A game of power

Courtly influence on the decision-making of emperor Theodosius II (r. 408-450)

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Preface

Political history has always intrigued me. For some years already the books I tend to read in my spare time are predominantly concerned with ancient or medieval kingdoms, rulers and courts. It was thus hardly surprising when, fairly soon into my research master programme on ancient history, my focus shifted from diplomacy – a topic that had busied me since my bachelor thesis – to the ancient courts. The first essay I wrote with this perspective was for the course Late Antiquity, taught by prof. Dr. Leonard Rutgers at Utrecht University, and it was an instant hit both with the professor and myself. From then on my mind was made up to explore the phenomenon of the court more extensively, resulting in a few other essays written for different courses, and, eventually, in this thesis. I have had the pleasure of lifting some of the shadows present at the court that obscured the closed doors, council- and private chambers and narrow corridors that were from time to time rife with schemes and intrigue. This is a process I have greatly enjoyed going through, but nonetheless I could not have gone through it entirely by myself; credit is due where it is deserved.

Thanks must go first of all to my supervisor Leonard Rutgers, who has provided me with useful feedback and allowed me the space to do my own thing with this topic. Secondly, Rolf Strootman, who functioned as consulting reader for this thesis, helped me delve into the broader world of court studies in a useful tutorial I followed from September 2012 until January 2013. Thirdly, my fellow student K. M. Lahcen has given his opinion on some specific parts of this thesis, thus aiding me in applying the finishing touches. Fourthly, my dear friend Louise Vink has turned my messy first version of Figure 1 into a neat and professional looking chart, which is naturally the version I have chosen to use in this thesis. Finally my mother, Joke Groeneveld, who is an English teacher, has my eternal gratitude for freeing up time in her busy schedule to read and correct my use of English in this entire thesis.

Emma Groeneveld
Utrecht, June 2013

Introduction

Often when describing the reign of a monarch at some point in history, historians refer to 'the king's policy' or describe how 'the emperor decided' on the outcome of a matter of political importance. This is usually done for convenience's sake - to create a general overview of the period in question - but the truth, as those historians are surely aware of, is that policy-making and decision-making were processes that did not take place in a void. Instead, the ruler often consulted with advisors or advisory bodies, as well as perhaps hearing the opinions of those who were close to him – family and friends – who could potentially have an influence on the ruler's decision. The role played by high officials or by a broader section of the nobility (where one existed) in this process could vary greatly depending on the time and place in history one investigates. See, for example, the contrast between the English king Henry III (r. 1216-72), who became increasingly subjected to the power and will of the barons and ended up with nothing much to say at all, and the French powerhouse Louis XIV, the Sun King (r. 1643-1715), who consulted with his advisors but clearly had the final word and was determined not to let any favourites influence his decision-making. The ruler's decision-making was thus not a straightforward matter.

Yet, the creation of policy, which usually took place at the court, stood at the heart of an empire- or kingdom's exploitations, making it a highly interesting topic of study. Indeed, studies of the court certainly exist, especially concerning the lavish early modern courts of which that of Louis XIV is the most splendid example, but a focus on the process of decision-making is as of yet absent.[1] What is more, the further one goes back in time, the less attention is awarded to the court. This can be explained by the fact that far fewer sources are extant, but that is no reason for not attempting such a specific investigation of an earlier court at all. The Roman Empire presents a hugely interesting period in which to investigate the machinations of the court, but so far the focus has mostly been on the reigns of emperors in general instead of dealing specifically with the court, and the influence that could be exercised on the emperor's decision-making is still a scarcely illuminated topic.[2] This is thus a field in which much can still be gained, and that is precisely what I aim to do.

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[1] See for instance studies such as A. G. Dickens (ed.), *The courts of Europe: politics, patronage and royalty, 1400-1800* (1977); Asch and Birke (eds*.), Princes, Patronage and the Nobility: the court at the beginning of the modern age c. 1450-1650* (London, Oxford 1991); T. Artan, J. Duindam, and M. Kunt (eds.), *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective. Rulers and Elites 1* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011); and see chapter one of this study.

[2] Studies on the ancient court will be given attention in chapter one. Examples of such court studies are A.J.S. Spawforth (ed.), *The Court and Court Society in Ancient Monarchies* (Cambridge 2007); A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Imperial Court' in: A. Bowman, E. Champlin, A. Lintott (eds.), *Cambridge Ancient History vol. 10* (Cambridge 1996) 283-308; R. Strootman , 'Eunuchs, concubines and renegades: The "paradox of power" and the promotion of favorites in the Hellenistic empires.' In A. Erskine and L. Llewellyn-Jones (eds.), *The Hellenistic Royal Court* (Edinburgh, forthcoming); R. Strootman, 'Hellenistic court society: The Seleukid imperial court under Antiochos the Great, 223-187 BCE.' In J. Duindam, M. Kunt, T. Artan (eds.), *Royal Courts in Dynastic*

However, influence on decision-making is not the easiest subject of investigation, primarily because a large part of it often took place behind closed doors, inside the corridors and chambers of the court. Especially where it concerns informal influence – for example by the wife of an emperor who could give her opinion or discuss matters privately with her husband – the process often took place in the shadows. Thus, in order to have a chance at uncovering information about how policy was made, an as large amount of sources as possible is needed – something which the early Roman empire cannot sufficiently provide. More suited is the Roman Empire in late antiquity, particularly the fifth century, seeing that there are both a fair amount of written sources contemporary to that period and descriptions by later authors to be found, as well as an interesting emperor whose court to investigate. The emperor who will be the centre of my attention – just as he was the centre of his realm's attention – is Theodosius II (r. 408-450). First off, some background about this figure is required.

When the eastern Roman emperor Theodosius II died on the 28th of July, 450 after a fall from his horse, it brought to an end the longest reign of a Roman emperor since that of Augustus. He had ascended the throne in 408 when he was a mere eight years old following the death of his father Arcadius, and according to Gibbon his subsequent reign was characterised by him being dominated by women and eunuchs.[3] Still, he is credited with overseeing the creation of one of the two great law codices of Late Antiquity – the Codex Theodosianus, the other being the Codex Justinianus – as well as battling the heresies of Nestorius and Eutyches respectively, all while the empire's borders were intermittently threatened by Persia or by 'barbarian' tribes such as the Vandals and the Huns. Theodosius II is thus a highly suitable subject for an investigation regarding influence on the ruler's decision-making, seeing that his long reign provides plenty of policy to research, and because there were powers at work that created the image of figures such as eunuchs and women exercising a dominating influence. This implies that the ancient sources might indeed help clear up some of the shadows surrounding this subject, at least for this particular emperor.

It is important to note that as of today no such study exists, neither concerning Theodosius II in particular nor of other Roman emperors. Indeed, in the field of court studies in general I have not yet encountered this specific focus on decision-making. The study I present here is thus innovative and stands out from works such as that of Kenneth Holum[4] on the one hand, who only focuses on Theodosian Empresses, and

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States and Empires: A Global Perspective. Rulers and Elites 1 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011) 63-89; A. Winterling, *Aula Caesaris. Studien zur Institutionalisierung des römischen Kaiserhofes in der Zeit von Augustus bis Commodus (31 v.Chr.-192n.Chr.)* (München 1999).

[3] E. Gibbon, *The History of The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. *Volume 3*, edited by J. B. Bury (London 1901) 382-393, 416-444.

[4] K. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses. Women and dominion in late antiquity* (Berkely 1982).

Fergus Millar[5] on the other, who embeds a section on the court in an otherwise much broader work. Thus, this study represents the first comprehensive study of influence at the court of Theodosius II.

To further enhance the innovativeness of this study as well as aiding the analysis of dynamics present at the court, theories on the court and on power will be employed. Since the court is a stage on which humans interact with each other in a social as well as political way, and it is the place where the dynamics of human interaction regarding power are played out, it can greatly benefit from being analysed from within a larger framework. This is true for courts throughout history, and it is my hope that just as studies of courts in other periods have aided my understanding of that of Theodosius II, my study can be of value within the broader field of court studies. Ultimately, my aim is not only to uncover the workings and levels of courtly influence on the emperor's decision-making, but also, through analysis of the material by using theory, to gain a deeper understanding of the courtly structures, power and dynamics at play at Theodosius' court. Considering that decision-making was not exactly a transparent process, theories might help to clarify it. What is more, I will investigate more than just the figures that stand out from the sources like the emperor's sister Pulcheria and the eunuch Chrysaphius, to whom the sources attribute much power. I will also devote sufficient attention to the body of high officials, who clearly also played a role. This will ensure that my research will not become top-heavy - an easy pitfall to fall into with sources that are more interested in extraordinary figures than in the established bureaucratic system - and result in a well-rounded study of this emperor's court.

My methodology is as follows. My sources will consist almost entirely of written sources. This is due to the nature of the topic, with its focus on high politics, which limits the kind of sources that are useful to, by and large, the written ones, because they offer a chance to look behind the public façade and ideology surrounding the ruler. Material such as coins and statues, on the other hand, is saturated with this ideology and presents the public image of power rather than depicting the situation behind the scenes. Their use is thus restricted.

In the first two chapters, some necessary background will be provided. The first chapter deals with court studies. In it an overview of the development of court studies is presented, a definition of the court is given, and courtly dynamics in general are examined. Also, two theories – that of Norbert Elias and the commentary on his work by Jeroen Duindam, which concerns the early modern court, and that of Michael Mann, which concerns the sources of power – will be described; elements of these theories will be used in the eventual analysis I will present in chapter six. The second chapter offers a summary discussion of the reign of Theodosius II, and describes the fifth-century

[5] F. Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire. Power and belief under Theodosius II, 408-450* (Berkely 2006).

Theodosian court. Contrary to the fourth-century Roman court, the fifth-century court ceased to be itinerant and instead became firmly rooted in Constantinople, resulting in the centre of political gravity shifting from being dispersed around the empire to being concentrated in the capital. This shaped the arena in which the emperor's decision-making took place.

The third, fourth and fifth chapters represent the body of this study and deal with high officials, eunuchs, and royal women respectively. In chapter three, the role of high officials in the decision-making process is explored by investigating the functions of the bodies of the senate and the consistory as well as of important offices such as that of the *magister officiorum* (master of offices) and the praetorian prefect of the east. The way *suggestiones* (proposals) proceeded through the bureaucratic system is described, and a case study on powerful officials at the end of Theodosius' reign is added in order to shed some light on particular important individuals. The fourth chapter concerns the position of palace eunuchs. It starts off by giving a description of the functions and offices held by eunuchs at the royal court, the most important of which was the office of *Praepositus Sacri Cubiculi* (Superintendent of the Sacred Bedchamber). Consequently, a chronologically structured overview is given of important palace eunuchs during the reign of Theodosius II, most notably focusing on the power of Antiochus and Chrysaphius. Chapter five focuses on the influence of royal women and consists mostly of a chronological overview of the power of Theodosius' sister Pulcheria, who achieved extraordinary power for a woman, as well as touching upon the influence of Theodosius' wife Eudocia. These two women had differing bases to their power: Pulcheria relied on piety and religious devotion, whereas Eudocia, as the emperor's wife, maintained an intimate kind of contact with him, which facilitated her influence.

The sixth chapter ties the whole study together and presents a comprehensive analysis of the presented material. The theories of Norbert Elias especially as found in Duindam's critical study of him, and that of Michael Mann's concerning the sources of social power are employed to aid my theoretical analysis of the dynamics present at the court that shaped influence on the emperor's decision-making. In order to achieve this, the background against which power unfolded is first described, after which the categories of high officials, eunuchs and royal women, respectively, receive specific theoretical attention. Finally, a synthesis is given that provides the final judgement regarding the analysis of courtly influence on the decision-making of Theodosius II.

Unless specified otherwise, when 'Theodosius' is mentioned, be it with or without 'II' following it, it refers to Theodosius II. His grandfather, Theodosius I 'the Great' is only mentioned twice, both times at the start of chapter five. Similarly all dates, unless specified otherwise, are A.D.

1. Court studies

The court is a structure that has been present for an extensive period of time in highly varying societies. Although the political, economic and cultural context of each court is specific, all courts constitute the environment in which the ruler's power is configured. Studies of a certain court can be conducted in a purely historical fashion by viewing the available sources and reconstructing the atmosphere, or by approaching it from a more theoretical angle. That there is plenty of middle ground to be found should need no emphasis. Because in this study the historical evidence that will be investigated first will consequently be analysed using modern theories on the court and on power, a chapter describing the theoretical background of the court is needed. This is what will be presented here. First off, an overview of the evolution of court studies is needed in order to shed light on my particular approach. Furthermore, crucial to any court study is the problem of definition; one cannot study a court without having properly set up boundaries as to what exactly it encompasses. Thus, a section is devoted to defining the court. Also, it will be useful to explore the various dynamics present at court that result from the interaction between different groups and persons as they can appear in courts throughout history. By viewing the way in which influence could be exercised at courts in general and by looking at the nature of that influence – including possible impact on decision-making, a backdrop will be provided for patterns of influence present at the court of Theodosius II. All in all, this chapter on court studies will provide ideas and analyses to be kept in mind while investigating the historical material regarding Theodosius' court, and it will consequently play an instrumental role in conducting a theoretical analysis of this matter, which will take place in the final chapter. Hopefully, court studies will help illuminate our understanding of Theodosius II's court.

A short overview of court studies

Until the publication in 1969 by Norbert Elias of his *Die höfische Gesellschaft*[6] ('Court Society', published in English in 1983) the court was not a particularly popular object of study. With the rise of democracy, monarchy as a system was relegated to the shadows and the era of the great courts of Europe was a thing of the past. Courts, with their reputation for intrigue and ruthless political acumen, summoned negative connotations and thus failed to attract the attention and emphasis they deserve as important structures in history.[7] Elias, however, managed to revive the spark of enthusiasm for this topic when he presented a mixture of elaborate theoretical analyses and historical

[6] Norbert Elias, *Die höfische Gesellschaft. Untersuchungen zur Soziologie des Königtums und der höfischen Aristokratie* (Berlin 1969).

[7] A. J. S. Spawforth, (ed.), *The Court and Court Society in Ancient Monarchies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 1.

research and applied it to the court of Louis XIV of France. Because extensive attention will be devoted to Elias later in this chapter, for now it will suffice to state that in short Elias assumes there was a long-term shift in the power balance between the monarch and the nobility, to the advantage of the monarch; a process which accelerated in the sixteenth century. The nobility became increasingly dependent upon the monarch through a vicious circle of conspicuous consumption and status competition, and via this route the king eventually managed to domesticate the nobles. Although the model has by now been deconstructed by Jeroen Duindam[8] and exposed to contain major flaws, Elias' work played such a significant role in court studies that no contemporary study foregoes mentioning him at least briefly in its introduction.

The next key work in the evolvement of court studies is the collection edited by A. G. Dickens in 1977.[9] It forms a bridge between purely descriptive histories of the court and the much more theoretical and abstract works that dominate recent court studies. This is illustrated by the varying approaches chosen by the contributing authors, who underline the composite nature of monarchies and emphasise the importance of a ruler's personal entourage.[10] Around the same time, within the field of antiquity, Keith Hopkins published an insightful essay on the political power of eunuchs.[11] Through what is definitely a very sharp analysis, Hopkins describes the importance of eunuchs and investigates why they came to hold so much power in the imperial society of the Eastern Roman Empire, thus providing a stepping stone in the development of ancient court studies long before a more comprehensive study emerged.

