1968) 496-505.

⁴⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 4,72-74.

abortive plan to conquer Britain reflected the young emperor's unrealistic wish to win military glory as a successful military commander.⁴¹

However, his uncle Claudius' conquest of Britain in 43 unambiguously shows that the bellicose ideology of the Republican period continued to play an important part in practical policy making during the empire. When Claudius assumed the purple, he was already fifty-one years old. Unlike Tiberius, however, he had not won any military victories before his accession. Suetonius reports that he had long been barred from taking up any public duties because of his supposedly inadequate mental and physical capacities.⁴² Therefore it is not surprising that, no doubt also aware of his father's fearsome military reputation, Claudius hastened to join his general, Aulus Plautius, in launching a campaign against the Britons as soon as his position as emperor was secure.⁴³ The conquest of Britain in 43 went smoothly.⁴⁴ After the defeat of Caratacus, Claudius led the Roman troops into Camulodunum (modern Colchester) which subsequently became a veteran colony and the headquarters of the new province of Britannia. Six months after leaving Rome, Claudius returned to the capital where he was awarded a grand triumph by the Senate. Later, Claudius issued coins to advertise his military successes and he probably also built a triumphal arch bearing an inscription stating that he had been "the first to subject barbarian tribes beyond the Ocean to the rule of the Roman people".⁴⁵ In AD 49, he extended the *pomerium* or religious boundary of the city, a gesture indicating his success in extending the territory of the Empire.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Suet. *Cal.* 43,1; Tac. *Germ.* 37,5. Suetonius reveals that Gaius' German campaign was not a well-planned military action. Caligula was originally persuaded by someone to supplement the troops of Batavians, and only after that did the idea of a campaign form in his mind. This example demonstrates that the policy making in the Early empire was a matter of individual whim, not of precise planning.

⁴² Suet. *Cal.* 2,2; 4.

⁴³ On the motives behind Claudius' British conquest, scholars have had few disagreements: the pursuit of military prestige and the intention to strengthen the nexus between him and his army were main purposes. See Levick (1990) 137-139. Osgood (2011) 86.

⁴⁴ For the outline of the Claudian invasion, see Mattingly (2007) 95-97. The latest version: Osgood (2011) 84-106.

⁴⁵ *CIL* VI 40416. The reverse of *RIC* I Claudius, 30 shows the architrave of a triumphal arch inscribed with the phrase DE BRITANN(IS). See also *RIC* I Claudius 33 and *RIC* I Claudius, 44. The relief from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias depicts the heroic image of Claudius and the captive Britannia. See Smith (1987) 115-117; Pl, XIV, no.6.

⁴⁶ Eck (2000) 236.

Unlike his predecessor, Nero never visited any of the frontier camps and had not commanded any Roman army. Nevertheless, there are reliable indications that he realized the importance of maintaining good relations with the soldiers. Tacitus and Cassius Dio note that he was displeased with his mother's open interference in military affairs.⁴⁷ He also tried to capitalize on the military successes of his generals and on other events which might have been interpreted as demonstrating Roman military or political superiority. After Corbulo had invaded Armenia and captured the capital city of Artaxata in AD 58, Nero was saluted as *imperator*, and one of the relief panels from the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias, constructed between c. AD 20 and c. AD 60, shows Nero threatening a collapsing Armenia.⁴⁸ Both Suetonius and Cassius Dio report that when king Tiridates of Armenia visited Rome in AD 66, he was diademed and entertained by Nero. On this occasion, Nero himself was again saluted as *imperator*, offered laurels on the Capitol and closed the gates of the temple of Janus to mark the end of warfare.⁴⁹ Although Nero never led the army to the front in person, a considerable amount of territorial expansion took place during his reign. He received twelve (possibly even thirteen) salutations as *imperator*, fewer than Claudius (who received twenty-seven) but still an impressive number.⁵⁰

During Vespasian's reign, despite the fact that several client kingdoms were annexed by Rome,⁵¹ no new conquests were attempted. Part of the explanation might be that Vespasian had acquired a substantial amount of military prestige before coming to power. The case of Titus is somewhat similar. Titus had emerged as an eminent and popular general when he was serving in his father's army in Syria.⁵² The victory over the Jews and the sack of Jerusalem

⁴⁷ Cass. Dio 61,8,1.

⁴⁸ For the salutation see Tac. *Ann.* 13,41. For a good discussion of the relief panels from Aphrodisias, see Alcock (2002) 90-93. While the panel from Aphrodisias depicts Nero as the conqueror of Armenia, there is no reliable evidence that he ever claimed the title *Armeniicus*. The abbreviated legend ARMENIAC, which appears on didrachms and hemidrachms of Nero which were struck in Caesarea in AD 59 may mean *Armenica* (sc. *victoria*) rather than *Armeniicus*. See Mattingly (1965) clxxxv; Bedoukian (1971) 11.

⁴⁹ Suet. *Ner.* 13. This sequence of events shows that Nero was trying to represent *pax* as the welcome result of successful warfare.

⁵⁰ For the territorial expansion which took place in Nero's reign, see Chapter Three. For his salutations as *imperator* see Griffin (1984) 231-233.

⁵¹ Luttwak (1976) 60.

⁵² Mucianus' praise of the military qualities of Titus is recorded by Tacitus in *Histories*, see Tac. *Hist.* 2,77.

in 73 enhanced his military reputation. Coins showing the legend IUDAEA CAPTA circulated all over the empire.⁵³ After his death, Domitian erected a triumphal arch in the Forum Romanum to commemorate his brother's victory over Judaea.⁵⁴ In actual fact, the Judaeian campaign of Vespasian and Titus was fought to quell a regional revolt rather than with the aim of enlarging the territory of the empire. Even the successful oppression of a rebellion generated sufficient military prestige to bolster the legitimacy of the imperial house.

