



---

Ordo Senatorius und Nobilitas: Die Konstitution des Senatsadels in der Spätantike: Mit Einem Appendix Über den Praepositus Sacri Cubiculi, den 'Allmächtigen' Eunuchen am Kaiserlichen Hof by D. Schlinkert

Review by: R. W. B. Salway

*The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 88 (1998), pp. 209-210

Published by: [Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/300849>

Accessed: 12/11/2012 06:45

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Roman Studies*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Image removed due to third party copyright

*The Queen's University of Belfast*

M. E. MULLETT

D. SCHLINKERT, *ORDO SENATORIUS UND NOBILITAS: DIE KONSTITUTION DES SENATS-ADELS IN DER SPÄTANTIKE; MIT EINEM APPENDIX ÜBER DEN PRAEPOSITUS SACRI CUBICULI, DEN 'ALLMÄCHTIGEN' EUNUCHEN AM KAISERLICHEN HOF* (Hermes Einzelschriften 72). Stuttgart: Steiner, 1996. Pp. x + 311. ISBN 3-515-06975-5. DM 128.

Following Eduard Meyer's maxim that 'Die Geschichte des Alterthums ist nie etwas anderes, und darf nie etwas anderes sein, als ein Theil der einen, allgemeinen Geschichte', Dirk Schlinkert has borrowed an interpretative model — Max Weber's status-class analysis — from the social sciences. Accordingly, S. seeks to distil the essence of the *Idealtyp*e of the senatorial aristocracy, which he considers to be a key problem for the social history of Late Antiquity. To determine the fundamental constituents of the concept of this nobility, in both practice and *mentalité*, he analyses the concept of the *ordo senatorius* in legal prescriptions (principally from the *Codex Theodosianus*) on the one hand and that of *nobilitas* in contemporary historiography (Ammianus Marcellinus' *Res Gestae*) on the other. From this S. claims to discern four '*conditiones*' (sic) essential to the ideal type: birth and background, the principle of the exchange of reciprocal obligations with the ruler, maintenance of appropriately aristocratic behaviour, and the possession of sufficiently grand *domus* and *patrimonium* (236).

However, while claiming the results of his two parallel analyses to be in accord, S. so hedges his conclusions with qualifications that one suspects that the divergent nature of the source material has

defied his attempt to determine the ideal type through rigorous application of his methodology. His quotation of Marc Bloch's dictum that 'Le vrai réalisme en histoire, c'est de savoir que la réalité humaine est multiple' seems almost to be an admission of the fact. This is hardly surprising given the problems inherent in his source material. For, even if the entire first chapter (*de dignitatibus*) and the first eleven constitutions of the second chapter (*de senatoria dignitate*) of Book Six of the Theodosian Code were not lacking, it remains the fact that its prescriptions were composed in response to specific cases rather than to establish a comprehensive definition of senatorial status. And, while S. is not indifferent to the subtleties of source criticism, I am not sure that he has taken sufficient account of the problems posed by Ammianus as a commentator on the aristocracy, particularly of Rome.

The discussion of court eunuchs is far more integral to the monograph than its relegation to an appendix suggests, since S. specifically labels them counterweights (*Gegenspieler*) to the senatorial aristocracy (237). Instead of a broad examination of known eunuchs in imperial service, S. takes three specific examples of imperial chamberlains to demonstrate his case, drawing principally on Ammianus and Claudian. Hence S.'s *Spätantike* is effectively only the second half of the fourth century. Thus the remarkable Urbicius, who served as *praepositus* on and off under seven emperors between 449 and 504, hardly features (cf. 245 n. 23). S. considers that their castration made eunuchs a *Randgruppe*, forced together by their social marginalization. However, even as his examples show, it is for individual failings and merits, rather than group characteristics, that court eunuchs became (in)famous. The only real evidence for group loyalty is the *conspiratio spadonum* that saved Gorgonius (Ammianus 15.2.10), of which S. might have made a lot more (cf. 274 n. 100), since it probably included one of his case studies (Eusebius). A broader survey might have revealed that, if anything, the pattern of rivalry and tension was between generals and court eunuchs individually rather than the latter and the senatorial aristocracy as a group, e.g. Gainas and Eutropius or Belisarius and Narses.

Still, I am sympathetic to S.'s project — explanation through abstraction is what separates serious analytical history from well documented story-telling. However, late antique *Senatsadel* does not seem susceptible to S.'s approach, given the disparate composition of an *ordo senatorius* which embraced those possessing a nobility still derived according to Republican custom alongside those ennobled by service to the imperial court.

University College London

R. W. B. SALWAY