Subsequently, the collection edited by R. G. Asch and A. M. Birke that was published in 1991[12] embodies an increased focus on the conceptual aspect. In the introduction, Asch remarks on the relative neglect that the political dimension of the court has suffered, and states it is one of the aims of this volume of collected essays to redress this balance by focusing on the role of the court as a stage for politics and centre of patronage. Contrary to Elias, the essays in this book show that the European courts between 1450 and 1650 were less an instrument for the domestication of the nobility than a 'point of contact' between the elite and the ruler, and that relations between them entailed a mutual give and take. The various chapters demonstrate not a single model but rather the differences in the rule and function of the court depending on the historical circumstances.

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[8] J. Duindam, *Myths of Power. Norbert Elias and the Early Modern European Court* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995).

[9] A. G. Dickens, (ed.), *The courts of Europe: politics, patronage and royalty, 1400-1800* (1977).

[10] J. Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles. The Courts of Europe's Dynastic Rivals, 1559-1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 10.

[11] K. Hopkins, 'The political power of Eunuchs', in: id., *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge 1978) 197-242.

[12] R. G. Asch and A. M. Birke (eds.), *Princes, Patronage and the Nobility: the court at the beginning of the modern age c. 1450-1650* (London, Oxford 1991).

As it stands, this first wave of court studies mostly concerned itself with the early modern court, and was prone to some bias.[13] Because of the focus on this period in history, studies exhibited the tendency to view the court as developing towards the modern state.[14] More recent studies have realised this and are more careful in their application of theory, hoping to instead produce more balanced works that benefit from theory while avoiding its pitfalls. Examples are Duindam's *Vienna and Versailles* (2003), Winterling's *Comitatus* (1998)[15], Schuller's *Politische Theorie und Praxis im Altertum*[16]*,* and the collection edited by Artan, Duindam and Kunt in 2011.[17] Winterling's collection thematically describes central aspects of the late-antique imperial court, which until now have not been treated, and offers a new view on the structure of the court. Moreover, a collection edited by Spawforth in 2008[18] is dedicated specifically to various courts in antiquity and represents a major comprehensive study of this kind within ancient studies. Themes taken into account are whether it was legitimate to talk of a 'court' in the various monarchies described in the chapters, and how crucial the ruler's court was for understanding how power operated regarding both decision-making and the representation of power. Contrary to the later example set by Versailles, Spawforth's volume makes clear that none of the ancient courts housed their elite courtiers within the palace. Instead, a recurrent feature of both ancient and modern courts can be seen in the disproportionate influence of low-status household attendants, particularly of those who were in a position of close personal contact with the ruler.[19] In contrast with for example the early modern period, whose courts have received more attention, there is still much room for further studies regarding the phenomenon of courts in the ancient world. This is particularly true for the late antique period, which has so far been underexposed despite the comparatively plentiful evidence. In this study I thus propose to shed light on this topic. In order to proceed, some basic notions will have to be explained, the first one of which is how the court can be defined.

Defining the court

Identifying the court solely with the ruler's palace is far too narrow a definition and will not suffice. However, as of yet there is no single clear-cut and widely accepted definition of the court that can be thus presented. Many of the characterisations that have been presented by various court studies appear to me to be too limited. In his introduction,

[13] Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles*, 10-11, 13.

[14] J. Adamson (ed.), *The Princely Courts of Europe, 1500-1750* (London 1999) 9-10.

[15] Aloys Winterling, Comitatus. Beiträge zur Erforschung des spätantiken Kaiserhofes (Berlin 1998).

[16] W. Schuller, (ed.), Politische Theorie und Praxis im Altertum (Darmstadt 1998).

[17] T. Artan, J. Duindam, and M. Kunt (eds.), *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective. Rulers and Elites 1* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011).

[18] A. J. S. Spawforth, (ed.), *The Court and Court Society in Ancient Monarchies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[19] Spawforth, *The Court and Court Society*, 11.

Asch (1991) states that most of the contributors to the volume follow Elias in his emphasis on the court consisting of both the ruler's household as well as all others present there, while it was also primarily a social milieu, and provided the stage for the 'sovereign power' of the ruler.[20] However, this does not explain the household's exact relation to the court, nor does it place sufficient emphasis on its political role or account for its location. Regarding this latter point, Zedler argues that the court is wherever the ruler is situated.[21] Werner Paravicini emphasises the role of the court as a centre of communication and exchange; it is a community based on speech and in service of power that is subject to certain rules.[22] This seems to me rather too specialised; the focus on speech and communication appears disproportionate. Werner Rösener hits closer to home in stating that the court is a complex locus of rule and society, where, in particular, political, administrative and social elements come together[23], but remains a little vague and too broad.

There are certain characteristics that must be taken into account when attempting to define the court. First and foremost, it is the place where the ruler is located, be it in the capital at the palace or at places the ruler travelled to. However, to a certain degree situations vary throughout history. In Tudor England, for instance, the phrase 'holding court' denoted the specific location the ruler resided at, at a particular moment together with his or her retinue. Seeing as the Tudor courts tended to move around a lot and, especially under Elizabeth, going on progress was common[24], there was not so much one well-defined central hub. When viewing more static courts, though, such as indeed the court of Theodosius II, one can imagine that the main palace retained considerably more of its identity as 'the court' even when the ruler was not present. Naturally the actual 'content' of this physical location is also indispensable to a definition of the court. This was made up by the ruler's household on the one hand, and on the other by the official dignitaries and bodies that were in business at the court – almost literally everyone who was in one way or another within relative proximity to the ruler. The court is also the space within which power converges and is distributed among various groups and people. It provides the context in which policy is made. This dynamic ensures competition for influence and status, turning the court into a complex web of information and communication. The private sphere is here enjoined with the public sphere. Within this arena, ceremonial and cultural trends come to the fore and give the court its own distinct

[20] Asch and Birke, *Princes, Patronage and the Nobility*, 1-38.

[21] R. Butz and Lars-Arne Dannenberg, 'Überlegungen zu Theoriebildungen des Hofes', in: Butz, R., Jan Hirschbiegel, Dietmar Willoweit (eds.), *Hof und Theorie: Annäherungen an ein historisches Phänomen* (Köln 2004) 2.

[22] R. Butz, Jan Hirschbiegel, Dietmar Willoweit (eds.), *Hof und Theorie: Annäherungen an ein historisches Phänomen* (Köln 2004) VII.

[23] Butz and Dannenberg, 'Überlegungen', 4.

[24] Clifford Geertz, 'Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power.' in: *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology.* (New York 1983) 153-157.

flavour, which can transpire and serve as a role model for the wider society. Taking all of the above into consideration, a workable definition of the phenomenon of the court runs as follows: the court is the political, social and cultural environment revolving around the ruler in which both personal and public power converge and are distributed between the ruler, players from the household and a staff of political officials. The court sits at the nucleus of a society and it is here that policy is made.

Dynamics at the court

The first factor to have an impact on court dynamics is the ruler's personality. If a monarch very conscientiously busied himself with the affairs of state, delegation was more limited and the main lines of influence thus had to lead straight to the ruler rather than any officials who might otherwise have had more power. Louis XIV of France, the Sun King, provides a striking example of a king who was determined to stand above his advisors and would not let any favourites influence his policy-making.[25] Naturally, when a ruler was less than enthusiastic about putting in an effort to actively rule, the focus of power at court became much more dispersed, resulting in a more complex dynamic. The strength of the dynasty of a ruler mattered, too. Powerful and capable relatives could boost a monarch's position, safeguarding him against outside threats. However, there is also another side to this coin, considering that the ruler's family could of course also pose a threat, using their descent to claim the throne in their own right after, for instance, conveniently disposing of any so-called obstacles. The English king Richard III proved apt at these tactics when, in order to succeed to the throne, he locked his nephews the twelve-year old king Edward V, to whom he was Lord Protector, and Edward's brother Richard, away in the Tower of London, never to be seen again. What also mattered was a ruler's age. Princes who succeeded their fathers at a very young age were obviously not suited to govern the state in person but were appointed a regent or another such figure who was temporarily in control until the monarch came of age. Assuming full personal control after power had been entrusted to others could prove difficult, however, and kings were certainly not always successful at this.

A second factor that determined the dynamics at the court can be found in the courtly hierarchy. The kind of groups, stately bodies and bureaucratic officials that were present and the way in which they were ranked co-determined the structure of the court. The ruler's close family naturally appeared quite high on the ladder due to the direct personal connection, and were often given high offices to hold which also accredited them with formal status. The nobility or the elite was very dominantly present at the

[25] Ragnhild Hatton, 'Louis XIV. At the court of the Sun King', in: Dickens, A. G. (ed.), *The courts of Europe: politics, patronage and royalty, 1400-1800* (London 1977) 238-239.

court. The various ministers and council-members, often coming from these noble circles, were part of a formally structured hierarchy. This hierarchy could at times be reorganised: Louis XIV rationalised the functions of his courtiers and created new offices where necessary, and Maria Theresa, who ruled Habsburg Austria from 1740-1780, managed to effect a revolution in government, reforming its structure.[26] To counteract the power of the nobility, favourites played special roles in court patronage as well as in the court's dynamics, especially so during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.[27] Favourites were usually lowly born persons who owed their positions wholly to the ruler, were entirely his creatures and who thus circumvented the nobility's cult of honour at the court, to the latter's great distress.[28] In the Ancient world, the Hellenistic *philoi* - superficially comparable to favourites - present an interesting case. The royal *philoi* ('friends') functioned primarily as advisors and military commanders. Their relationship with the king was a very personal one: they dined with him, functioned as his bodyguards, constituted his daily entourage, and even guarded the king's bedchamber while he was sleeping or ill. (Quintus Curtius Rufus 8.6.2-6 and 9.6.4; Arrian 4.13.1). Over time, a harsher political climate began to prevail due to territorial contraction, meaning honorific titles at court were necessary in the king's struggle to retain the loyalty of his men. This "frozen formalism" is exemplified by the splitting of friends into "first" and "second" friends in the second century BC.[29] However, the function of the *philoi* never crystallised into a formal office.[30] When 'special' functions such as these existed, the courtly hierarchy was structured along different lines than what one would normally expect. Each court thus had its own distinctive shape and form; one that must be understood if questions regarding influence are to be posed.

Thirdly, the issue of obtaining power and influence must be discussed. Most works concerning the court simply mention that certain groups and individuals accrued influence with others or with the emperor. While this is usually seen to mean political influence, more often than not this is not specified, and there are certainly other kinds of influence that were sought after, too. Duindam makes an important point when describing how politics encompasses more than just top-level decision-making: courtiers were often looking to advance their own dynastic interests or to secure a prestigious office, rather than being interested in meddling in the details of policy. It was only in the most weighty issues, or issues that directly concerned them, that larger groups were

[26] Ibid. 243; E. Wangermann, 'Maria Theresa. A reforming monarchy' in: Dickens, A. G. (ed.), *The courts of Europe: politics, patronage and royalty, 1400-1800* (London 1977) 303.
[27] Asch and Birke, *Princes, Patronage and the Nobility*, 1-38.
[28] Adamson, *The Princely Courts of Europe*, 20.
[29] Spawforth, *The Court and Court Society,* 16.
[30] J. Rowlandson, 'The Character of Ptolemaic Aristocracy. Problems of Definition and Evidence.' In: Rajak, T., S. Pearce, J. Aitken & J. Dines (eds.), *Jewish Perspectives on Hellenistic Rulers* (University of California Press 2007) 33.

drawn into policy matters.[31] Moreover, even if certain individuals are described by the sources as powerful and influential, this does not automatically imply that their power was political or that it stretched beyond the palace walls. The ruler's personal attendants, through their proximity to him, occupied a powerful position seeing as people seeking to influence the ruler could do so through requesting access or relaying messages via these dignitaries. However, this only boosted their personal gain and put them in a position of power within the palace itself; it is much harder to discern if they themselves also influenced the emperor directly in political matters. It is thus one of my goals not only to uncover which figures at the court of Theodosius II were influential, but particularly to distinguish precisely what sort of influence they had.

The final factor we need to discuss here briefly is the spatial configuration within which these dynamics operated and by which they were influenced. The ruler's palace naturally consisted of many different quarters, to which access could vary greatly – some parts were more or less public while others were strictly private. To name a few, one can think of council rooms, audience chambers, the servant's lodges, and the ruler's own private quarters. People within fairly close proximity to the ruler and access to the inner quarters can be seen to belong to the inner court, whereas those to whose presence the ruler was shielded by his apartments' doors were only part of the outer court. The outer court would get to see the ruler predominantly in his public function and could thus only obtain power in the same way, through official functions, while in the inner court a more personal sort of influence could be attempted. Naturally, those in positions in which they could control access to the emperor became key figures at the court; they had the potential to be power-brokers. Moreover, figures such as eunuchs in for example Achaemenid Persia became important because they could transcend the boundaries of access throughout the palace and function as intermediaries, for instance between the king and the royal women.[32] At the Ancien-Régime courts there were different thresholds at the palaces each requiring a higher status or favour before they could be reached[33], and one can imagine this situation existing in other times as well. The layout of the palace thus helped determine the lines along which influence was exercised: the various doors and people in charge of access directed the course of this influence. Of course, this was not a one-sided process, but also provided the ruler with tools to determine a certain hierarchy of personal favourites among his courtiers.[34]

Norbert Elias, Jeroen Duindam and Michael Mann

[31] Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles*, 134.

[32] Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, 'Eunuchs and the royal harem in Achaemenid Persia', in S. Tougher (ed.), *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond* (London 2002) 19-49.

[33] Adamson, *The Princely Courts of Europe*, 7-41. 13.

[34] Ibid. 14.

Besides using a variety of different elements from court theories in this study, two theories in particular will be more elaborately applied to the court of Theodosius II and thus deserve special attention. The first of these has already been briefly discussed above. Norbert Elias's model of court formation and court society, introduced in *Die Höfische Gesellschaft* (1969), has proved very influential. Being a sociologist inspired by Weber, he presented his 'court society' as a transitional phase in the passage from feudal to absolutist monarchy, in which the key figure was an aspiring monarch seeking to 'domesticate'.[35] Elias' central premise concerns a long-term shift in the power-balance between the monarch and the nobility to the advantage of the monarch, a process that was accelerated in the sixteenth century by economic change.[36]

This premise is directly connected to the model Elias presents, which can be outlined as follows. According to Elias, the court formed the centre of competition for prestige and status, where the monarch actively promoted rivalries and stimulated competition for his favour. As the laughing outsider, standing above this competition, the king could easily maintain his power. Moreover, etiquette and ceremonial were used as instruments of power: the smallest sign of displeasure could severely influence the status of the courtiers. The nobility became increasingly dependent upon the monarch through a vicious circle of conspicuous consumption and status competition and the king eventually managed to domesticate the nobles.[37] Since Elias studies the absolutist monarch Louis XIV, many of his ideas feature the monarch as steadily in control of his court, rising above and actively regulating the competition within the nobility.[38] Here we see that power at the court is deliberately fragmented so that the monarch can oversee it; the power of the nobles thus seems to converge upon his person. Elias places much emphasis on the status competition that was present at the court; he compares it to the stock exchange, highlighting the precarious nature of positions. The ruler's leading role could, however, be reversed. Jeroen Duindam, who has conducted a study on Elias' court theories, expresses it lucidly: 'A clever ruler could skilfully exploit his central position to reinforce his power; a less-proficient successor could be crushed by that very position.'[39] The social nature of influence at court is also emphasised: social obligations constituted the majority of the daily routine of courtly 'professionals'.[40]

For those seeking to work with Elias' theory, Duindam's study will prove highly useful, if not indispensable. In *Myths of Power: Norbert Elias and the early modern*

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[35] R. Smith, 'Measures of Difference: The Fourth-Century Transformation of the Roman Imperial Court.' in: *American Journal of Philology* Vol. 132 nr. 1 (Whole Number 525) (2011) 125.