Domitian was twenty-nine years old when he became emperor in September 81 but, unlike Vespasian and his brother Titus, he lacked sufficient military honours when he ascended the throne. This deficiency appears to have been his main reason for launching an offensive against Germania Libera, the result of which prompted Tacitus' comment *tamdiu Germania vincitur*.⁵⁵ In 83 he celebrated a triumph to crown his successful campaign and received the title Germanicus.⁵⁶ The Chattian War resulted in a modest extension of Roman territory, giving the Romans control over the Taunus Ridge and the Wetterau region. As seen in Chapter Three, a series of forts, watchtowers and roads was established in this region.⁵⁷

Taking a broad view of military expansion between the final years of Augustus and Domitian's death, it can be said that, of those campaigns which were fought during the ninety years following the battle of the Teutoburg Forest, only the conquest of Britain resulted in a substantial extension of Roman territory, and that Britain was also the only area in which the Romans continued to pursue a consistent offensive policy right up to the end of the first century AD.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, there can be no doubt that all emperors of the Julio-Claudian and Flavian dynasties tried to obtain at least a certain amount of military prestige and that the intimate connection between military success and the legitimacy of imperial rule continued to stimulate further territorial expansion.

The accession of Trajan marked the beginning of a new period of vigorous Roman expansion. Lacking the aura of an Italian aristocratic origin,

⁵³ Hannestad (1988) 119, fig.75; Beard (2003) 557.

⁵⁴ For the Arch of Titus, see Hannestad (1988) 124-32. *LTUR s.v.* Arcus Titii (Via Sacra).

⁵⁵ Tac. *Germ.* 37.

⁵⁶ Jones (1990) 129. For the title appearing on official documents and coins, see Kneissl (1969) 43-57; Buttrey (1980) 52-56.

⁵⁷ Schönberger (1969) 155-164; Webster (1985) 192; Jones (1990) 129.

⁵⁸ Whittaker (2008) 302.

Trajan might have felt that he needed military honours to win the approval of the Senate and the Roman people.⁵⁹ Despite the fact that his ambitious conquests in Arabia, Dacia, Armenia and Parthia were prompted by a variety of factors, there can be no doubt that the pursuit of military glory was a cardinal concern in launching these wars.⁶⁰ The image of Trajan as a fellow-soldier and commander-in-chief of the army is clearly reflected on Trajan's Column. The giant Adamklissi monument which was erected in the eastern frontier province of Lower Moesia likewise underlines his martial qualities.⁶¹

Immediately after Trajan's death in 117 the new emperor, Hadrian, radically revised the expansionist policies. As mentioned in Chapter Three, he withdrew the army from the Lower Danube, thereby restricting the new Roman province of Dacia to the area within the Carpathian mountains. In Britain he built a wall with the aim of facilitating the task of controlling the movements of the barbarian tribes of the north. On the south-western German frontier a new system of wooden palisades and trenches was created to consolidate the *Agri Decumates*. In Africa, the *Fossatum Africae* was established to regulate the movements of transhumant pastoralists. During the early 130s Hadrian's generals suppressed the revolt of Bar Kokhba in Judaea, but no aggressive military expeditions were launched during his long reign. His goal was clearly to maintain the Roman empire within well-defended boundaries.⁶²

The fact that Hadrian opted for a non-expansionist policy by no means implies that he had little interest in military affairs. On the contrary, many sources refer to Hadrian's good relations with the imperial army. Before his accession to the throne, he had had a long career in the frontier armies.⁶³ After he had become emperor, his frequent inspections of military camps during his

⁵⁹ Trajan's father served as commander of a legion under Vespasian in the Jewish War and then became consul. Trajan himself spent many years in the army before his accession. He was appointed consul in 91, and afterwards returned to Germania with three legions. He remained on the German frontier until the news of the assassination of Domitian in AD 97 was delivered to him by Hadrian. See SHA *Hadr.* 2,5. For the early life of Trajan, see Bennett (1997) 20-27.

⁶⁰ For the adoption of Trajan and his succession, see Kienast (1968), to be read with Todd (2001) 324-331.

⁶¹ On Trajan's Column, see Lepper and Frere (1988); Packer (1997) 113-120; Lancaster (1999) 419-439; esp. Coarelli (1999). On the Adamklissi monument, see Rossi (1971) 55-65.

⁶² According to the *Epit. de Caes.* 14,10 Hadrian claimed: "I have achieved more by peace than others by war." Cf. Campbell (2002) 135.

⁶³ Ando (2000) 316.

constant journeys clearly expressed his concern for the well-being of the soldiers. Various writers record that Hadrian attached great importance to military discipline.⁶⁴ There is also a rich collection of numismatic evidence highlighting Hadrian's intimate relationship with the praetorians and with the imperial legions of the frontier provinces.⁶⁵ This approach to military affairs appears to have won broad approval, as Hadrian's conservative frontier policy did not elicit much criticism from senatorial writers.⁶⁶

Antoninus Pius adhered broadly to Hadrian's approach to imperial policies.⁶⁷ However, because he had not achieved any martial successes before his accession, he urgently needed a military victory to bolster his reputation. With this in mind, it is not surprising that, shortly after ascending the throne, he launched two aggressive campaigns, one on the frontiers of Upper Germania and Raetia and another in Britannia.⁶⁸ Since there are no indications that the north-western frontiers were under any threat in this period, these campaigns appear to have been driven mainly by ideological considerations. Following these attacks, Antoninus Pius was acclaimed *imperator* in 142, whereafter he issued commemorative coins advertising his military prowess.⁶⁹ Once he had obtained the requisite military *gloria*, Antoninus Pius never again undertook any other military expeditions. In this respect his approach to military policies resembles that of Claudius, another emperor who lacked military credibility at the beginning of his reign. As stated in Chapter Three, multiple factors played a part in military decision making during the Principate, but the military policies adopted by Claudius and Antoninus Pius strongly suggest that the desire to

⁶⁴ Cass. Dio 69,9,4; *Epit. de Caes.* 14. 11.

⁶⁵ Campbell (1994) 74. Many of these coins shows Hadrian dressed in military costume. On some coins he is accompanied by one or more military officers, while others depict him addressing soldiers from a platform. Hadrian on horseback is also a popular scene. For examples, see *BMC III*, Hadrian no.1313; *BMC III*, Hadrian no. 1672.

⁶⁶ From his perspective as a Roman senator, Dio Cassius comments that in general Hadrian was an excellent emperor, in spite of the fact that many people were murdered at the beginning and at the end of his reign. See Cass. Dio 69,23,2.

⁶⁷ For a more extensive discussion, see Chapter Three.

⁶⁸ Cf. Chapter Three.

