

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE IN THE THIRD CENTURY L. de Blois (abstract)

The first half of the third century A.D. should be considered a period of tensions, upcoming crisis, and changes under a veil of continuity. Emperors were progressively becoming dependent on their armies, which they could not discipline any more. From about AD 230 large parts of the population in war zones, their hinterlands and along military transit routes were plundered by Roman military and exhausted by extraordinary requisitions, for which they did not receive indemnities. Increasing military expenditure, added to a lack of plate and taxation problems put imperial finances and coinage under heavy pressure. Weights and finenesses of gold and silver coins were already declining. Under a surface of continuity appointment policies were changing in consequence of military, fiscal and administrative needs, to the advantage of military middle cadres and other equestrian specialists, which must have estranged members of the traditional higher orders. In imperial representation dynasties and personal qualities and successes of ruling emperors were still quite important, although there were developments towards more institutionalisation and 'Ueberhöhung' of Roman imperial power, whereas traditional imperial functions and titles that had to do with the *urbs* Roma were already waning.

From the times of the emperor Decius (AD 249-251) until the Tetrarchy (AD 284-305) the Roman Empire went through a period of real and manifold crises, which resulted in profound changes in administration, appointment policies, military strategy and tactics, monetary policies and the representation of imperial power. One of the most important consequences was a progressive integration of traditional state structures, the emperors' personal apparatus and military middle cadres into a bureaucracy that had a much higher status than the largely servile *familia Caesaris* could have had, and so attracted more idle supernumeraries than the low status *familia Caesaris* ever had done.

In this paper I elaborate upon theories and conclusions brought forward by Elio Lo Cascio in *Cambridge Ancient History XII*², by Peter Eich in his *Zur Metamorphose des politischen Systems in der römischen Kaiserzeit. Die Entstehung einer "personalen Bürokratie" im langen dritten Jahrhundert* (Berlin 2005) and by myself in my 'The Onset of Crisis in the First Half of the Third Century A.D.', in: K.-P. Johne, Th. Gerhardt & U. Hartmann, eds., *Deleto paene imperio Romano. Transformationsprozesse des Römischen Reiches im 3. Jahrhundert und ihre Rezeption in der Neuzeit* (Stuttgart 2006) 25-36.