[36] Duindam, *Myths of Power*, 31.

[37] Duindam, *Myths of Power*, 31.

[38] Norbert Elias, Die Höfische Gesellschaft (1969) 197.

[39] Duindam, *Myths of Power*, 90.

[40] Ibid. 93.

European court (1995), Duindam offers a sharp critique of Elias' model and methods during which he makes many an interesting point regarding court dynamics himself. Certain problems and contradictions are to be found within Elias' model; Duindam's study systematically deconstructs the model through sharp analyses that are supported by extensive research and arrives at the following conclusions. The model is seen to break down because Elias' arguments form a vicious circle. Firstly, since the nobility did not fulfill the role of victim the model calls for, the whole argument loses *raison d'être*. Duindam cannot confirm that the balance of power between the nobility and the monarch changed in a significant way. Secondly, Elias underestimates noble pedigree as the first denominator of status and thus exaggerates both the mobility possible at court and the uncertain position of the courtiers. Thirdly, Elias' depiction of the role played by the bourgeoisie is unsatisfactory. Fourth, while Elias tries to form an argument in which the monarch's will plays a subordinate role, in his portrayal of matters the monarch's intention is always shown to be highly relevant. Finally, Duindam addresses some more general problems with the work. Elias often fails to explain the connection between the various parts of his analysis, resulting in a gap between theory and fact that he is unable to bridge. Moreover, the scope of Elias' theory on court society is unclear: the French elite is the focal point, but it is not clear to what extent Elias' model is assumed to be applicable elsewhere. Elias' theoretical framework blinded him to information that contradicted or added nuance to his theory. Duindam concludes that Elias' model, despite its flaws, is not entirely useless, but can still be used with regard to the perception of power as the power of the network, group interaction, forms and contacts, and a focus on the vertical lines between elites and their dependents. In the end, Duindam aptly demonstrates how both Elias is too generalising, not precise enough in his definitions and research, and how, because of this, his model ends up forming a vicious circle.[41]

Duindam also puts forward some highly insightful comments regarding court dynamics. He emphasises that, contrary to what Elias argues, social preoccupations were saturated with politics. 'Schemes and intrigues defined life at court. The splendid isolation of decision-making was imaginary: politics were determined to no insignificant degree in the corridors of the court.'[42] Duindam states that this applies to the seventeenth- and eighteenth centuries, but only when nobles were actually present at the court. Attendance at court translated to influence and power and was necessary in order to obtain advantages for the family. If it is true that the nobles dominated the court from a social perspective, it must be stressed that this enabled them to exert influence on political matters, at times even allowing them to go against the ruler's desires.[43] Also, for

[41] Ibid. 181-191.
[42] Ibid. 92-93.
[43] Ibid. 95.

the French court at least it was advantageous for a faction to take in people from a variety of backgrounds, seeing that a minister, for example, had a different sphere of influence than a noble with a high ceremonial office.[44] Duindam identifies a 'shadow hierarchy' that existed alongside the formal hierarchy; in contrast to the formal hierarchy, this reflected the real influence and status of the courtiers, and it underwent rapid change. The factors that determined a person's position within this shadow hierarchy were things such as genealogy, wealth – be it acquired or inherited -, individual characteristics and qualities, and more.[45]

It is already evident that one of Duindam's realisations is relevant for Theodosius II's court: at the court of Louis XIV, women played important roles in the power struggles that prevailed within and between the various factions. All of these factions were under the control of the wife or mistress of the central figure.[46] The role of most notably Theodosius' sister Pulcheria and his wife Eudocia in this respect must be thoroughly analysed. Duindam explains this female influence in the following way. Intimate contacts with the monarch enabled women to function as intermediaries between courtiers and the monarch by serving as a broker of the king's patronage. Other confidants could also take on this role. However, there were also women who were not involved in amorous liaisons with the ruler or his heirs who could attain power, so other routes to influence certainly existed. Women listed alongside their husbands in descriptions of the factions at court were often equally important and also held offices at the court. Through their mutual contacts they were able to 'bridge the chasm of status dissonance.'[47]

Another study, that of Michael Mann, will be used to help analyse the dynamics present at Theodosius' court, this time one that focuses on the sources of power instead of the court itself: because this study investigates power at the court, it will prove useful to cover both sides of this coin with an appropriate theory. Thus, while Elias and Duindam's observations directly concern the court, Michael Mann's work falls within the category of sociology and has no immediate connection with the court. Although Elias' model is outdated, not all of his observations are rendered useless, and through combining his work with Duindam's commentary and Mann's critical theory pitfalls will hopefully be avoided. Mann's *The sources of social power* (1986), which is split into two volumes, provides a theory on power within different societies ranging from the 'beginning' to the present day. The first volume, which ranges from the beginning to AD 1760, contains two chapters on the Roman empire – the Roman territorial empire and the late Roman Christian empire – but makes no mention of the Roman court, despite the fact that the court forms such an important nucleus of power. The Roman court is

[44] Ibid. 147.
[45] Ibid. 153.
[46] Ibid. 155.
[47] Ibid. 155-156.

most certainly a social institution that falls within the general scope of Mann's model, though; thus, his ideas regarding the sources of power will prove useful in analysing the court's dynamics.

Two statements sum up his methodology: firstly, 'societies are constituted of multiple overlapping and intersecting sociospatial networks of power,' and secondly, 'a general account of societies, their structure, and their history can best be given in terms of the interrelations of what I will call the four sources of social power: ideological, economic, military, and political (IEMP) relationships.'[48] These are both overlapping networks of social interaction as well as organisations and an institutional means of achieving human goals. The factors of organisation, control, logistics and communication constitute Mann's central problem and denote the capacity to organise and control people, territories, materials, as well as the development of this capacity throughout history. Different organisational means of social control are offered by the four sources of social power.[49] The original source of power is identified to be human nature, seeing as humans are always seeking to increase the quality of their life and design effective ways of achieving this, which results in a dynamism that is characteristic of human life that forms the source of all other power.[50]

Mann defines power as follows: 'In its most general sense, power is the ability to pursue and attain goals through mastery of one's environment.'[51] Social power thus specifically refers to mastery over other people. However, another aspect of social power must be touched upon. Mann states that, in order to pursue their goals, humans set up cooperative power relations, in which a division of labour takes place. This results in collective power. However, despite this division, there is a top which directs and overlooks it all, accruing an 'immense organization superiority' over the others. This control rests on the institutionalisation of laws and norms within that particular social group.[52] Mann is here clearly talking about the ruler and the ruling class or group controlling the masses, but that is not to say that such an analysis cannot hold up for the more narrow sphere of power relations at the court. Those in power are seen to depend on their environment – their context and network - in order to maintain their positions.[53]

Power can be categorised into different types, one of which is authoritative power: this indicates power that is actually willed by groups and institutions and encompasses definite commands and conscious obedience. Within authoritative power, logistics are seen to play a central role. The way in which commands are physically transmitted and

[48] Michael Mann, *The sources of social power. Volume I. A History of power from the beginning to A.D. 1760* (Cambridge 1986) 1-2.
[49] Mann, *The sources of social power*, 2-3.
[50] Ibid. 4.
[51] Ibid. 6.
[52] Ibid. 6-7.
[53] Ibid. 15.

implemented, and what sort of control by which power groups is routinely or erratically facilitated by logistical infrastructures feature as important questions with regard to power structures.[54] Most certainly at the court the transmission or indeed concealment of information hinted at power; individuals that occupied different positions within this chain of information must have been able to exercise varying forms and degrees of power on the courtly environment and on the ruler himself.

Yet another of Mann's notions connects nicely with this. Upon describing the importance of ideology, he showcases Max Weber's metaphor of 'switchmen' (of railways) who determine down which of several possible tracks social development would proceed. Mann adapts it to suit his own notions more fully: the sources of social power constitute the 'tracklaying vehicles' – because they literally pave the way – that lay different gauges of track across the historical and social landscape.[55] This idea can be applied to the fabric of society at large, but could also be seen to operate at the level of the court: the arena where (in the societies it concerns) policy, which is surely a track-laying vehicle, was made. The road towards the creation of policy might also be made up in a similar way, with various factions and opinions attempting to guide policy along different tracks.

The models outlined above embody both specific court theory as well as a theory accounting for the underlying sociological power structures that operated in empires in general and explain human interaction. Their strength lies in combining the two: Elias' model is outdated but still useful to a certain extent, because it focuses specifically on the court, while Mann's model makes no mention of the late antique court but, because of its more general nature, can help uncover the deeper dynamics of power. Before these theories can be used, however, it is first necessary to study the historical evidence regarding the court of Theodosius II and its lines of influence. In order to do this, in the following chapter I will provide an overview of his reign as well as of the main characteristics of the fifth-century Late Antique court. This chapter will be followed by three chapters that will explore the possible influence on the emperor's decision-making by high officials, eunuchs and royal women respectively. Once this ground has been covered, the theories discussed above will be used to help analyse this influence.

[54] Ibid. 8-9.
[55] Ibid. 28.

2. Theodosius

The reign of Theodosius II

In 408, after the death of his father Arcadius, the eight-year-old Theodosius II became sole ruler of the Eastern Roman Empire. He had already been proclaimed *Augustus* on January 10, 402, and had thus been co-ruler of the Empire for six years up to this point – in name. Gibbon has painted a picture of an ineffective emperor who was dominated by women and eunuchs[56], while the ancient sources paint a similar image: Priscus of Panium describes Theodosius as unwarlike and cowardly, as well as governed by eunuchs (Priscus 3.1), and Theophanes states that he was 'easily swayed, carried by every wind' (Theoph. AM 5941). Despite this image, his long reign was stable. Considering the difficult nature of this study's enquiry – the uncovering of influence on the emperor's decision- and policy-making, a process which took place largely behind the scenes and even in the shadows – an emperor had to be selected about which sufficient sources are available that could shed some light on such a topic. Seeing that the sources already hint at influence from for example eunuchs, the reign of Theodosius II is well-suited and interesting to investigate in this manner.

Due to his young age at this ascension the Empire was effectively governed by Anthemius, who had been praetorian prefect of the East since 405 and who oversaw the management of public affairs (Socrates 7.1). Before his death, and arguably as early as Theodosius' proclamation as *Augustus* in 402[57], Arcadius had made an arrangement with the Persian king Yazdgerd (r. 399-420) to appoint him as his son's guardian (ἐπίτροπος). This ensured good relations with Persia until 420 and allowed for a relatively peaceful beginning of Theodosius' reign; because all was quiet on the Persian front, the Empire could concentrate its forces to drive back the Huns that invaded across the river Danube in 408. Moreover, the Persian eunuch Antiochus, who had functioned as emissary of the Persian king during the arrangement of Yazdgerd's protectorate of Theodosius in 402, remained at the court at Constantinople from that point on as *cubicularius* and from 408 until 413 or 414 as *praepositus sacri cubiculi,* acting as the emperor's guardian and tutor. Theodosius had four sisters – Pulcheria, Arcadia, Marina, and Flaccilla (who died young). His older sister Pulcheria (399-453), who took a vow that she would remain a virgin and convinced her sisters to do the same, is credited with educating him and, after being proclaimed *Augusta* in 414, with assuming control of the government of the Empire. At that point Anthemius disappeared from office, and Antiochus was dismissed as *praepositus*, although he remained influential as *patricius* until 439. Anthemius' regime, characterised as relatively tolerant, was replaced by a regime in which the emphasis lay

[56] Stephen Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire. AD 284-641* (Blackwell Publishing 2007) 103-104.
[57] J. Bardill and Greatrex, G., 'Antiochus the Praepositus: A Persian Eunuch at the court of Theodosius II', in: *DOP* 50 (1996) 173, 197.

on strict Christian orthodoxy; Jews were persecuted, pagans were barred from public office, and although it was not encouraged, violence used to inspire conformity was condoned.[58]

Around 419/20, Christians living in Persia began to be persecuted - mildly at first but when Yazdgerd died in 420, his son, Vahram V, who succeeded him, intensified the persecutions. War with Persia broke out and after reaching a stalemate, Helion, master of offices from 414-427, was sent to treat for peace. With impeccable timing the Huns invaded in 421-422, leaving the Romans with little other choice than to buy off peace, because of their simultaneous involvement in war with Persia. In these turbulent times, Theodosius married Athenaïs - a beautiful girl from Greece who was christened Eudocia - on 7 June 421. She was proclaimed *Augusta* in 423 and came to exert a culture influence at the court, possibly causing a minor revival of classical culture.[59] No male heir was produced; the couple only had daughters, the eldest of which, Licinia Eudoxia, married the Western Roman Emperor Valentinian III in 437.

In 423 the Western Roman emperor Honorius (r. 395-423) died and over the following two years Theodosius intervened to overthrow the usurper John, who had claimed the throne. After tensions had built up for some time, Nestorius' heresy was overthrown at the First Council of Ephesus in 431. What Theodosius is best known for, however, is the issuing of the *Codex Theodosianus*, one of the two major imperial law-books compiled in late antiquity. A Code Commission was already set up in 429, and the work, containing laws from the time of Constantine up to the mid-430s, was finished and presented in 438. It contained laws that for example concerned the Church, matters of succession and the holding of office and came to have a large impact on the transmission of Roman law in Western Europe.[60] After a relatively quiet spell regarding relations with the various barbarian peoples, in the same year in which the Theodosian Code was issued the Vandals broke the treaty that had been made in 435 and renewed hostilities; the issue was dealt with and a new treaty was conducted in 442. In the meantime, however, there were more disturbances at the borders: in 441 a short-lived invasion into Roman Mesopotamia by the Persians drew the Roman empire's attention and most likely necessitated the reconfirmation of the 422 treaty. Also, possible attacks around this time from Saracens, Tzanni, Isaurians and Huns caused instability.

During the last decade of Theodosius II's reign the eunuch chamberlain Chrysaphius came to the fore as a powerful and dominant personality at court. In 443, the same year in which the empress Eudocia was permanently exiled to Jerusalem, he

[58] Roger C. Blockley, *East Roman foreign policy. Formation and conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius* (Leeds 1992) 55.
[59] Alan Cameron, 'The empress and the poet. Paganism and politics at the court of Theodosius II.' in: *YClS* XXVII (1982) 273.
[60] J. Harries and I. Wood (eds.), *The Theodosian Code: Studies in the Imperial Law of Late Antiquity* (London 1993) text inside cover.

became *spatharius* (bodyguard); a position he held until his death 450. At this point, war with the Huns had ended, but as a consequence the reckless decision of the Romans in 444 to stop the payments to the Huns that had been agreed upon by the treaty, by 447 the Huns yet again attacked the empire. An embassy was sent to Attila in 449, during which the plot that had been hatched to assassinate him - the designing of which is ascribed to Chrysaphius (Priscus fr. 7, 8, 12; John of Antioch fr. 198) - was uncovered before it could be put into practice. Chrysaphius also had a connection with the Second Council of Ephesus, also known as the Robber Synod, which was held in 449 and concerned a stand-off between the heresiarch Eutyches, who was Chrysaphius' friend, and Flavian, the patriarch of Constantinople, who had declared Eutyches' views as heretical in 448. Another friend of Chrysaphius', Dioscorus, dominated the council, during which the views of Eutyches were declared orthodox and Flavian was deposed.[61] Not long after, before even reaching his fiftieth year, emperor Theodosius II died after a fall from his horse, on the 28th of July, 450. Thus ended the longest reign of a Roman emperor after Augustus.