⁶⁹ Several coins struck in AD 143-144 refer to Antoninus Pius' military successes. On the obverse of one of these coins, Antoninus Pius appears wearing a laurel wreath. On the reverse, the image of *Virtus* holding a spear appears, with the legend VIRTUS AVG. see *RIC III Antoninus Pius*, 102. The obverse of another coin which was minted in 143-144 also shows the emperor wearing a laurel wreath, while the reverse depicts a flying Victory holding a trophy in her hands. See *RIC III Antoninus Pius*, 109 a. For similar coins, see *RIC III Antoninus Pius*, 104, 105a, 106, 110, 111a.

increase the legitimacy of imperial rule remained a major stimulus for military conquest, especially in the case of those emperors who had not built up any military prestige before their accession to the throne.

During the first years of Marcus Aurelius' reign, pressure on the northeastern Roman frontiers intensified. The sources suggest that initially Rome was reluctant to launch large-scale attacks against barbarian tribes which were harassing provincial territory.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, there are also indications that military honour still played an important role. For example, the revolt which took place in Syria in 161 offered Lucius Verus an excellent opportunity to attain military glory, although he also earned the dubious reputation for incompetence in commanding the army. After putting down the revolt and restoring peace to Syria, the Roman army boldly advanced into Armenia. The capture of the capital Artaxata in 163 earned Verus the title Armeniacus.⁷¹ Both Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus were hailed as *imperator*, and coins were minted in Rome to advertise the victory. On some coins a personified Armenia can be seen sitting on the ground and surrounded by weapons. On some types the image of Mars holding a trophy appears.⁷² Another coin which depicts Lucius Verus sitting on a tribunal and crowning a king has the legend REX ARMENIIS DATUS.⁷³

In 165 Avidius Cassius led an army to the Euphrates, where a major battle took place at Dura-Europos. In the aftermath of this battle Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, one of the most important cities of the Parthian empire, was sacked. In the following year, Verus' army crossed the Tigris and appeared in Media, earning Verus the title Medicus. As Birley explains, these wars "resulted in a modest extension of Roman territory with the annexation of land as far as Dura."⁷⁴

Any attempt to elucidate the exact reasons for the military campaigns of the first and second centuries while trying to assess the role played by military provocations or to judge the validity of territorial claims made by Rome and by

⁷⁰ This can be clearly sensed in Dio's account in Books 72 and 73.

⁷¹ SHA *Ver.* 7,1,2; SHA *Marc.* 9,1. *CIL* VIII 19690; *CIL* X17; *AE* 1960, 21.

⁷² *RIC*, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus 191.

⁷³ For *aurei*, see *BMC* [III H 18] IV no. 300ff. For sesterces, no. 1099ff. Harnestad (1988) *op. cit.* 219; 399, n.286.

⁷⁴ On Verus' military activities in the East, see SHA *Ver.* 5-11; Cass. Dio 71,1,3. Birley (2000) 165; Birley (2008) 194-195. In the *Historia Augusta*, Verus is depicted as a corrupt general who led a life of luxury and debauchery. The author has a low opinion of his capacities as a military commander.

other political entities leads to the inevitable conclusion that it very difficult to determine whether Rome played an active and aggressive role in most of these conflicts or was merely passively responding to challenges originating from outside the Roman world. Therefore, little can be gained by entering into this debate.⁷⁵ Whatever the exact motives behind these conflicts might have been, it must be emphasized that the emperors of the Principate, as their Republican predecessors had done, could freely use the option of initiating military violence to satisfy their appetite for glory if they thought such an action was desirable or necessary. On the other hand, they also had the option to end wars if this suited their best interests. During the last years of Marcus Aurelius' reign, for example, if the *Historia Augusta* is to be believed, the emperor planned to annex the lands beyond the middle Danube and establish two new provinces, Marcomannia and Sarmatia.⁷⁶ Immediately after his father's death, Commodus gave up this plan and stopped the nascent war with the Iazyges, the Quadi and the Marcomani. Having done so, he hastened to Rome to enjoy a comfortable life.⁷⁷ He did not escape unscathed as his indifference to military glory incurred the criticism of various members of the Senate, including his father's right-hand man Pompeianus and the historian Cassius Dio.⁷⁸

Even as late as the early third century, some emperors still continued to subscribe to the military ethos of earlier centuries. Septimius Severus might justifiably be described as the most aggressive emperor since Trajan. Although up to a point his military policies might have reflected his background and personality,⁷⁹ they can also be seen as having been partially driven by the need to strengthen the new emperor's legitimacy after the civil war of the years 193-197. In the early years of his reign, Septimius Severus undertook various campaigns in the eastern territories, first in Armenia and followed by incursions into Arabia and Parthia. The victory he won over the Parthians in 198 earned

⁷⁵ Potter (1990) holds a similar opinion.

⁷⁶ SHA *Marc.* 27,10.

⁷⁷ Cass. Dio 73,1.

⁷⁸ Cass. Dio 73,1,2; Hdn. 4,6-7.

⁷⁹ Severus was the first Roman emperor to originate from Africa. Before his accession to the throne, he had had a long career in the army. He first served as *legatus* of the *Legio IV Scythica* in Syria under the provincial governor Pertinax in 181-183, and then as *legatus Augusti pro praetore* in Gaul. After fulfilling the governorship of Sicily and attaining the consulship in 190, he became governor of Upper Pannonia with three legions under his command in 191. He proclaimed himself emperor in April 193. The civil war strengthened his relationship with the legions in the East. See Birley (1988) 58; 63; 83.

him the title Parthicus Maximus.⁸⁰

In 208, when he was already sixty-three years old, he launched a new expedition against the barbarians of northern Britain. The contemporary historian Herodian claims that, on the eve of the war, the Britons sent envoys to Severus to discuss terms of peace, but Severus dismissed their offers and went ahead with his preparations for the war as he was eager to “gain a victory over the Britons and the title of honour”.⁸¹

Herodian reports that Septimius Severus vigorously continued to pursue military success until his death.⁸² Archaeological evidence from Carpow confirms that he had planned to occupy northern Britain permanently, a project which had not been attempted since Agricola.⁸³ During the campaign he restored Hadrian’s Wall and his expedition to Britain earned him a title Britannicus in 209.⁸⁴ One of the inscriptions on the Arch of Severus explains that the monument had been erected *ob rem publicam restitutam imperiumque populi Romani propagatum*, “because of the restoration of the state and because the Empire of the Roman people has been enlarged.”⁸⁵ Septimius Severus’ annexation of northern Mesopotamia and his invasion of northern Britain are evidence that an individual’s desire to obtain or increase military prestige was still a strong stimulus for territorial expansion.

One of the conclusions which emerge from the foregoing discussion is that, instead of being just the “icing on the cake”, concerns fuelled by a desire for prestige and legitimacy were still a major factor in Roman military policies.⁸⁶ During the Republic, fierce competition among aristocratic families for military honours had been an important factor in the expansion of Roman territory and the emergence of the Roman hegemony in the Mediterranean world. From the early Principate, the emperors quickly monopolized the highest military honours, such as the right to be acclaimed *imperator*, the right to celebrate *triumphalia* and the right to preside over various military festivals.⁸⁷ Certainly all

⁸⁰ SHA *Sev.* 16,2; Hdn. 3,91,12.

⁸¹ Hdn. 3,14,5.

⁸² Hdn. 3,15,2-3.

⁸³ Birley (1971) 182. Intensive excavations have been conducted at Carpow in the last half century, see Birley (1971) 254, no. 21.

⁸⁴ SHA *Sev.* 18,2; *ILS* 431.

⁸⁵ *CIL* VI, I 033 = *ILS* 425.

⁸⁶ Alcock and Morrison (2001) 279.

⁸⁷ About these military honours, see Campbell (1984) 120-148. In 19 BC L. Cornelius Balbus was granted the honour of celebrating a full triumph for his military success

these sources of prestige had become imperial monopolies by the end of Claudius' reign at the latest. Several passages in Tacitus' *Annals* suggest that Tiberius was not happy with Germanicus' successes in the German frontier region, and that letters were sent to stop him from undertaking any further military expeditions. Elsewhere Tacitus informs his readers that in 48 Claudius discouraged Corbulo's ambition to take military action against the Chauci because he was worried that the latter's military accomplishments would dwarf his own martial achievements. This led Corbulo to lament how fortunate the republican generals had been.⁸⁸ In the *Agricola* Tacitus reveals that Agricola's successes in Britain aroused Domitian's jealousy and resulted in the former being summoned back to Rome.⁸⁹ In the late second century Laetus was killed by Septimius Severus because his excellent reputation with the soldiers had incurred the latter's odium.⁹⁰

Even if most military honours were monopolized by the emperors, it does not follow that the contest for them had completely disappeared. In what follows, I shall focus on two forms of rivalry which certainly persisted. The first of these competitions was between Roman emperors and their predecessors; the second was rivalry between generals.

3. Rivalry with predecessors and peers

After Tiberius there was hardly any need for emperors to become personally involved in military campaigns since *legati* could be commissioned to undertake various military missions under the auspices of the emperor. Any victories won by these *legati* were attributed to the emperor. However, the fact that they no

against the Garamantes. This was the last time that someone who was not a member of the imperial house held a triumph. See Ehrenberg-Jones (1955) 36. In AD 22 Blaesus successfully put down the Tacfarinas rebellion, which had lasted for years. He was given an honorary triumph and hailed as *imperator* by his soldiers. Subsequently only emperors were acclaimed *imperator*. See Tac. *Ann.* 4,74,1. The last ovation awarded to someone not belonging to the imperial house was that of A. Plautius, in AD 47. See Tac. *Ann.* 13,32; Suet. *Claud.* 24,3. The surviving sources record only two senators who were given the prerogative to proclaim their military fame through a new cognomen. See Vell. Pat. 2,116,2; Cass. Dio 55,28,4, Florus 2.31, Suet. *Cl.* 24. See also Talbert (1984) 362–364. For the monopolization of these honours by the emperors of the early Principate, see Campbell (1984) 120–53. On *cognomina*. see Vell. Pat. 2,116,2; Cass. Dio 55,28,4, Florus 2.31, Suet. *Cl.*, 24. See also Talbert (1984) 362–364, Campbell (1984) 358–362.

⁸⁸ Tac. *Ann.* 11,20.

⁸⁹ Tac. *Agr.* 42.

⁹⁰ Cass. Dio 76,10.

longer had to dirty their hands in warfare by no means implies that the emperors of the Principate no longer felt the urge to seek military glory. As already mentioned, some emperors who felt deficient in military honours, such as Claudius, Domitian and Antoninus Pius, were clearly keen to obtain them. In addition to trying to achieve at least some military successes to bolster the legitimacy of their rule, emperors were also competing with their Hellenistic, Republican and imperial predecessors.

As noted above, Claudius' received twenty-seven acclamations as *imperator*, more than any other emperor. In this way he attempted to escape the shadow cast by his earlier life and to prove that he was able to do better than any other member of the imperial family.⁹¹ Suetonius relates that Domitian embarked on a campaign in Gaul and Germany with only one aim: he wanted to equal his brother in power and status.⁹² Prior to his accession, in order to demonstrate that his military skills were not inferior to those of his brother Titus, he even convinced his father to send him to Parthia to assist the Parthian king, Vologaesus, against the Alani.⁹³ Both Augustus and Trajan consciously tried to emulate Alexander the Great. The former paid his respects at Alexander the Great's tomb in Alexandria after the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra.⁹⁴ The Mausoleum of Augustus as well as the claim to world domination, which is mentioned in the *Res Gestae*, reinforce the impression that Augustus attempted to rival Alexander's exploits.⁹⁵ About one hundred years later, after the subjugation of Parthia, Trajan arrived in Charax (Basra), at that moment the easternmost part of the Roman Empire. Cassius Dio reports that when the emperor stood on the bank of the river and watched a merchant ship sailing to India, he lamented that he did not have the opportunity to surpass Alexander the Great because his age prevented him from conquering the regions farther to the east.⁹⁶ Even Commodus, who showed little interest in military matters, took the title Conqueror of the World shortly before his death in 192.⁹⁷

During the Principate, non-imperial generals had to be very aware of the possibility that the pursuit of military glory might arouse the jealousy or enmity

⁹¹ Eck (2000) 235.