The Theodosian court

Contrary to earlier times, fifth century emperors were confined to the city and their palace[62]; Theodosius II no longer lead his own army like his father had done, but rather ruled from a civilian context.[63] What was previously an itinerant court usually defined as *comitatus* in Latin or as *στρατόπεδον* (army camp) in Greek was transformed into the fifth century *palatium* or *παλατιον*: the palace.[64] No longer were emperors visible as the commanding political forces within the Roman state that travelled the far reaches of the empire with their troops and members of the court. Rather, as the western emperors settled down at Ravenna, the eastern emperors after Theodosius I (r. 379-395) remained for the most part securely behind Constantinople's walls, resulting in their being less suited for directly concerning themselves with local or regional affairs. This was true especially for the western part of the empire, which saw a period of chaos in the fifth century with regard to military threats, whereas the eastern empire remained more stable and was thus able to keep the civic base of the empire intact, its administration and bureaucratic system proving highly effective.[65]

With the emperor residing much more permanently at the court, the centre of political gravity shifted from being dispersed among various bodies, armies and the itinerant court, to being far more concentrated at the capital. New power dynamics thus

[61] J. R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, vol. II, A.D. 395-527* (Cambridge University Press 1980) 296.
[62] Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire,* 105.
[63] F. Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire. Power and belief under Theodosius II, 408-450* (Berkeley 2006) 9.
[64] McCormick, 'Emperor and court' in: Av. Cameron e.a. (eds.) *Cambridge Ancient History Vol.14: Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, AD 425–600* (Cambridge 2001) 136.
[65] Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire*, 102-103. See also: McCormick, 'Emperor and court', 136.

came into play. Fergus Millar identifies the emperor as surrounded by two interacting spheres of power and influence, namely the household or *cubiculum*, and the body of high officials who constituted the Imperial council or *consistorium* and the Senate as well as holding the prime posts at court. Power and potential involvement in decision-making could lie within either of those spheres. Also, royal women exercised a personal kind of influence that was supposedly gathered in the household sphere.[66] Their political significance grew: empresses could now control their own *cubiculum* and they formed a link in the chain of influence at the court, being regularly approached by outsiders seeking power.[67] Theodosius II's sister Pulcheria has certainly gone down in history as a she-wolf who controlled the affairs of state. Another courtly group constituted of palace eunuchs, who having gradually gained in influence and importance since as early as the second century AD[68] certainly featured as important actors. They were almost exclusively in control of the institution known as the Sacred Bedchamber and thus stood in close contact with the emperor; a position that could entail a great deal of power.[69] Various other officials worked closely with Theodosius, embodying the necessity for any regime to have powerful advisors. Among these were the *quaestor*, the praetorian prefect of the east, the *magister officiorum* and the group of *magistri militum*.[70]

A highly condensed and by no means fully representative list of a few of these influential figures can be given as follows. The Persian eunuch Antiochus was *cubicularius* at the palace from 402, being made *praepositus sacri cubiculi* in 408 and, while being dismissed from office in 413/14, continued to wield some power as *patricius* until 439; Anthemius was highly influential in the period 405-414 as praetorian prefect of the east; Helion was *magister officiorum* from 414-427; between 439 and 442 Cyrus of Panopolis was in office as praetorian prefect and prefect of Constantinople until he was eclipsed by the eunuch Chrysaphius, who formed a dominant force at the court from that point on until his death in 450; and Nomus, who was *magister officiorum* from 443-6. Moreover, even though they were less visible and not consistently present at the court, two generals must also be mentioned, namely Ardabur and his son Aspar, who held high offices in the military throughout a large part of Theodosius' reign.

Naturally these figures accrued their influence and exercised their offices within a particular physical context. Some space should thus also be devoted to the actual physical environment of the court: the palace structures within the capital. The late antique palace was generally emulated upon the building program of Augustus on the Palatine Hill, as well as the development of palatial structures during the Tetrarchy,

[66] Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire*, 193, 201.
[67] McCormick, 'Emperor and court', 146.
[68] Walter N. Stevenson, 'The rise of eunuchs in Greco-Roman antiquity.' in: *JHSex* 1994-1995 5 (4), p.495.
[69] Louise Cilliers and François P. Retief, 'The eunuchs of early Byzantium.' in: *Scholia N. S.* 13 (2004) 108.
[70] McCormick, 'Emperor and court', 145-146.

which also saw the addition of a Hippodrome being placed directly besides the palace. The court was not confined to one building but was rather spread out among multiple palace structures: emperors and empresses had their own separate palaces.[71] Pulcheria certainly had her own household including a personal *praepositus sacri cubiculi.* The courtiers had their residences in the immediate vicinity of the Great Palace, and during Theodosius II's time two court eunuchs, Antiochus and Lausus, built rather magnificent mansions: the palace of Lausus contained a semi-circular entrance portico which alone was more than twenty-five meters in diameter, while that of Antiochus was twice that size.[72] Within the imperial palaces, specific living quarters could not be freely entered and the *cubiculum* in particular constituted an area to which access was very much controlled – usually by eunuchs such as the *praepositus sacri cubiculi*. Although it is impossible to uncover the exact spatial configuration within the palace, McCormick states that every high-ranked palatial resident seems to have formed an organisational cell, seeing that a personal domestic staff, including slaves, bodyguards and a cellarer, lived with him.[73]

It remains to be seen how exactly the lines of access and influence ran at the fifth-century Theodosian court. Which people were the power-brokers, and what sort of power did such a position bestow upon its holders? A first step in this investigation must consist of a focus on the official bodies of government and the high office-holders, which will be presented in the next chapter.

[71] K. L. Noethlichs, 'Strukturen und Funktionen des spätantiken Kaiserhofes.' in: Aloys Winterling*, Comitatus. Beiträge zur Erforschung des spätantiken Kaiserhofes* (Berlin 1998) 22.
[72] McCormick, 'Emperor and court', 139-141.
[73] Ibid. 141.

3. High officials

By the fifth century, the original configuration of the central administration as it is usually associated with the Roman empire had changed. No longer did the senate hold its traditionally central position, and with the emperor ceasing to lead the army in person the balance between these two also altered. With the division of the empire into West and East Constantinople attained a senate of its own while the east-Roman ruler still maintained a relationship with the senate in Rome, too. Because the court became static in the fifth century as opposed to itinerant the capital saw an ever-increasing amount of officials that formed part of a centralised administration.[74] This formed the context within which the emperor's decisions were made; thus, a breakdown of the system must be given. The various offices and bodies that played roles at the imperial court will be examined. To the extent that our sources allow, the most important individual office-holders will be highlighted within their respective categories.

The senate and the consistory

The first bodies that deserve attention are the senate and the consistory (*consistorium*). They are here discussed jointly because of the connections between them and the ambiguities surrounding them. The senate's traditional position as institution where important decisions were made changed to it becoming instead a place where decisions were manifested.[75] Roger Blockley states that in late imperial times the consistory, which was convened by the emperor, could be summoned to discourse on both ordinary issues as well as those of the utmost importance. It moreover received both foreign and domestic embassies. Apart from the specific matters that were placed before the consistory, it is not known whether it convened on a regular basis to independently discuss policy. It is thus possible that its function was usually a reactive one. Moreover, after the middle of the fifth century it appears that the consistory's functions became chiefly ceremonial. Regarding the senate, Blockley explains that emperors could consult with the senate in times that the consistory was in decline, but that its role, again, appears to have been merely a reactive one; the emperor could use the senate to gain support during difficult decisions. He argues that the senate's actual influence on matters of foreign policy was most likely minimal.[76]

[74] Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire*, 175.

[75] McCormick, 'Emperor and court, 157.

[76] Roger C. Blockley, *East Roman foreign policy. Formation and conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius* (Leeds 1992) 134-135.

On the contrary, in their chapter on government and administration in the Cambridge Ancient History[77], Barnish, Lee and Whitby accredit the senate with more actual power than Blockley does. They state that the senates of both Rome and Constantinople could present a possible challenge to imperial power. Membership of the senate had been made the highest reward for service by Constantine I and Valentinian I and emperors were still legitimized by senatorial approval, as well as actively aided in their decision-making by the senate, as happened with Anastasius and Justin II. The rise of Theodahad to the Gothic kingship may have been facilitated in part by the senate of Rome. Moreover, senators could both passively and actively oppose rulers; for example, both Justin I and Justinian were met with strong opposition when presenting the senate with controversial plans.[78]

Furthermore, Fergus Millar identifies decision making to have had a strongly collectivist ideal during the latter part of Theodosius' reign; a process in which both the senate and the consistory (*consistorium*) played a role.[79] He sees the emperor as surrounded by two interacting spheres of power and influence, namely the household or *cubiculum*, and the body of high officials who constituted the *consistorium* and the senate as well as holding the prime posts at court. Power could lie within either of those spheres, as well as within personal influence by individuals.[80] The system appears to not have been entirely translucent, because it emerges from the sources that those interested in exercising influence were not always aware of whether the emperor deliberated with the senate or with the consistory. In 431/2 Ioannes inquired with an unidentified Prefect (most likely the praetorian prefect of the East) to ascertain that his letter was read to both the emperor himself as well as the *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, but also to the senate or the consistory. Moreover, at Chalcedon in 431 representatives of Nestorius' side who argued their case in front of the emperor had not desisted from doing so "either before your Piety of before the illustrious Consistorium". Other messages sent by his followers give a similar impression of mild confusion.[81]

Seeing that it is difficult to establish the precise power and influence of the senate and the consistory we can merely state with certainty that they fulfilled their original roles as advisory bodies. The relationship between these official bodies and the emperor must have varied at least slightly at differing times, so the information presented by Barnish e.a. depicting a strong senate is not automatically applicable to the reign of Theodosius II. However, seeing that both the senate and consistory are also named as

[77] S. Barnish, A. D. Lee and M. Whitby, 'Government and administration' in: Av. Cameron, B. Ward-Perkins and M. Whitby, *Cambridge Ancient History 14: Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, AD 425–600* (Cambridge 2001) 164-206.

[78] Barnish e.a., 'Government and administration', 177.

[79] Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire*, 201.

[80] Ibid. 193, 201.

[81] Ibid. 204-205.

bodies to present letters to at least in 431 it would appear that the role of these two must at least surpass the one presented by Blockley. In order to more accurately gauge the importance their functions gave them, the power of individual office-holders and courtiers must be canvassed so as to create a background against which each player's relative influence can be determined.

Prominent offices and functionaries under Theodosius II

At the late Roman imperial court, a distinction can be made between different groups. On the one hand there were the high civilian officials such as the *magister officiorum* (master of offices) and the *quaestor*, while on the other hand officials of the imperial *cubiculum* or bedchamber surrounded the emperor. This latter group was mostly made up of eunuchs that fulfilled positions such as chamberlain, and the most important post of *praepositus sacri cubiculi* (superintendent of the royal bedchamber).[82] The power of eunuchs will be elaborately discussed in the next chapter, however, and thus will be predominantly passed over in this section.

A list of officials put together around 400 is for the most part preserved. The *Notitia Dignitatum* or Registry of Dignitaries makes note of all ancient Roman civil and military posts. It does not state the names of office-holders but rather presents an overview of the various offices and what sort of subordinates they had. At this time, each of the major officials of the empire was distinguished and graded by one of three titles; namely *illustris* ('illustrious'), *speciabilis* ('worshipful'), and *clarissimus* ('right honourable'), with the first of these representing the highest rank.[83] Instead of simply discussing the (most important) offices as they are presented in the registry, it might instead be convenient to take Barnish e.a. into account and to distinguish between palatine ministries and ministries that existed outside of the palatine system.

The first great palatine ministry was perhaps also the most important in the political sense: the *magister officiorum* (master of the offices). He was of the illustrious rank and controlled a vast number of departments as well as maintaining a very sizeable staff.[84] Among the palace staffs that he was superior to were the *sacra scrinia* of the chancellery, which managed both legal affairs and general imperial communications, and the *scholae* of imperial bodyguards. He also handled the arms factories, which were politically sensitive roles. How deep the control of the *magister officiorum* reached with regard to these various departments is obscure, however. The chief source of his power lay within his dominance of communications with the emperor himself; he supplied foreign envoys with interpreters, coordinated audiences, and oversaw both the couriers

[82] Ibid. 194.

[83] W. Fairley, *Notitia Dignitatum or Register of Dignitaries*, in *Translations and Reprints from Original Sources of European History*, Vol. VI:4 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1899) 5.

[84] Fairley, *Notitia Dignitatum*, 11.

and the public post inspectors (the *agentes in rebus* or *magistriani*). These *agentes* could occasionally be seen to act as spies or informers that operated in the provinces, and the highest ranking members of this group headed the staffs of prefects, diocesan vicars and certain generals and provincial governors. Seeing that the *agentes* were in a prominent position to control information, but were still controlled by the *magister officiorum*, the latter was thus able to spread his net wide and gather information on a broad range of official activity. This powerful position was somewhat mediated by a corps of notaries that were independent and socially and politically prestigious.[85] Priscus of Panium, in describing the embassy to Attila the Hun in 449, makes note of the then active master of offices Martialis. The eunuch chamberlain Chrysaphius, who Priscus accuses of having designed a plot to assassinate Attila, informed Theodosius of his plans, who then saw it fit to summon Martialis. Priscus states that Martialis, 'being in charge of the messengers, interpreters and the imperial bodyguard, is informed of all the emperor's plans.'[86] Theodosius then discussed Chrysaphius' proposal of this plan with Martialis and decided on the particular envoys they wanted to send to Attila (Vigilas and Maximinus). (Priscus fr. 11.2).

A *magister officiorum* who is well-attested during the reign of Theodosius II is Helion. He served in this function for thirteen years, from 414-27. Philostorgius records the episode in which after the death of western Roman emperor Honorius in 423 the throne was usurped by John. Theodosius intervened and dispatched Ardabur, master of the soldiery, and his son Aspar along with an army to rid the empire of this turbulent figure. In the meantime, Theodosius sent Helion to Thessalonika to 'place the robes of a Caesar on Valentinian.' When, two years later, John was eventually expelled and killed, Helion, ' the master of the offices and patrician, went to Rome and, when all had assembled there, he placed the robe of Emperor upon Valentinian, who was in his seventh year.' (Philostorgius 43.1). Helion was moreover part of important embassies such as the one sent to the Persian king Vahram in (according to Theophanes) 428/9. Theophanes states that Helion, who had become patrician between October 424 and October 425, was held in high esteem by Theodosius and successfully treated for peace together with Anatolius, the *magister militum per Orientem*, after which the persecutions against Christians ceased. (Theoph. AM 5921).

A childhood friend of Theodosius', Paulinus, who joined him in his studies after the death of Arcadius, forms a good example of power emerging directly from close personal contact with the emperor. John Malalas describes how Theodosius

[85] Whole paragraph: Barnish e.a., 'Government and administration', 172.

[86] Blockley, *East Roman foreign policy*, 136.

> '… advanced Paulinus through all the ranks, since he was his friend, matchmaker for his marriage and their table companion. After that he promoted him to magister, and so his fortunes increased. Since he had free access to the emperor Theodosius, as his bestman at his marriage, Paulinus also often visited the Augusta Eudokia, as magister.' John Malalas *Chron.* 14.3.

Paulinus was in office as *magister officiorum* until he fell from favour. He thus achieved formal power by means of informal power – namely his personal association with the emperor – which elevated him to a position where he could exercise both. It is certainly imaginable that figures such as this Paulinus were very influential indeed, retaining both direct access to the emperor as well as having the means to put that access to good use if he wished to do so.

Another top palatine minister and *illustris* was the quaestor of the sacred palace. The *Notitia Dignitatum* shows him as being in control of both the formulation of laws and petitions and mentions that he does not have a staff but that he can have assistants from the bureaus as he may wish.[87] The quaestor acted as legal adviser to the emperor. The importance of this legal role was well-established: for the creation of the *Codex Theodosianus* a group of them was drawn from the eastern court's increasingly professional bureaucracy. The Codex was published in 438, but a Code Commission had already started its development as early as 429. The quaestors were pivotal in putting together the Code, but their effect on the actual legal content was most likely limited, seeing that officials made proposals with regard to their own spheres of administration.[88] However, the quaestor's power was not limited to the general drafting of laws; he also functioned as the emperor's mouthpiece and conveyed petitions to the emperor as well as drafting letters, proclamations, replies and rescripts. Specific departments and ministers supplied the suggestions for governmental reforms. The quaestor himself had little power over this system; he only transformed the proposals of others into legal shape. His power over non-administrative legislation was substantial, however, and it is most likely so that he stood within close proximity of the emperor and enjoyed constant access to him.[89]

The other two great palatine ministries were the *comes sacrarum largitionum* (count of the sacred largesses) and the *comes rerum privatarum* (count of the private estates). They held the rank of *illustris* and their office provided them with membership of the senate. Also, they were part of the emperor's personal entourage. Both of these ministers oversaw the efforts of their provincial subordinates, in particular where it

[87] Fairley, *Notitia Dignitatum*, 12.

[88] Harries, J. and Wood, I. (eds.), *The Theodosian Code: Studies in the Imperial Law of Late Antiquity* (London 1993). 7-8.

[89] Barnish e.a., 'Government and administration', 173.

concerned the collection of revenue, by sending off *palatini* (staff) from their central *scrinia* each year. The *comes sacrarum largitionum* was responsible for both the palatine civil and military services and was accountable for the collection of revenues that were due in forms of textiles and either precious or semi-precious metals, and saw to it that these were paid out in uniforms, plate and coin.[90] He headed a large department and controlled the counts of the largesses in each separate diocese, and for example the accountants of the general tribute and the procurators of the mints. What is more, a large staff was at his disposal, consisting of primarily the chief clerks of nine separate bureaus as well as a few other chief clerks. These bureaus included that of fixed taxes, that of records, that of accounts and that of silver. The *Notitia Digniatum* moreover states that the *comes sacrarum largitionum* 'is entitled to as many post warrants in the year as his occasions may require.'[91] Barnish explains that this count managed an administrator with a substantial staff as well as jurisdiction in fiscal matters in each diocesan group of provinces. He was also in control of the provincial depots, mines, customs offices, various state factories and a departmental transport service.[92] The *comes sacrarum largitionum* was thus certainly a powerful office-holder that stood among the top of the ranks in the fifth century. In this position he was well-placed to bring forth *suggestiones*, of which he was undoubtedly an important source.[93]

The *comes rerum privatarum* managed the imperial estates, keeping track of the administration of lands that had been confiscated by the emperor or bequeathed to him as well as property that had been rendered ownerless after having become abandoned or heirless (*bona vacantia* or *caduca*).[94] Like the *comes sacrarum largitionum*, he was also authorised to obtain as many post-warrants as he deemed necessary.[95] He oversaw the accountants of the private domain, the private baggage train, the provost of the herds and stables, and the procurators of the pastures. His staff consisted of chief clerks of various tax departments and the chief clerk of the whole staff.[96] As Barnish describes it, the organisation within this office was similar to that of the *comes sacrarum largitionum*, albeit on a smaller scale. It consisted of five sub-departments to be found at the court, administrators that operated on the diocesan and provincial level, and officials that controlled estates, be they individual estates or groupings of estates (*domus divinae*). However, the *comes rerum privatarum* was liable to lose control of the *domus divinae*: by 414, the *praepositus sacri cubiculi* (the eunuch grand chamberlain of the emperor) had

[90] Ibid. 171.
[91] Fairley, *Notitia Dignitatum*, 12-13.
[92] Barnish e.a., 'Government and administration', 171.
[93] Ibid. 171.
[94] Ibid. 171.
[95] Fairley, *Notitia Dignitatum*, 14.
[96] Ibid. 14.

taken over the administration of the immense Cappadocian *domus divina*.[97] What goes for both of these *comes* is the following. A man with such a large staff and influence in various areas and departments was in a good position to exercise power in general – whether this was translated into direct influence on matters of policy is hard to tell, but it would appear logical that he at least had good access to information, and it is clear that both the *comes sacrarum largitionum* and the *comes rerum privatarum* belonged to the emperor's personal retinue, indicating access to the emperor's person as well.

A high official who according to Barnish' classification was located outside the palatine system – in theory, at least, and occasionally also in practice – was the praetorian prefect. His power lay in his position as imperial deputy and judicial functionary, maintaining the right to put out edicts and receiving extensive honours. These responsibilities almost matched those of the emperor himself.[98] The *Notitia Dignitatum* shows the praetorian prefect of the east as an *illustris* who headed a substantial amount of important dioceses, among which the East, Egypt, Asia, Pontus and Thrace.[99] His elaborate staff consisted of officials that were the heads of various departments - to name a few: the chief of staff, the keeper of the records, the receivers of taxes and the curator of correspondence. The praetorian prefect was in a position to issue the post-warrants himself instead of receiving them, unlike other officials whose use of this service was limited.[100] This system deserves some attention; Fairley describes this *cursus publicus* as a highly effective and well-organised post-service, used by government officials, through which government dispatches were transmitted. It was headed by the praetorian prefect.[101] What is more, the praetorian prefects were the principal source of *suggestiones* (proposals) that embodied the most usual way in which information was presented to the emperor from below that could inspire imperial decisions. Seeing that how, in the end, they constituted the authorities to which all the provincial governors turned, the praetorian prefects occupied a prominent position within this chain through which proposals were conveyed.[102] The fact that he was effectively in control of many departments meant that the praetorian prefect had good access to information and to routes of influence, but in what precise way he could influence the emperor himself is more difficult to ascertain. What we can assume, however, is that with responsibilities like these the praetorian prefect most likely had a hand in determining at least certain aspects of policy, whether that happened through the emperor himself or not.

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[97] Barnish e.a., 'Government and administration', 171-172.
[98] Ibid. 174.
[99] Fairley, *Notitia Dignitatum*, 6.
[100] Ibid. 6-7.
[101] Ibid. 7.
[102] Harries and Wood, *The Theodosian Code*, 8.

The image that emerges from the sources regarding Anthemius, who was praetorian prefect of the east from 405-414, most certainly supports the assumption that the office could entail vast power. However, considering that Theodosius II was still very young in the years that Anthemius was active, it cannot be discounted that the reason that Anthemius became so powerful was because there was room for him to do just that. In a way he almost circumvented having to influence the emperor; the management of public affairs was entrusted to him instead of young Theodosius after the death of Arcadius (see Socrates Scholasticus *HE* VII.1). Nonetheless, Anthemius had been in office since before the death of Arcadius and thus must have been in good standing with Theodosius' father, already making a name for himself. It appears that he was part of a coalition that replaced the ineffective and corrupt governing circle steered by the empress Eudoxia that was unable to deal with the unrest created by the Johannite supporters of John Crysostom. Anthemius and his clique succeeded in both putting a stop to the Johannite disorders as well as securing lasting peaceful relations with Persia.[103] After the death of Arcadius, imperial laws were addressed specifically to him in vast numbers: forty are attested for in the period 408-414.[104] Socrates describes how Anthemius administered the government of the east in Theodosius' place, stating that 'The management of public affairs was therefore entrusted to Anthemius the praetorian prefect (…) [who] seldom did anything unadvisedly, but consulted with the most judicious of his friends respecting all practical matters…' (Soc. *HE* VII. 1). Unfortunately for him, Anthemius was ousted by the Augusta Pulcheria in 414, who overturned his pragmatic and broad-based regime and instead placed the focus on the well-being of the state relying on orthodox Christian piety and its virtues.[105]

Apart from these various civil officials that operated from within the capital there was also the illustrious *magister militum* or master of the soldiery of the east, who was in command of the armies of the eastern empire.[106] Army commanders appear to have had power regarding the determination of foreign policy precisely because they were not constantly present at the court, but were out in the field and were thus not always directly contactable by the government. The central government only controlled foreign policy in a general way, except in extraordinary circumstances.[107] Because in the fifth century emperors no longer commanded their armies in person, there was no direct contact between the *magistri militum* and the emperor in the field itself. They thus attained power by delegation rather than maintaining an on-the-spot influence on the

[103] Roger C. Blockley, 'The dynasty of Theodosius' in: Av. Cameron and Peter Garnsey (eds.), *Cambridge Ancient History Volume 13: The Late Empire, AD 337–425* (Cambridge 1997) 123.
[104] Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire*, 226.
[105] Blockley, 'The dynasty of Theodosius', 134.
[106] Fairley, *Notitia Dignitatum*, 8-10.
[107] Blockley, *East Roman foreign policy*, 130.

emperor. It is fathomable, however, that these commanders could still be in close personal contact with the emperor when they were at the capital. Ardabur and his son Aspar were high in Theodosius' regard and their efforts secured their family prominent positions throughout his reign. They were entrusted with many an important campaign and maintained a high success rate, playing a pivotal role in for example the removal of the usurper John who claimed the western Roman throne in 423. McCormick states that the *magistri militum* formed a powerful social and professional group that held extraordinary power down to the 470s. He sees these figures operating as powers behind the throne, and describes how they arranged marriage alliances with Roman families as well as enveloping themselves in the ceremonial privileges that corresponded with their position in public life.[108]

The church was also represented at the late antique court. The bishops of Constantinople were often seen at court, not only in order to tend to the sacred functions demanded by the court life but also present visiting prelates to the emperor. They moreover played a role in the election of emperors, taking part in the debates surrounding it.[109] However, it was not until the sixth century that a permanent ambassador (the *apocrisarius*) was placed at the court in Constantinople by the Roman See.[110] During Theodosius II's reign the church was thus still in the process of strengthening their foothold at the court. There are the two religious Councils to take into account, though.

Alternatively, there was also the entire household staff that was in some way or another connected to the emperor and his surroundings. Among this staff was a body of eunuch officials that served as chamberlains and the most prominent post within this field in fact offered very real possibilities to achieve power and influence. This post was that of the *Praepositus Sacri Cubiculi* or the Superintendent of the Sacred Bedchamber. Eunuchs have been accredited a chapter of their own, however, and will thus not be dealt with at this very moment, but it is important to know that these figures were also part of the courtly environment.

The bureaucracy was quite elaborate indeed, and one inevitably wonders whether the emperor personally monitored and regulated matters. The whole point of having an effective administration in place is that the emperor could delegate to a large extent. It can be expected that the high officials maintained a degree of independence; however, the point of interest lays in the line that is drawn between major decisions that were taken by the emperor in consultation with the consistory and those decisions that were left to the bureaucratic officials themselves. Political decisions were to a large extent

[108] McCormick, 'Emperor and court', 145-146.

[109] Ibid. 155.

[110] Pierre Blet, 'Nuncio', in: Philippe Levillain (ed.), *The Papacy. An Encyclopedia. Volume 2* (New York, London 2002) 1058.

made in passive mode, by way of the responses sent by the central authorities to petitions and letters that had been addressed by individuals or communities and occasionally through provincial governors or other officials.[111]

Suggestiones

So how did decision-making actually proceed through the official bureaucratic system? First off, the impetus for topics on which to make decisions on must be located. The system of *suggestiones* has already been mentioned briefly in the section above, but will now be described in more detail. It constituted the way in which information and proposals were conveyed to the emperor from lower down in the system, and after reaching the emperor decisions had to be made regarding these proposals. They could come from outside the palace from for example provincial officials but also from within the palace itself, from department heads who wished to procure benefits or reorganise their staffs.[112] As pointed out above, the praetorian prefects were a prolific source of *suggestiones* and were thus an important link in this chain. One can imagine the topic of such proposals will have varied greatly from relatively minor or private matters to matters more broadly relevant to the politics of the empire.

Harries and Wood describe the process as follows. A *suggestio* that reached the palace formed the first phase in the drafting of a constitution, in the process of which the proposal was discussed by the consistory as well as the top palatine ministers and, after 446, also by the senate. The quaestor was consequently responsible for the actual draft of the constitution; this would have resulted from a proposal the nature of which could have altered to a considerable degree in the course of the discussions and drafting.[113] No mention is made of the exact role of the emperor in these matters, however, though it would appear logical that he played a crucial role where it concerned big decisions. This is indeed what Fergus Millar argues: he states that when a major decision had to be made, the opinions of all the important officials and other individuals (such as occasionally the emperor's sister and wife) were canvassed, and that the emperor had the final word.[114] Even so, Theodosius II, becoming emperor at such a young age, did not have an easy time in taking strong personal control of the government. He delegated to a large degree and thus empowered his officials, perhaps to an exceptional extent.[115] With the senate, consistory and the top officials being canvassed in these situations, as well as the quaestors and praetorian prefects playing specifically important roles, decision-

[111] Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire*, 174-175.

[112] Harries and Wood, *The Theodosian Code*, 10.

[113] Ibid. 8-9.

[114] Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire*, 204.

[115] Harries and Wood, *The Theodosian Code*, 9.

making following from *suggestiones* thus appears as a broad-based process in which there was no clear front runner.

There is one part of Theodosius' reign for which it is possible to uncover more detailed information regarding the emperor's inner circle of power, however. This will serve as a small case-study that will demonstrate which offices could lead to what sort of power, and show which individuals managed to reach the very top at the latter part of Theodosius' reign. It will illustrate deeper lines of power, even if only for a part of Theodosius' rule. With the help of the *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* (*ACO* II) recorded for the first session of the Council of Chalcedon, which was held on the eight of October 451 and thus fell shortly after the death of Theodosius II, Fergus Miller has managed to compile a list of individuals that were very involved indeed during the latter end of Theodosius' reign. He argues that despite the change in emperor it is not very likely that the core circle had changed in a radical fashion. Millar supports this by demonstrating that this group corresponded with the various addressees of letters sent by Theodoret in the 440s, the names recorded by Priscus in his account of the negotiations with Attila, and the names that were shouted by the crowd in Edessa in the spring of 449.[116] The full list consists of seven *archontes* (office-holders) and twelve members of the senate; this latter group were all ex-office holders.[117] The *archontes* were Anatolius, Palladius, Tatianus, Vincomalus, Martialis, Sporacius, and Genethlius. The senators were Florentius, Senator, Nomus, Protogenes, Zoilus, Theodorus, Apollodorus, Romanus, another Theodorus, Constantius, Artaxes, and Eulogius.[118] Regarding some of these individuals more is known from other sources; they will thus be examined in more detail. It will moreover be interesting to find out precisely which persons from this list were already in office under Theodosius and which were new men that thus fall outside of our objective.