⁹² Suet. *Dom.* 2,1.

⁹³ Suet. *Dom.* 2,2.

⁹⁴ Suet. *Aug.* 18,1.

⁹⁵ Levi (1947) 206; Nenci (1958) 290-298; Zanker (1988) 72-77; Cooley (2009) 4, 36-37.

⁹⁶ Cass. Dio 68,29,1-2; Bennett (1997) 202.

⁹⁷ Speidel (1993) 109.

of the emperor. However, this does not mean it is possible to jump to the conclusion that the commanders of the Early Imperial period lost any desire to win glory because they had been reduced to being mere puppets of the emperor, and there are clear indications that successful commanders were generally admired.⁹⁸ Tacitus reports that, when the Romans and foreigners in Syria learned of Germanicus' death, they paid their respects to their beloved general.⁹⁹

It also appears from the literary sources that ambitious generals were still intent on achieving honours and rivalry between generals in the pursuit of glory remains a stock theme in Early-Imperial literature. After Dolabella had defeated Tacfarinas in 24, for example, he requested an honorary triumph. Tiberius rejected this request because he feared that Dolabella's reputation would overshadow that of the emperor's uncle, Junius Blaesus.¹⁰⁰ The governor of Upper Germania, Antistius Vetus, planned to build a canal between the Saône and the Moselle by which goods could be more conveniently transported to the Rhine and the North Sea. Because he was jealous of Antistius, the imperial governor of Gallia Belgica refused to allow him to bring the army into his province to complete the project.¹⁰¹ Gaius Suetonius Paulinus' aggressive policy in Wales seems to have been motivated in part by his desire to rival Corbulo's military reputation after the latter had achieved enormous successes in Armenia.¹⁰² During the civil war of 68/69, two commanders of Vespasian's army, Mucianus and Antoninus, fell out with each other because they were both seeking military glory.¹⁰³ Unquestionably, Domitian's decision to recall Agricola from Britain was also prompted by jealousy.

4. Public opinion

Throughout the duration of the Principate, not only emperors and generals of senatorial background, but large sections of the population were interested in

⁹⁸ Campbell (1975) 27.

⁹⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 2,73. In more than one place in Tacitus' narratives, Germanicus is compared to Alexander the Great, expressing immense regret about his death at such a young age.

¹⁰⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 4,26,1.

¹⁰¹ Tac. *Ann.* 13,53,4.

¹⁰² Tac. *Ann.* 14,29,5.

¹⁰³ Tac. *Hist.* 3,52. Tacitus also records the competition between Valens and Caecina for glories, which resulted in their defeat by Otho. Tac. *Hist.* 2,23.

military achievements and territorial conquest. Some emperors enjoyed great posthumous reputations among the Roman population, and in most cases these reputations were based on military successes achieved during campaigns of conquest. All Roman emperors were highly sensitive to public opinion and played on it by disseminating images depicting them as *imperatores* conquering towns and peoples in the peripheral regions of the world. A wide variety of visual media continued to broadcast propagandistic messages acclaiming Rome's military prowess, as discussed above. In many cities of the empire, monuments carrying symbols of the emperors' martial valour show that imperial messages conveying military successes were positively received by the inhabitants of the empire.¹⁰⁴

Significantly, some emperors were criticized for their indifference to state affairs and military matters. Although Augustus had retrieved Roman hostages and standards from the Parthians by diplomacy, both Virgil and Horace expressed their expectation that one day Augustus would subjugate Parthia by force.¹⁰⁵ Nero was completely uninterested in leading troops. Suetonius says that he even toyed with the idea of withdrawing the army from Britain, but gave the plan up because such a step might incur disrepute.¹⁰⁶ Tacitus complains about Tiberius' passivity in imperial affairs, which aroused the contempt of the Parthian king, Artabanus III.¹⁰⁷ Both Pliny the Younger and Cassius Dio criticize Domitian for spending huge amounts of money to make peace with Rome's enemy, Decebalus of Dacia.¹⁰⁸ Commodus is likewise blamed by Herodian for ending the war on the Danube frontiers by dispensing huge sums of money rather than by force.¹⁰⁹

Taken together, the literary and epigraphic sources leave no doubt that traditional values emphasizing military conquest and victory remained one of the most important motives for imperial expansion in the early empire.¹¹⁰ There are in fact indications that this ideology continued to play a part in imperial policy making until at least the mid-third century.¹¹¹ While countless

¹⁰⁴ For the relationship between the emperor and urban elites in the Early Empire, see Ando (2007) 359-377.

¹⁰⁵ Hor. *Od.* 4,15,23; Verg. *Aen.* 6,719-807.

¹⁰⁶ Suet. *Ner.* 18,1.

¹⁰⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 4,32; 6,31,1.

¹⁰⁸ Plin. *Pan.* 12,2; Cass. Dio 67,7.

¹⁰⁹ Hdn. 1,6,6-8; Mattern (1999) 178.

¹¹⁰ Harris (1979) 9-53; Woolf (1993) 182.

¹¹¹ As Woolf has pointed out, "Military glory was still a desideratum" in the imperial period. Woolf (1993) 183.

publications refer to the first two centuries of the Principate as the period of the *pax Romana*, it was a time in which many wars were fought.¹¹² The concept of the *pax Romana* refers primarily to a situation in which the outbreak of civil wars had become extremely rare. On the frontiers, violence continued much as before, and the intervals between peace and war were nearly always of short duration. Although the pace of territorial conquest slowed down after Augustus, the fundamentally positive attitude to warfare did not change significantly during the Principate.