The official named at the very top of the list in the *Acta* is Anatolius. The *Acta* announces him as 'the most magnificent and most glorious Stratēlates (Magister Militum) and ex-consul and patricius'.[119] He was *magister utriusque militae per Orientem* from 433 to approximately 446, usually referred to as *magister militum* or *magister militum per Orientem*, consul in 440, *magister utriusque militae* from 450-451, and patricius from 447 until 451. He helped negotiate no less than three peace treaties with the Huns (in 443, 448 and 450) and was thus clearly a man who Theodosius entrusted with significant responsibilities. A letter sent to him no later than 433 depicts how Paul, bishop of Emesa,

[116] Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire*, 197-200.

[117] Ibid. 198. See Ibid. 198-199 for a translation of part of the *Acta* in which these persons are named.

[118] See ibid. 198-199 for the offices and titles.

[119] Ibid. 198.

approached Anatolius about church unity; this could hint at a possible influence on certain aspects of policy. As *magister militum*, however, he was often away from the court and would have exercised power by delegation rather than by ways of influencing the emperor. When he was present at court, though, he was certainly recognized by his contemporaries as a man of means; Theodoret of Cyrrhus, for example, sent him several letters in 448 or 449 in which he was asked to aid Theodoret in getting rid of the restrictions that had been placed on his movements (Theod. *Ep.* 79, 92, 111, 119).[120]

Two important individuals, Nomus, who was named in the *Acta*, and the eunuch *spatharius* Chrysaphius, were approached by Dioscorus around 444 when he attempted to pursue Athanasius. Athanasius was the nephew of Cyril of Alexandria – bishop there from 412 until 444 – and he and his family were oppressed and cheated by Dioscorus, who had succeeded Cyril. Athanasius and his brother consequently fled to Constantinople to seek protection, but Dioscorus tried to forestall them by contacting Nomus and Chrysaphius. The brothers were thrown into prison and required to pay a large amount of money to get out.[121] They were clearly two leading personalities present at the capital that were in a position to help him. It is interesting to state that Athanasius also tried to secure their support, but it appears that Dioscorus proved more convincing.[122] Chrysaphius, the almost infamously powerful eunuch *spatharius* and *praepositus sacri cubicula*, will be discussed in chapter four. Nomus was the *magister officiorum* of the East from 443-446 as well consul in the year 445, and a patricius to boot. A law recorded in the Theodosian *Novellae* (24[a]) gave him new responsibilities concerning *agri limitanei* in Thrace, Illyricum, Oriens, Pontica, Egypt, Thebais and Libya, demonstrating that he must have been a powerful figure in the government.[123] A letter by Theodoret (*Ep.* 58), probably written in 445, moreover depicts him as an influential adviser of Theodosius. Theodoret wrote to the consul Nomus and told him: '*Τῶν μὲν γὰρ ὑμετέρων φρενῶν εἰδὼς ἐξηρτημένα τὰ πράγματα, καὶ τὰς κοινὰς ὑμῖν ἐπικειμένας φροντίδας ὁρῶν*', which translates to 'With the knowledge namely that all affairs depend on your judgment and with the observation that matters regarding the public case concern you'[124]. It is hard to determine whether this central position was the effect of his being consul in that particular year or whether it was because of his general importance and use to the emperor. It is plausible that the truth lies in the combination of the two. Evidence to support his all-round influence can be seen in the fact that in 449 he convinced Theodosius to summon the Second Council of Ephesus together with his friend

[120] See Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 84-86 for the information on Anatolius used in this paragraph.
[121] Ibid. 192, 196, 200.
[122] Ibid. 196.
[123] For Nomus see Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 785-786.
[124] This translation owes thanks to Michel Buijs.

Chrysaphius. Nomus was also part of the envoy sent to Attila the Hun in 450, along with Anatolius.[125] This is thus very tangible evidence of his influence on the emperor even in very large matters: Nomus was clearly a very important man who had the emperor's ear.

Martialis, who was also named in the *Acta* of Chalcedon, was *magister officiorum* at least in 449, the year in which Priscus records him as being informed by the emperor of Chrysaphius' plan to assassinate Attila which has been described above already. At the time an enquiry was made into Eutyches' complaints on April 27, 449, Martialis was present at this event in Constantinople. When he took part in four sessions of the Counci of Chalcedon he was no longer in office.[126] It is telling that he was still influential without it. Sporacius was *comes* in the east after late 448 and was *comes domesticorum peditum* of the east from 450 until 451, and thus indeed served under Theodosius and remained in office after the emperor's death.[127] Florentius had a long career during the reign of Theodosius II that is quite well-documented: what we know is that he was prefect of the city of Constantinople in 422, praetorian prefect of the east both from 428-429 and from 438-439, as well as consul in 429, and was made patricius between 444 and 448. He may well have held some other prefectures. Theodosius appointed him in 448 to take part in the enquiry that took place in Constantinople in which the views of Eutyches were investigated and moreover attended the enquiry into Eutyches' trial in 449.[128] Florentius was thus seemingly a man whose worth was known to the emperor and recognised as such. Senator was in office as consul of the east in 436 and patricius from around 446/7-451. According to Priscus (fr.4) he was sent on an embassy to Attila, maybe in 442/443, but nothing else is known about this embassy. Senator was also part of the high secular dignitaries whose names were shouted out at Edessa on 14 April 449.[129] Theodoret (for example *Ep.* 44 and 93) depicts him as an important character who could offer help in strenuous situations. Protogenes was praetorian prefect of the east in 448-449, and was also approached by Theodoret, who, when he was accused of heresy, asks Protogenes to make sure he is judged in a fair manner (Theod. *Ep*. 94). Zoilus was governor of Syria before 433 and praetorian prefect of the east at least in 444, and Theodorus was also in office in 444, namely as praetorian prefect of Illyricum.[130] Apollodorus was *comes consistorianus* around 435-438; he was part of the second commission on the Theodosian Code and is mentioned in the *Acta* of Chalcedon as ex-quaestor of the sacred palace in 451.[131] Constantinus was in office as praetorian prefect of the east three

[125] Ibid. 785.
[126] Ibid. 729.
[127] Ibid. 1026.
[128] Ibid. 478-479.
[129] Ibid. 990-991.
[130] Ibid. 1089, 1204.
[131] Ibid. 120.

different times: in 447, 456, and in 459, as well as becoming consul in 457 and patricius after this time.[132] Though he began his career under Theodosius, it appears to have taken off during Marcian's reign. The final person on the list of the *Acta* who is actually visibly in office during Theodosius' reign is the *cubicularius* Romanus, who was one of the influential figures to whom the agent of Cyril of Alexandria offered a bribe in 431 in Constantinople. He was *praepositus sacri cubiculi* before 451, but it is not known when exactly he fulfilled this office.[133]

Regarding the following persons mentioned in the *Acta* no evidence exists of them being active in high office before the death of Theodosius[134]: Palladius (praetorian prefect of the east from after October 11 450 until 455); Tatianus (made prefect of the city of Constantinople by Marcian in 450, previously governor of Caria); Vincomalus (*magister officiorum* of the east from 451-452, consul in 453); and Genethlius (*comes rerum privatarum* from after October 11 450 until 451). For the two remaining persons listed in the *Acta* that have not yet been mentioned it is not known whether they came into their offices during the reign of Theodosius or not. A second Theodorus was *officialis* of the praetorian prefect of the east before 451, but it is not known when exactly.[135] Eulogius was praetorian prefect of the east before October 451, but it is not specified when he started this office.[136] All in all it appears that a lot of the dignitaries present at the Council of Chalcedon who had already come to power under Theodosius had at some point held the office of praetorian prefect. This speaks to the possibilities the office brought with it. Moreover, many of them served a tenure as consul. Two notable heavyweights were not praetorian prefects, however: Anatolius, the *magister militum*, and Nomus, *magister officiorum* proved how favourable a position their offices could lead to.

Another interesting piece of information that the *Acta* present us with is that the fact that a person's span of office had ended did not necessarily entail that he had also lost his influence, which is visible in the way the twelve senators were listed along with their previous offices. Their former titles remained connected to their names, merely preceded by 'ex-', but contemporaries clearly imagined the emperor's inner circle to consist not only of current office holders but also of former office holders.[137] Theodoret, upon writing to Antiochus, who was consul in 431, said to him: 'You have laid aside the cares of your very important government, but your fame flourishes among all.' (Theod. *Ep.* 95). Theodoret then proceeds to request help from Antiochus. To what extent these

[132] Ibid. 317-318.

[133] Ibid. 947.

[134] According to the information found throughout Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*.

[135] Ibid. 1090.

[136] Ibid. 419.

[137] Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire*, 196.

figures retained the resources to put their envisioned influence to good use is hard to tell, though. What it does hint at is the way in which formal and informal power were connected and combined. Seemingly losing one's formal power did not automatically result in a loss of informal power, and when there were situations in which figures that were ex-office holders that were still perceived to be the go-to persons when one needed to achieve something, it speaks to the strength and tenacity of this informal influence indeed.

The officials identified as Theodosius' core circle during the latter part of his reign were the persons who those outside of the court could approach for help in greatly varying matters, from personal ones to issues concerning their surroundings or to church matters. Those writing to them clearly envisioned them as being in a position in which they could personally beseech or influence the emperor. Nomus, for example, in convincing the emperor to summon the Second Council of Ephesus certainly had an impact on policy and decision-making. After having explored the role of high officials in the process of decision-making, it is now time to focus more fully on the informal aspect of power - which has had a brief introduction in this chapter – and investigate the position of palace eunuchs.

4. Eunuchs

The functions of eunuchs

Throughout various societies in world history eunuchs played important roles. In some cases their role was limited to for instance functioning in religious cults such as the cult of Cybele, but often eunuchs were found at the ruler's court, where they could be involved in politics. Eunuchs were men that had been castrated usually at a young age, as a result of which their hormonal development was significantly disturbed. If a eunuch was indeed castrated at a young age his voice did not break and thus remained more high-pitched. Furthermore, castrati had a non-muscular build and were prone to potential weight-gain and a decreased amount of body hair. This marked them as outsiders from society and more often than not eunuchs were depicted negatively by the historical sources. Eunuchs were often slaves or criminal offenders that were punished by castration, but in rare cases self-castration could occur, such as undertaken by the followers of the cult of the Syrian goddess Atargatis. Their outsider status could be enhanced by their actually being foreigners, which was the norm in the Roman Empire, for instance, but at the same time this did not have to be the case. In China, where eunuchs began to become prominent since the Tang dynasty and eventually made up a third of the administrative hierarchy during the Ming dynasty[138], eunuchs were mostly natives. Moreover, during the Late Roman Empire the balance began to shift from eunuchs with mostly foreign origins to their being increasingly 'home-grown' during the Byzantine Empire.[139]

The consequences of the isolated position of these eunuchs made them excellently suited for imperial service: they could not conceive children and thus had no personal dynastic interests to advance; they were outcasts from society and had to rely on the emperor they served for protection; and they could be trusted with access to the most private areas of the court, even close to royal women, because they could not possibly pose a threat to the royal succession. Already in Achaemenid Persia (559-331 BC) eunuchs were an institutionalised element of the royal court, serving in both the public and the private apartments of the king and also serving the royal women. Here eunuchs rose to importance because of their ability to transcend the boundaries of access that were present throughout the palace; they functioned as intermediaries between for example the king and the royal women and could be employed by both to gather

[138] Shih-shan Henry Tsai, 'Eunuch power in Imperial China' in: Tougher, S. (ed.), *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond* (London 2002) 221-234.

[139] Shaun Tougher, 'In or out? Origins of court eunuchs' in: Tougher, S. (ed.), *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond* (London 2002) 143-160.

information and relay messages and gossip back and forth between the outer and inner courts.[140]

Eunuchs also had a recognised place in the Roman Empire, functioning at the imperial court already from the Principate onwards within the group of slaves and freedmen. They gradually evolved into prominent chamberlains. The institutionalisation of court eunuchs with the office of *praepositus sacri cubiculi* started in the fourth century, presumably at the courtly reforms of Diocletian and Constantine.[141] The institution of the 'sacred bedchamber', run almost exclusively by eunuchs, was created around this time. *Cubicularii* or chamberlains were in the close personal service of the emperor and they were ranked according to importance. The *comites sacrae vestis* or keepers of the wardrobe were among the most junior officials, whereas the *comites domorum* oversaw the income meant for the bedchamber. More senior figures were the *spatharius* or captain of the bodyguard and the *sacellarius* or keeper of the privy purse. Above them stood the *castrensis* or the majordomo of the palace, a *spectabilis* or noteworthy who also had some accountants, assistants and secretaries below him. He concerned himself with the technical management of the palace.[142] Near the top was the *primicerius sacri cubiculi* or senior eunuch – also a *spectabilis* - and above him still stood the highly important *praepositus sacri cubiculi* or grand chamberlain. In 422 Theodosius elevated the *praepositi* to the same rank (*illustris*)as the *magistri militum* and the praetorian and urban prefects.[143]

The office of *praepositus sacri cubiculi* (PSC) deserves more detailed attention. His primary function entailed overseeing the protection and security of the emperor in his *cubiculum*, which technically meant the bedroom, but is understood to have encompassed the inner part of the palace and the ruler's private quarters that were the domain of the *cubicularii.*[144] This meant that he operated within direct close proximity of the emperor, who was isolated from the rest of the palace by court ceremonial. This proximity formed the basis of the PSC's power.[145] In this position within the inner court and guardian of the private quarters of the emperor, he controlled informal access to the emperor, as opposed to the formal access that had to be negotiated via the *magister officiorum*. The existence of this informal route was known to outsiders and thus part of

[140] Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, 'Eunuchs and the royal harem in Achaemenid Persia' in: Tougher, S. (ed.), *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond* (London 2002) 19-50.
[141] H. Scholten, *Der Eunuch in Kaisernähe. Zur politischen und sociazlen Bedeutung des praepositus sacri cubiculi im 4. und 5. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Frankfurt am Main 1995) 4.
[142] Scholten, *Der Eunuch in Kaisernähe,* 68-69.
[143] Cilliers, Louise and François P. Retief, 'The eunuchs of early Byzantium.' in: Scholia N. S. 13 (2004) 108-109, 113.
[144] Scholten, *Der Eunuch in Kaisernähe*, 73.
[145] Ibid. 7.

the institutionalised system.[146] Obviously this imbued the PSC with significant power; he functioned as intermediary between the emperor in his private sphere and the outside world, transcending boundaries of the palace that were otherwise not freely crossable. What further enhanced this role was the fact that palace eunuchs could be employed as messengers and used to handle sensitive situations. This placed them in an excellent position to control the flow of information both to and from the emperor and opened other avenues to power that lay within the shadowy areas of courtly intrigue and schemes. As Duindam has explained with regard to the seventeenth- and eighteenth century French court, 'schemes and intrigues defined life at court. The splendid isolation of decision-making was imaginary: politics were determined to no insignificant degree in the corridors of the court.'[147] It is of course very imaginable that this was also the case at the late antique court, and if so, the eunuchs and in particular the eunuch *praepositi* were suitably placed to take advantage of this if they wished to do so and if they played their cards right.