As Campbell has pointed out, *virii militares* still accounted for a substantial proportion of senators during the first and second centuries AD,¹¹³ and almost all men belonging to the imperial house or closely related to it took up posts as military tribunes shortly after receiving their *toga virilis*. As the account of Dio shows, the military tribunate still functioned as the inevitable stepping-stone for sons of senators aspiring to gain entry into the Senate.¹¹⁴

As Table 1 shows, almost all Roman emperors of the first, second and early third centuries AD acquired personal experience of commanding troops in the frontier zones either before or after their accession. Young Octavian joined Caesar's army for the campaign against Pompey's sons in Spain, and it was during this campaign that Caesar first noticed his qualities. Although Augustus himself was not regarded as a remarkable general, the list of imperial family members who were favoured by Augustus, from Marcellus, Drusus, Gaius and Lucius down to Tiberius and Germanicus, shows that military qualifications played an important part in his choice of possible successors. His two grandsons, Gaius and Lucius, who were later adopted, were sent to the army shortly after they had assumed the *toga virilis*. Both the brothers Drusus Nero and Tiberius, his stepsons, also proved notable generals. Young Germanicus was given the command of the army which was sent to suppress the revolt of the Pannonians and the Dalmatians in AD 6. His outstanding military achievements made him extremely popular with Roman soldiers and civilians alike.¹¹⁵ In contrast to this renown, because Agrippa Postumus and

¹¹² See Woolf (1993). In a recent article, Mattern discusses banditry and revolts in the Principate; see Mattern (2010).

¹¹³ On *virii militares* in the Republic, see De Blois (2000). On *virii militares* in the empire, see Campbell (1975) 12. Campbell also points out that there was no guarantee that all *virii militares* would attain consular rank. See Campbell (1976) 16.

¹¹⁴ Cass. Dio 67,11,4.

¹¹⁵ Tacitus devotes a lot of space to describing the virtues of Germanicus and the tremendous reputation he enjoyed among both soldiers and citizens. See Tac. *Ann.* 1,33;

Claudius failed to demonstrate their capacity to command an army, they were detested by Augustus and Livia.¹¹⁶ After the death of Germanicus in 19, Tiberius' son Drusus emerged as the most promising successor. Tacitus refers to a letter of recommendation written to the Senate by Tiberius, in which the emperor stressed that Drusus had matured after an eight-year probation period in which he had repressed mutinies, brought wars to a successful conclusion, and had been awarded a triumph and two consulships.¹¹⁷ These examples suggest that military experience continued to be an important factor in selecting imperial successor during the early Principate.

Emperors	<i>Vir militaris</i>	Heirs	<i>Vir militaris</i>
Augustus	√	Gaius Caesar	√
		Lucius Caesar	√
		Tiberius	√
Tiberius	√	Germanicus	√
		Drusus	√
Caligula	√	--	--
Claudius	√	Nero	×
Nero	×	--	--
Galba	√	Lucius Piso	√
Otho	√		
Vitellius	√		
Vespasian	√	Titus	√
Titus	√	--	--
Domitian	√	--	--
Nerva	×	Trajan	√
Trajan	√	Hadrian	√
Hadrian	√	Lucius Aelius	√
		Antoninus Pius	×
Antoninus Pius	×	Lucius Verus	√
		Marcus Aurelius	√
M. Aurelius	√	Commodus	√
Commodus	√	--	--
Pertinax	√	--	
Didius Iulianus	√	--	
Sep. Severus	√	Caracalla	√

2,43; 2,69; 3,1-7; 3,49. Suet. *Cal.* 3-5.

¹¹⁶ Suet. *Aug.* 64,1; *Claud.* 2; Cass. Dio 55,32,1;

¹¹⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 3,56,7.

Table 1. *Military experience of Roman emperors, 27 BC-AD 211*

When Gaius was still very young, Germanicus took him with him to the frontier camps, where he was nicknamed “Caligula” by his father’s soldiers.¹¹⁸ Likewise, after Claudius’ conquest of Britain, he granted the honorary title Britannicus to his natural son.¹¹⁹ Suetonius records that he often took Britannicus in his arms and commended him to the soldiers of the Praetorian Guard.¹²⁰ Some twenty-five years later, Vespasian had been acclaimed *imperator* by the army in Judaea before he made his bid for throne. His military qualities are celebrated by Flavius Josephus.¹²¹ When Titus was in his early twenties, he had already served as a military tribune in Germany and Britain and built up a military reputation.¹²² This helped to pave the way for his being designated successor to the throne by Vespasian.¹²³ This also explains why Vespasian’s younger son, Domitian, was so eager to launch a campaign against the Chatti in AD 83, regardless of the fact that the military glories resulting from Agricola’s successful military exploits in Britain were supposed to accrue to the emperor.¹²⁴

In the period of the new dynasty which began with Nerva and Trajan, although all emperors with the exception of Commodus were created by means of adoption, martial qualities continued to play an important role in the imperial succession. After the oppression of the conspiracy under Aelianus, Nerva announced the adoption of Trajan, a notable general who was holding the governorship of Upper Germany at the time. The Senate and Nerva knew that Trajan had massive support among the army.¹²⁵ When Hadrian became military tribune of the *Legio II Adiutrix* in 94, he was only eighteen years old. Since Hadrian had accompanied Trajan during the two Dacian wars as well as the Parthian War, there can be little doubt that his military talent had won him the emperor’s favour.¹²⁶ Viewed in this light, Hadrian was a logical candidate for

¹¹⁸ Suet. *Cal.*, 9,1.

¹¹⁹ Suet. *Claud.* 17; Scullard (2011) 253-255.

¹²⁰ Suet. *Claud.* 27,2.

¹²¹ See Jos. *BJ*, Books 3 and 4.

¹²² Suet. *Tit.* 4,1; Tac. *Hist.* 2,77,1.

¹²³ Jones (1984) 99. Vespasian was the first emperor to be succeeded by one of his natural sons.

¹²⁴ Tac. *Agr.* 39; Jones (1992) 128.

¹²⁵ Cass. Dio 68,3.

¹²⁶ It was Hadrian who delivered congratulations to Trajan when the latter was adopted by Nerva in 97.

succession to the imperial throne, although the surviving sources claim that his adoption and designation as successor owed much to Trajan's wife, Plotina.¹²⁷ Immediately after his adoption by Hadrian in 136, Aelius was made consul and then governor of Pannonia with *imperium proconsulare*. According to the *Historia Augusta*, Lucius Verus had achieved some important military victories, even though he was not credited with the same military capacities as some other candidates for the imperial throne.¹²⁸ Marcus Aurelius had never done military service in the frontier provinces before becoming emperor, but he sent his co-ruler, Lucius Verus, to the East, permitting him to carry out campaigns against Parthia and Armenia.¹²⁹ In the speech which he gave the soldiers after becoming emperor in 181, Commodus recalled that his father had often taken him to the military camps when he was a child.¹³⁰ Although the possibility that this speech is a literary creation of Herodian cannot be discounted, the fact that Marcus Aurelius took Commodus with him during the Marcomannic campaign of 175, when he was only thirteen years old, suggests that his father did try to keep him away from a life of ease in Rome. On his deathbed Marcus Aurelius commended his son to his statesmen and army commanders, asking them to assist Commodus in state business and military affairs.¹³¹

The sources for the early third century demonstrate the continued vitality of the tradition of taking young princes to the frontier provinces to give them a taste of military life. Septimius Severus dispatched his two sons, Caracalla and Geta, to the army camps, wishing them to gain military glory by fighting against the barbarians instead of being corrupted by the luxuries and pleasures of the city of Rome.¹³² When Severus died during the British campaign in 211, both his sons were serving in the expeditionary forces in the frontier zone.

As Table 1 shows, between 27 BC and AD 211 only three out of twenty-one emperors, Nero, Nerva and Antoninus Pius, never acquired any military experience before or during their reigns. In the time of the Republic, Roman

¹²⁷ Cass. Dio 69,1,1; SHA *Hadr.* 4,10.

¹²⁸ SHA *Ael.*, 3,5.

¹²⁹ The author of the *Historia Augusta* records that when Lucius Verus was young he lacked honour in both civil and military life. This might have been the reason his (adoptive) brother, Marcus Aurelius, decided to send him to the Danube to lead the army and tackle the increasingly thorny frontier problems in the region. Subsequently Lucius Verus gained a series of victories and titles in the East, although Herodian downplays his military exploits.

¹³⁰ Hdn. 1,5,3.

¹³¹ Hdn. 1,6,8; SHA *Com.* 3,5.

¹³² Hdn. 3,14,2; 3,14,9.

aristocrats had had to do ten years of military service before they could hold public office at Rome.¹³³ In the Principate young male members of well-to-do senatorial or equestrian families could begin upon administrative careers without fulfilling this requirement. Nevertheless, it appears from Tacitus that good generalship continued to be regarded as proof of virtue,¹³⁴ and military experience and military success were still important to those aspiring to gain access to the top ranks of Roman society.¹³⁵ This helps to explain why the Senate continued to contain a significant proportion of *virī militares*.¹³⁶

Agrippa's outstanding military talents enabled him to become the right-hand man of Augustus for decades until his death in 12 BC. Galba's success in maintaining strict discipline in the Rhine legions impressed Gaius when he visited the army at Mainz in early 40.¹³⁷ Domitius Corbulo was entrusted with major military missions during the reign of Claudius and Nero, giving him the opportunity to display his extraordinary military prowess.¹³⁸ Agricola was appointed governor of Britain for ten years and he used this position to campaign deep into Scotland in 85.¹³⁹ Albinus' victory over the barbarian tribes on the Rhine frontier attracted the attention of Commodus.¹⁴⁰ During the Principate competition among members of the Roman ruling class still existed. Unlike their Republican predecessors, senators and *equites* were now principally competing for the emperor's attention, but military achievements clearly continued to play an important part in this process.¹⁴¹

From the emperor's perspective, war and military conquest were a very important means of strengthening the connection between the imperial family and the army.¹⁴² The mutiny which broke out on the Pannonian and Rhine frontiers in AD 14 offers a good example of this assertion. The revolt began in the legionary camps of Pannonia when Augustus died and Tiberius succeeded

¹³³ Polyb. 6,19,2-5.

¹³⁴ Tac. *Agr.* 39. Tacitus mentions the competition which existed between the governors in Britain for the sake of military glory.

¹³⁵ Campbell (1976) 18.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³⁷ Suet. *Gal.* 6,3.

¹³⁸ On the career of Corbulo, see Syme (1970) 27-39; Vervaet (2003) 436-464.

¹³⁹ Levick (1999) 159.

¹⁴⁰ SHA *Alb.* 6,3-4.

¹⁴¹ As Hopkins puts it, "in order to be a top official (ordinary consul or supplementary [suffect] consul), the successful contestant had to have held a whole series of administrative posts." See Hopkins (2009) 188.

¹⁴² See Campbell (1984) 382-401.

to the throne. After learning about the crisis, Tiberius sent his son, Drusus, to the Pannonian frontier. After he had arrived, Drusus told the mutinous soldiers that the Senate would consider their complaints to do with payments and conditions of service, whereupon the soldiers shouted that it was not the Senate but the emperor who should be concerned about these issues.¹⁴³ When Germanicus, the highest commander of the eight legions on the Rhine, realized that the situation was getting out of hand, he forged a letter in the name of Emperor Tiberius in which it was recorded that the army's requests were met.¹⁴⁴ Concerned that his wife and son, Agrippina and Caligula, might be attacked by the disgruntled soldiers, Germanicus decided to send them to the lands of the Belgic Treviri. When the soldiers apologized for their recklessness, he reproached them gravely. Recalling the glorious history of the first and twentieth legions, he reminded the soldiers of the benevolence of Tiberius, their former commander, who had recruited his soldiers personally and fought many battles at their side. By emphasizing the affinity between the emperor and his soldiers, he managed to quell the revolt.¹⁴⁵ According to Tacitus, he played on the mutineers' sense of guilt by offering them the opportunity to redeem themselves by advancing into German territory, an operation which led to the territorial expansion during the early reign of Tiberius.¹⁴⁶

There were many methods to cement or reaffirm the nexus between the emperor and the soldiers, but the best one was to command the army in person or to entrust other members of the imperial family with the responsibility for important expeditions. Although some emperors showed little enthusiasm for either of these options, many did not hesitate to embrace them.¹⁴⁷ Augustus entrusted the command of his armies to close family members. Caligula's German campaign of AD 39 served the purpose of reinforcing the loyalty of the legions of Upper Germany.¹⁴⁸ When the news of the rebellion of Galba reached Rome in AD 68, Nero began to make plans for a military expedition. According to Suetonius, Nero boasted to his friends that he would be able to win over the soldiers of the frontier zone simply by showing them his tears. The anecdote sounds ludicrous, yet it does reflect the standard image of the

¹⁴³ Tac. *Ann.* 1,26,4-6.

¹⁴⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 1,36.

¹⁴⁵ Tac. *Ann.* 1,42; Campbell (1984) 34-5.