The *praepositus sacri cubiculi* was moreover involved in religious politics. Firstly, the PSC was the approachable partner at court for religious factions. Chamberlains of both Theodosius II and the *augusta* Pulcheria functioned as intermediaries between various religious factions and counted as advisors who could influence the religious convictions of the reigning figures. This influence was the result of the PSC being in a position of trust and maintaining a close personal relationship with the emperor.[148] Secondly, the PSC was active in the *consistorium*, not as an official member but as the personal advisor of the emperor himself. He was thus entitled to take part in the meetings that were held and because he fulfilled this role he moreover had the opportunity to be involved in synods. Rather than this involvement in the synods being the result of active participation, it stemmed from the PSC's direct involvements in the meetings that preceded them.[149] Thirdly, the *praepositus sacri cubiculi* represented imperial religious politics and belonged to the commission that was present at court that discussed church-political issues.[150]

Naturally, the fact that the power of the PSC originated in his personal bond with- and proximity to the emperor also meant that he was wholly dependent upon the latter's favour for this power. He would have had to assess the emperor's attitudes to important matters and had to hop on the same political bandwagon as much as possible in order to keep his position secure. The PSC's position as intermediary figure in control of access

[146] Ibid. 8, 76.

[147] Duindam, *Myths of power*, 92-93.

[148] Scholten, *Der Eunuch in Kaisernähe*, 105, 117.

[149] Ibid. 107, 114-117.

[150] Ibid. 97, 114.

should in theory have allowed him to get a good feeling for the political currents that flowed through the court.

Helga Scholten, in her study of eunuchs in proximity to the emperor and in particular of the political importance of the *praepositus sacri cubiculi* in the fourth and fifth centuries AD, compares the position of the PSC to that of a chief secretary in a modern bureaucratic organisation. For this metaphor she employs a study by sociologists Miller and Form, who portray a field of 'informal communication network' of a radio station, in which the position of chief secretary takes up an important coordinate. She spreads up-to-date information and contacts on both the boss's floor and the lower layers. These sort of informal contact persons also exists and are important within modern democracies.[151]

Keith Hopkins provides an enlightening analysis of the political power of eunuchs in the eastern roman empire in his 1987 study.[152] He identifies proximity to the emperor as opening up the greatest possibilities to attain power; the palace eunuchs operated within the immediate vicinity of the emperor, which is what formed the firm basis of their power. Moreover, because of their closeness to the emperor, eunuchs functioned as intermediaries hired to further the interests of those who wanted favours of the emperor. In this process the eunuchs secured privileges for themselves by exacting commissions from everyone appointed to public office and demanding fees for audiences. They thus became very wealthy, which further reinforced their power. Their proximity to the emperor also led to eunuchs being sent on special missions, which allowed them to exercise power outside of the palace, to which their sphere of influence was usually limited.

In the traditional view, weak emperors succumbed to the influence of eunuchs (and indeed, this is the image that prevails concerning the reign of Theodosius II), who exercised their power by means of subtle flattery and insinuations. Hopkins argues, however, that because the power held by eunuchs was so consistent, there is more to it than the weaknesses and virtues of individual emperors. The continuing position of power of the eunuchs must in fact be seen as a socio-political institution in its own right, which had a place within the general power structure. Hopkins identifies a change in this power structure. After Diocletian and Constantine's reforms the emperor now controlled entry into the upper orders, but for the execution of the major governmental tasks he had to rely on his chief officers; any lengthening of their services would increase the threat they could pose to the emperor's survival, though. The emperor thus became isolated, being deified and excluding the executive ministers from intimacy. Hopkins explains that eunuchs formed the key in bridging the gap between the now isolated emperor and the

[151] Ibid. 87.

[152] K. Hopkins, 'The political power of Eunuchs', in: id., Conquerors and Slaves (Cambridge 1978) 197-242.

rest of the court, meeting the emperor's distinct need for human information and contact. Their authority also served to supervise the aristocracy. To the emperor, the eunuchs posed less of a threat, since they were entirely dependent on his favour and there was no one to inherit their wealth or position.[153] It will be interesting to see how this theory holds up for eunuchs during the reign of Theodosius II.

Eunuchs under Theodosius II

During the reign of Theodosius II a number of powerful eunuchs are to be found; the source and nature of their influence – and whether these figures could influence the emperor's decision-making - is what will be investigated here. Two fragments that survive of Priscus of Panium's work describe his view on the power eunuchs held over Theodosius. It must be noted that Priscus, who was a contemporary fifth century diplomat and historian, was very biased when it concerned the eunuch Chrysaphius in particular. Chrysaphius constituted the object of his greatest hatred and is shown in a very negative way, being hungry for power and gold and stopping at nothing to achieve these goals.[154] Keeping this in mind, the fragments remain valuable for their information when viewed with a critical eye. First off, Priscus states that

> Everything he [Theodosius] did was under the influence of eunuchs, and they brought affairs to such a level of absurdity that, to put it briefly, they distracted Theodosius, as children are distracted with toys, and allowed him to do nothing at all worthy of record, although he had a good character. Even when he had reached fifty years of age they persuaded him to persist in certain low-class pursuits and in wild-beast hunting, so that they, and Chrysaphius in particular, wielded the royal power.
> (Priscus fr. 3.1)

Priscus furthermore argues that 'During the reign of Theodosius Chrysaphius controlled everything, seizing the possessions of all and being hated by all.' (Priscus fr. 15).

These are bold statements to make, but Priscus is certainly not the only ancient source who mentions eunuchs in powerful positions during this period. The first eunuch that can be seen to enter the limelight is Antiochus, who was in office as *cubicularius* at the palace from 402 and *praepositus sacri cubiculi* from 408 until 413/414, as well as remaining influential as *patricius* until 439.[155] John Malalas, a sixth century chronicler, records that while Arcadius was still alive, Antiochus took care of Theodosius' upbringing as well as functioning as *cubicularius* and administrator of the Roman state. Antiochus then became *praepositus* and patrician and was 'a powerful man in the palace and in

[153] The last two paragraphs describe the content of Hopkins, 'The political power of Eunuchs', 197-242.

[154] Roger C. Blockley, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire. Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus. Part One* (Liverpool 1981). 63.

[155] Bardill and Greatrex, 'Antiochus the Praepositus' , 171-97.

control of affairs.' (Malalas 14.15). However, after Theodosius had grown up he became angry with Antiochus, who was still a patrician and treated him overbearingly, and made him a priest of the Great Church in Constantinople. Malalas' claim that Theodosius then issued a decree in which ex-*cubicularii* were no longer admitted to the senatorial or patrician rank after they had completed their service appears implausible.[156]

Theophanes, writing in the eighth century, relays more information regarding the origins of this powerful eunuch. After having proclaimed Theodosius *augustus* in 402, Arcadius appointed the Persian emperor Yazdgerd as the boy's guardian in his will, who then dispatched Antiochus, 'a most remarkable and highly educated adviser and instructor' (Theoph. AM 5900). He was to take Yazdgerd's place and represent him as the child's guardian, consequently staying at the emperor's side. Like Malalas, Theophanes also records Antiochus as being made a priest after disparaging and disregarding the emperor, as well as introducing the above mentioned decree. (Theoph. AM 5936). Moreover, he states that 'in the same year Antiochos the Persian departed and the blessed Pulcheria gained complete control of affairs.' (Theoph. AM 5905). This is a slightly confusing statement because the dating can be interpreted in two different ways. Pulcheria is often described as coming to power with her being proclaimed *augusta*, which happened on the fourth of July 414, when she was only fifteen years old (Sozomen IX 1; Suid. Π 2145; Theoph. AM 5901). It would appear logical, then, that this represents the year that Theophanes is referring to. However, the year that Antiochos departed can also indicate the year in which he was made a priest by Theodosius and dismissed from service, which happened much later than 414. Unfortunately, the dating for this latter event is muddled and difficult to reconstruct. Bardill and Greatrex dismiss Martindale's dating that places the event in 421 and instead convincingly argue that Antiochus was deposed in 439[157], which indicates a long and successful career for Antiochus. It would appear logical that because by that time Pulcheria had long since been a very prominent and powerful figure in control of many affairs at the court, Theophanes' statement must refer to the year in which she first assumed power. Antiochus at this point apparently stepped down from his office as *praepositus sacri cubiculi,* but emerged again as influential *patricius* sometime after, retaining this position until he was dismissed by Theodosius in 439.

Moreover, a letter written by Synesius, a contemporary who lived from ca. 373-414, enhances the powerful image of this eunuch. He writes:

> Our wonderful John, to put it briefly, is in the same position as ever. Fortune is showing herself as prodigal as possible to him, and is even seeking to surpass herself.

[156] Scholten, *Der Eunuch in Kaisernähe,* 43-44.

[157] Bardill and Greatrex, 'Antiochus the Praepositus', 187, 190.

> He has the ear of the emperor, and more important still, his good will to use for his own needs. Then again Antiochus does for him whatever he can; and Antiochus can do whatever he wishes. When I speak of Antiochus, do not confound him with Gratian's favorite, the sacred little man, honourable in character, but very ugly. The man to whom I am referring is young, has a paunch, held office under Narses the Persian, and even after Narses. Since then his fortune has only gone on increasing. Under these circumstances it is likely that he [Chilas] will be in command among us as long as is a raven's life, this most righteous general, the near relation of the one [Antiochos] and the intimate of the other [John].
> (Synesius, *Ep.* 110)[158]

The consensus – which is indeed convincing – holds that this letter should be dated to 404/405.[159] The statement that Antiochus can do whatever he wants is very telling indeed and conjures up the image of a man – or, technically, a eunuch – of means, who already stood in the limelight while Arcadius was still alive. When Arcadius died Antiochus became *praepositus sacri cubiculi*; this position meant that Antiochus was within close proximity of the young emperor, and this was further enhanced by the role he played in Theodosius' education. Moreover, the title of patricius is indicative of a close personal relation with the emperor.[160]

So why did Antiochus disappear from his offices when Pulcheria assumed control in 414? His career did not end there, as we have seen, so he must have returned to the court at some point, where he exercised influence through his rank. The fact that this happened before 439, when he was definitively ousted, indicates that Pulcheria must still have been powerful when he returned. Holum on the one hand and Bardill and Greatrex on the other offer two differing explanations for Antiochus' initial disappearance in 414. Holum, following Theophanes and Sozomen, states that Pulcheria got into a quarrel with Antiochus and convinced Theodosius to dismiss him from his office of *praepositus*, after which she then assumed personal control of the imperial family and began directing its affairs.[161] Bardill and Greatrex find this explanation unacceptable, however. They instead view Antiochus' departure as a precaution rather than the product of his own mismanagement; in this way, he had the possibility to re-enter the courtly environment once circumstances had changed. Bardill and Greatrex argue that when Pulcheria had decided that she would take control, she could not afford to project the suggestion that she was merely a puppet of Antiochus and Anthemius, who as a powerful praetorian prefect was another leading figure of the court at that time. What is more, Anthemius

[158] As found in Bardill and Greatrex, 'Antiochus the Praepositus', 174.
[159] Ibid. 175.
[160] Scholten, *Der Eunuch in Kaisernähe*, 51.
[161] K. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses. Women and dominion in late antiquity* (Berkeley 1982) 90-91.

disappeared from office at the same time as Antiochus did. Pulcheria had to come across as strong and independent in her own right, putting her own stamp on the government by choosing her own ministers. It is not known whether Antiochus and Anthemius agreed willingly with this plan, though.[162]

Bardill and Greatrex's theory appears very logical especially with regard to Pulcheria feeling the need to start with a clean slate. However, Antiochus reappeared at court while Pulcheria was still influential - she only temporarily lost her influence two or three years after 439 at the hands of the eunuch Chrysaphius, by which time Antiochus had already been made a priest. There was thus no direct change in circumstances that Antiochus would have been able to seek after taking precautionary leave. The fact that Pulcheria was still present at the time of Antiochus' return might indicate that they never quarrelled to begin with and that he perhaps left willingly, but it can also suggest that they had buried the axe, or that Antiochus returned specifically through personal relations with the emperor himself instead of with the emperor's sister. We can only speculate about the exact circumstances, but it must be said that it would appear illogical for an ambitious man to willingly step down from a position of such power. What can also be deduced from this episode is that the office of *praepositus* allowed the eunuchs to build such a close personal bond with the emperor that losing their office did not necessarily mean that they lost all possible roads to influence and power.

As is illustrated by Anthemius being mentioned as powerful praetorian prefect and overall highly placed figure during this time, Antiochus was certainly not the only figure who managed to exploit the emperor's fragile early years. One would expect that Antiochus was best placed to directly influence the emperor, however, seeing as he stood in such close proximity to Theodosius. The question is whether the emperor himself actually had the last word in decision-making in practice and not just in theory. The historian Socrates, a contemporary of Theodosius, describes how Anthemius administered the government of the east in Theodosius' place, stating that 'The management of public affairs was therefore entrusted to Anthemius the praetorian prefect (…) [who] seldom did anything unadvisedly, but consulted with the most judicious of his friends respecting all practical matters…' (Soc. *HE* VII. 1). We can only speculate whether Antiochus was part of this advisory clique. We do know that in the period 408-414 there was a great amount of imperial laws – forty in total - addressed specifically to Anthemius.[163] This certainly has the semblance of a regency, which would entail that Antiochus' personal influence with the emperor did not have as strong a repercussion as it could have had were the emperor in active personal control of matters. What it did do, though, was create possibilities for the future: by forming a shaping force

[162] Bardill and Greatrex, 'Antiochus the Praepositus', 192.

[163] Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire*, 226.

during the emperor's childhood one can imagine Antiochus entering into a position of confidence, which could have helped him later on when the emperor actually came of age. After being ousted by Pulcheria in 414 Antiochus did indeed return to the court where he retained a role that is hard to specify but which was powerful enough to make Theodosius feel like Antiochus was acting overbearingly, after which he was dismissed from the court completely. Unfortunately for Antiochus, at his return to the court Pulcheria was still one of the major forces in play, and thus his previously built-up relation with the emperor himself was not a free ticket to the fair. Whether he had any direct influence on decision-making at this time is thus hard to assess.