¹⁴⁶ For the northern expedition launched against Germans, see Tac. *Ann.* 1,50-2,24

¹⁴⁷ Nero and Commodus showed little interest in commanding armies.

¹⁴⁸ The conspirator Gaetulicus served as governor for ten years from 29 to 39. About the conspiracy, see Barrett (2001) 91-114.

emperor as a fellow-soldier and commander-in-chief of imperial armies.¹⁴⁹ Fifteen years later, Domitian decided to undertake the command of the legions which crossed the Rhine in the Chattian War of AD 83.¹⁵⁰

Trajan excelled in his role as imperial *dux militum*.¹⁵¹ Hadrian did not show the same enthusiasm for leading the army to war, but he did spend a large amount of time visiting Roman legionary bases and supervising army drills and manoeuvres, and he showed a keen interest in the daily lives of officers and ordinary soldiers.¹⁵² Marcus Aurelius sent his co-ruler, Lucius Verus, to the Danube frontier to command the army, not only because he wanted to keep him away from the luxurious life in Rome but also because he wanted to strengthen the ties between the army and the imperial family.¹⁵³ A few decades later, Caracalla was fond of posing as a fellow-soldier among the troops stationed on the German frontiers.¹⁵⁴

5. Conclusions: some thoughts on the roles of Roman emperors

The literary, epigraphic and numismatic sources leave no doubt that the Republican emphasis on martial virtues continued to play an important part in Roman foreign policy and in imperial self-presentation during the Principate. After the reign of Augustus, almost all wars were fought outside Italy, in such remote corners of the Roman world as North-West Spain, Syria, Germany, the Danubian region and North Africa. Nevertheless, traditional military values remained strong. Military qualities were regarded as an important criterion in choosing a successor to the imperial throne. As we have seen, Roman emperors were expected to play multiple roles, but among these that of commander-in-chief remained of paramount importance, as shown by imperial titulature, images and legends inscribed on Roman coins,¹⁵⁵ formulaic texts inscribed on monuments, literature and all kinds of material images. The Roman soldiers had

¹⁴⁹ Suet. *Ner.* 43,1.

¹⁵⁰ Domitian arrived in Gaul in 82. Initially, he pretended to be conducting a census, but suddenly turned on the Chatti. See Jones (1992) 128.

¹⁵¹ Campbell (2002) 134.

¹⁵² Cass. Dio 69,9.

¹⁵³ SHA *Ver.* 4,3.

¹⁵⁴ Hdn. 4,7,4.

¹⁵⁵ For the imperial portraits on Roman coins, see King (1999) 123-146. For military style, see King, *op. cit.*, 133.

to swear an oath of allegiance to the emperor, and emperors were expected to address the troops in person when visiting the legionary camps.¹⁵⁶

Unquestionably emperors did enjoy considerable freedom in emphasizing some aspects of their roles at the expense of others. Some emperors, such as Nero, Antoninus Pius and Commodus, showed minimal interest in commanding armies during their reigns. Making a completely different choice, Augustus, Trajan and Septimius Severus showed a keen interest in seeking territorial gains during their long reigns. Caligula, Claudius and Domitian showed some interest in territorial expansion, but the offensives which took place during their reigns mainly served the purpose of increasing the emperor's prestige. After their ascension to the throne, Tiberius, Vespasian and Hadrian were better known as politicians than as military generals, although each of them had had a long career in the army and were not lacking in military prestige. During their reigns, most frontier issues were dealt with by diplomatic means rather than by military force.

One of the conclusions which emerges from this chapter is that Roman imperialism during the Principate was both flexible and complex. As far as the foreign policies of individual emperors are concerned, there was no strict rule which had to be followed. Augustus' imperial policy was generally offensive, but unlike Trajan and Septimius Severus, he rarely interfered personally in military affairs. Nero did not present himself as a *dux*, but it is fallacy to conclude that he was a non-militaristic monarch. On the contrary, with regard to territorial expansion Nero was much more ambitious than the other two emperors in his group, Antoninus Pius and Commodus. Marcus Aurelius spent a great deal of time with the Roman legions on the Danubian frontier, but it cannot be inferred from this that he was militarily more aggressive than his predecessor Antoninus Pius.

Precisely because different emperors followed different foreign policies and adopted different attitudes to military affairs, Millar's claim that the Roman empire played a passive role in relationships with barbarian or hostile nations is an oversimplification. On the other hand, exactly the same is true of Isaac's monolithic claim that, "the frontier policy of Rome in the east was intermittently but persistently aimed at expansion."¹⁵⁷ It seems more realistic to say that in deciding to take either a passive or a more active and aggressive stance towards hostile barbarian states or tribes, Roman emperors were

¹⁵⁶ Campbell (1984) 65-84.

¹⁵⁷ Isaac (1988) 372.

prompted by considerations relating either to their personal prestige or by what they believed to be the political and military interests of the empire. A key factor in all this was that, whatever roles the Roman emperors decided to play, Rome's unchallenged military and political superiority ensured that it was always able to respond elastically to changing situations on the frontier issues. Antoninus Pius, who is regarded as one of the most unwarlike emperors in Roman history, pushed the German-Raetian *limes* forward and built a new wall in Scotland. Whatever his motives might have been, these actions illustrate that Rome enjoyed much more freedom than its opponents in changing its foreign policies.

Given the freedom to manoeuvre enjoyed by Rome during the Principate, it is in a way not surprising that the history of territorial expansion shows such a varied picture during this period. Certainly, the traditional militaristic ethos remained alive, stimulating imperial interest in territorial expansion. Lucius Verus was given the unofficial title of *propagator imperii* and a medallion issued in AD 178 which celebrates the successes of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus also bore the legend *propagatores imperii*.¹⁵⁸ As late as the early fourth century, Constantine the Great was referred to as *propagator orbis* in an inscription.¹⁵⁹ While the foreign policies of individual emperors show much variation, this emphasis on successful warfare and territorial expansion as a source of imperial prestige and legitimacy sets Early-Imperial Rome apart from Qin and Han China where emperors were not expected to excel in military leadership or indeed to become personally involved in military affairs at all.

¹⁵⁸ Birley (2000) 184.

¹⁵⁹ *AE* 1969, 70.