After Antiochus's dismissal from his office as *praepositus sacri cubiculi* there is a bit of a gap until the next dominant eunuch – Chrysaphius – emerges, in which the possible influence of other eunuchs is nonetheless perceivable. The fact that Chrysaphius came to power around 439 and that this thus neatly coincides with Antiochus' deposition will be discussed in more detail further on. At this point it is interesting to highlight an event that occurred in 431 that allows us to identify some of the main players of the game of thrones at that specific moment. In his quarrel over religious views with Nestorius that resulted in the first Council of Ephesus in 431, Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria, concocted a list of bribes that was distributed around the court intended to ensure that his religious views would be accepted.[164] This supposedly gained him the upper hand at Theodosius' court. Whether it was because of these bribes or not, the Council was decided in Cyril's favour. The bribes show various persons that could potentially indirectly influence the outcome of the Council; quite the major event. Interestingly, the highest sum was offered to the eunuch grand chamberlain Chryserus, who was allegedly offered 100 lbs. of gold, followed by several figures that received 50 lbs, among which the wife of the praetorian prefect.[165] Cyril must have thus wanted to influence the praetorian prefect in a more subtle way than simply approaching him directly. Paulus, who is thought to have been Eudocia's *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, was offered 25 lbs.[166] Others were the master of offices, the quaestor, various other eunuchs from the households of both Theodosius and Pulcheria (she had her own palace) as well as two of Pulcheria's ladies of the bedchamber.[167]

The fact that Chryserus received the highest sum does not automatically imply that he was the most influential figure capable of assisting Cyril to the highest degree. Martindale records that Chryserus had openly opposed Cyril[168], thus it is also possible

[164] Barnish, 'Government and administration', 169.

[165] Alan Cameron, '*The empress and the poet. Paganism and politics at the court of Theodosius II.*' in: YClS XXVII (1982) 256.

[166] Scholten, *Der Eunuch in Kaisernähe*, 104.

[167] Barnish, 'Government and administration', 169.

[168] Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 297; cf. *ACOec.* I iv, pp. 223-4.

that he simply needed the most convincing. After this event he is not mentioned again; he presumably lost his position to Lausus, who could thank his second period of office to the growing influence of Pulcheria and his own religious convictions.[169] Nevertheless, the list is a good indicator of chains of influence present at the court in 431, at least with regard to acceptance of religious viewpoints. The fact that two of Pulcheria's handmaidens were approached speaks for the importance of proximity to those in power and illustrates the intermediary role these figures who operated within the private quarters could play. The strategy of using these 'lines of power' was moreover known to those outside of the palace; the game was elaborate indeed.

The power of Chrysaphius

By the end of the 430s, the game would become more elaborate still; enter Chrysaphius, who caused a significant splash in the currents of the court. He was a court eunuch who was in office as *spatharius* (imperial bodyguard) from 443 until 450, but his road to power began a few years earlier, around 439. Between that time and the moment he became *spatharius* in 443 an astounding selection of powerful figures somehow disappeared from the eastern court, namely the eunuch Antiochus, Cyrus of Panopolis (who was a poet as well as imperial advisor, prefect of Constantinople and praetorian prefect of the east in 439), the empress Eudocia, and Theodosius' sister Pulcheria. Antiochus was deposed because the emperor had become displeased with him for the vague reason of acting overbearingly. Malalas describes Cyrus of Panopolis as succeeding to Antiochus' power in 439, then being in office until 441, when he was himself succeeded by Chrysaphius.[170] He was part of Eudocia's clique who in 441, at the zenith of his fame and power, was suddenly removed from all of his offices and sent off to the bishopric of Cotyaeum in Phrygia.[171] In a document dated to 441 that has been identified as being from Cyrus' hand, Cyrus describes himself as a bee – honest and industrious – who was ousted from the emperor's favour by 'baneful drones', namely Chrysaphius and his partner Nomus[172], who was consul and *magister officiorum*. Chrysaphius thus appears ruthless indeed.

The empress Eudocia had returned in 439 from a trip to Jerusalem, when Chrysaphius is said to have sown discord between her and Pulcheria.[173] Theophanes (AM 5940) describes how Chrysaphius, 'a eunuch who exercised power over the palace and the emperor Theodosios', saw his efforts to expel Flavian, the bishop of Constantinople, fail because Pulcheria was in control of affairs. He proceeded to intrigue against her by

[169] Scholten, *Der Eunuch in Kaisernähe*, 104.
[170] Cameron, 'The empress and the poet', 224.
[171] Ibid. 222.
[172] Ibid. 235 (see p.239 for the dating).
[173] Ibid. 264.

using Eudocia. Chrysaphius suggested that, because Pulcheria had her own *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, Eudocia should also demand one from the emperor, bad-mouthing Pulcheria in the process. The emperor refused, however; Chrysaphius then proposed that Eudocia should trouble the emperor into making Pulcheria a deaconess because she had taken a vow of virginity. Flavian, who was ordained to do this, informed Pulcheria of the situation, advising her not to let him into her presence. Pulcheria realised she had been plotted against, gave Eudocia her *praepositus* and left the court, going into exile at the Hebdomon palace. Eudocia herself went into permanent exile at Jerusalem in 443, but it is difficult to assess the reliability of the story that surrounds it. Malalas recounts how Theodosius gave a unusually large apple to Eudocia, who then gave it to Paulinus (Theodosius' childhood friend and *magister*), who, unaware that it had come from the emperor in the first place, sent it to Theodosius as a gift. When the emperor asked his wife where the apple was she claimed she had eaten it. Theodosius suspected Eudocia was in love with Paulinus, had him exiled and then executed, and the empress herself requested leave to go to Jerusalem. (Malalas 14.8). Kathryn Chew suggests that Chrysaphius may have been behind her removal, seeing that it seems to fit with his strategy to isolate the emperor from those closest to him, thus enhancing his own position. He could have orchestrated the whole apple scenario.[174] Chew does not present this as anything more than speculation and that is precisely what it must remain, but Eudocia's departure must have been sparked by an event, and it just so happens to coincide with the start of Chrysaphius' tenure as *spatharius*. It is thus possible that the eunuch might have had a hand in this episode, although it must remain speculation. If anything, it speaks to the image both ancient and contemporary authors have of this cunning man.

Having thus eliminated his enemies from the stage, Chrysaphius rose to great heights indeed. The sources duly reflect this. As mentioned previously, Theophanes saw Chrysaphius as wielding power over both the emperor and the palace (Theoph. AM 5940), and so does Evagrius, who states that he dominated the palace (Evagrius *HE* I.10).[175] Malalas goes so far as to say that Theodosius was in love with Chrysaphius, whom he describes as very handsome. He states that 'He [Theodosius] gave him many gifts, whatever he asked for, and Chrysaphios had free access to the emperor. He had control over all affairs and plundered everything.' (Malalas 14.19). Priscus, who has been briefly mentioned above, harbours a specific hatred for the eunuch. His observations are especially interesting because he was a direct contemporary and was himself present at the embassy to the Hunnic leader Attila in 449. Priscus shows Theodosius as a cowardly emperor who was afraid of usurpers, relied on bad officials and was especially dependent

[174] Kathryn Sue Chew, 'Virgins and eunuchs. Pulcheria, politics and the death of emperor Theodosius II.' in: Historia 55 (2) (2006) 222.
[175] See also: Zon. XIII 23.44 and Cedr. I 587.

on eunuchs. Chrysaphius headed this last group and formed the object of Priscus' greatest hatred[176], and he claims that hatred for this man was universal. (Priscus fr. 15). Priscus describes how this conniving eunuch proposed a plot to murder Attila, which was then discussed by the emperor and Martialis, the *magister officiorum*. (Priscus fr. 11.2). However, the plot was discovered before it could be put into effect and no harm came to Attila. The whole episode greatly embarrassed the imperial government and put Chrysaphius into danger[177], as well as negatively impacting his position It is telling, however, that if Priscus is to be believed about Chrysaphius' instigating role in the plot, the eunuch was thus in a position to influence and indeed convince the emperor to take a certain course of action in a weighty matter. This event described by Priscus thus shows both his power and the negative consequences of the plan's failure. It is also possible, however, that Priscus exaggerates Chrysaphius' scheming and plotting nature and thus his role in this affair in order to portray him in a negative way, seeing that he hated the eunuch.

Chrysaphius moreover had influence in church matters. When Cyril of Alexandria died in 444 he gained more and more opportunities to interfere in this sphere and to make his presence felt.[178] Flavian, the bishop of Constantinople, got on the eunuch's bad side when he refused to fulfil Chrysaphius' instructions to send the emperor golden *eulogai.* This episode led to 'a considerable feeling of grievance between them' (Theoph. AM 5940), and Theophanes claims that afterward Chrysaphius did everything in his power to rid the bishopric of this turbulent priest. An ulterior motive is to be detected, however. The heresiarch Eutyches was a friend of his and a person whose views he shared (Chrysaphius was a monophysite)[179]; he wished to see Eutyches elected to Flavian's office. However, Eutyches views were discovered to be incorrect by Eusebius scholasticus, who took his case to Flavian, after which Eutyches was branded a heretic. Chrysaphius was obviously infuriated at both the situation and the role Flavian played and convinced the emperor to decree that another synod be held at Ephesus in which Eutyches' views would be examined. (Theoph. AM 5940). This synod held in 449 was dominated by Dioscorus, the monophysite bishop of Alexandria and a friend of Chrysaphius', who, of course, arranged a positive outcome: Eutyches' views were declared orthodox and Flavian was duly deposed.[180] This second synod of Ephesus became known as the 'Latrocinium' ('Robber Synod') for its overtly nepotistic flavour. Chrysaphius thus certainly emerges as a major power behind the throne capable of turning matters to his own hand because of his influence with the emperor. Helga

[176] Blockley, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians*, 63.

[177] Ibid. 63.

[178] Cilliers and Retief, 'The eunuchs of early Byzantium.' in: Scholia N. S. 13 (2004) 114.

[179] Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 295-297.

[180] Ibid. 295-297.

Scholten goes so far as to say that around 449 Chrysaphius held the reigns and determined Theodosius' church politics.[181] What further underlines the eunuch's importance is the fact that he was among the high officials that were named in the acclamations made at Edessa in April 449.[182]

According to Theophanes, the emperor eventually realised the nepotistic nature of the Second Council. He writes that Theodosius, 'after collecting his thoughts, realized that he had been deceived by Chrysaphios' villainy, and grieved over the unholy treatment of Flavian and the injustice to the other bishops. In great anger he first banished Chrysaphios…' (Theoph. AM 5942). Coupled with Chrysaphius' blunder in the embassy to Attila – if we may believe Priscus, that is - it would thus appear that the eunuch took some blows towards the end of Theodosius' reign.

Because eunuchs in high positions owed their position entirely to a close personal relationship with the emperor, the tide could turn for them when the emperor they served died. This was very much the case with Chrysaphius. His power stemmed from his influence on Theodosius, which he tried to monopolise as much as possible by getting rid of other powerful personae. When Theodosius died in July 450 it became painfully obvious that Chrysaphius had made many enemies indeed. Some time before the emperor's death Pulcheria had returned to the palace and once again assumed her position of power, which she immediately put to use when her brother died. A great variety of sources mention that Pulcheria had Chrysaphius murdered.[183] John Malalas states that the new emperor Marcian had the eunuch beheaded because he 'had injured many people, who now bore witness against him' (Malalas 14.32). Theophanes has a slightly different version still: 'the blessed Pulcheria handed over the universally detested eunuch Chrysaphios to Jordanes.' He states that this Jordanes was the son of the John that had usurped the western Roman throne in 423, and who, according to Theophanes, was treacherously killed by Chrysaphius despite having surrendered himself to Ardabur and Aspar. (Theoph. AM 5942). However, in 423 Chrysaphius was not in the picture yet; this appears to be a confusion on Theophanes' behalf. The Jordanes mentioned in this fragment was actually the son of John the Vandal, not John the usurper.[184] The different details that prevail in these accounts of the eunuch's death merely illustrate the variety of people he had antagonised.

All in all it has become abundantly clear that Chrysaphius was a force to be reckoned with at the eastern Roman court from at the earliest 439 almost until the death

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[181] Scholten, *Der Eunuch in Kaisernähe,* 116.

[182] Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 295-297.

[183] Ibid. 295-297. Martindale names Prosp. Tiro s.a. 450, Addit. II ad Prosp. s.a. 450, Coll. Avell. 99.11, Marcell. Com. s.a. 450, Theod. Lect. Epit. 353, Chron. Pasch. s.a. 450, Joh. Ant. fr. 194, Nic. Call. HE XIV 49.

[184] Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (transl. and comm.), *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284-813* (Oxford 1997) 162.

of Theodosius in 450, only seeing his reputation slide with his alleged blunder with regard to the plot versus Attila, the Robber Synod, and Pulcheria's return. Chrysaphius transcended his role as powerful figure within the court itself, which was facilitated by control of access and his intermediary function, and, through a strong personal bond with the emperor himself, managed to impact policy on various occasions. Even when taking into account the undoubtedly coloured nature of the sources, who portray him as a 'baneful drone', the bare essential pieces of information speak for themselves, with Chrysaphius' role in the Second Council of Ephesus, the mentioning of his name at Edessa and, if we may believe Priscus, his designing hand in the plot to murder Attila paint a strong picture indeed. Strikingly, he achieved all this without holding the office of *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, being in function only as *spatharius*. Moreover, it could be argued that his negative reputation in the sources only speaks to enhance this picture further, since the sources all portray him as universally hated but also as having a hand in many important matters. For a eunuch, to whom were attached many negative stereotypes, to rise to such heights must indeed have fostered resentment with those around him.

The ancient sources duly reflect this sense of resentment and, in general, paint a negative image of court eunuchs; the value of these sources thus requires some additional attention. Chrysaphius was referred to as a 'baneful drone' by Cyrus of Panopolis; depicted as an impious and scheming character by Theophanes (AM 5940); and, according to Priscus (fr. 3.1), was hated by all. The other sources mainly show Antiochus and Chrysaphius as powerful figures who dominated the palace (see, for instance, Evagrius 1.10). But how true to reality are these depictions? The reasons that can be given for the sources' negative depiction of court eunuchs are as follows. Firstly, as we have seen at the start of this chapter, eunuchs were outsiders and were often seen in a negative way by society in general. There were thus plenty of negative stereotypes available that the ancient sources could employ to discuss Theodosius' court eunuchs; this helped create the image of the scheming and plotting eunuch. Secondly, when those who are not legitimately entitled to large amounts of power (like the emperor was) manage to acquire it nonetheless, it is bound to foster resentment. This resentment could be enhanced when one considers that eunuchs, castrated figures who were not fully men, were able to stand within closer proximity to the emperor than almost everyone else. Finally, authors may have had their own reasons for disliking particular figures. Such was the case with the contemporary author Priscus, who bore Chrysaphius such unlimited hatred because, according to him, the eunuch was the origin of many of the policies of which Priscus himself disapproved.[185] Of course, the fact that Priscus' hatred stemmed from Chrysaphius' influence on policy is very telling, indicating that

[185] Blockley, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians*, 63.

Priscus' account is most likely coloured precisely because the eunuch was an important figure indeed.

When investigating the opinions of the ancient sources it is also crucial to see whether they were contemporaries of the people they were writing of or not. Often later accounts will be more outspokenly coloured because there was no need for censure any longer, but concerning the reign of Theodosius contemporary sources who emphasise the influence of eunuchs also exist, such as Cyrus of Panopolis and Synesius. Priscus of Panium was a contemporary, too, but published his work after the deaths of Theodosius and Chrysaphius and could thus still speak his mind.

Once the outspokenly negative judgments and stereotypes given by the authors are removed, the image of powerful eunuchs remains. Seeing that such a large share of the sources depict both Antiochus and Chrysaphius as being in powerful positions and exploiting these fully, there is no reason to discard these depictions as entirely untrue. Apart from emphasising the negative stereotypes connected with eunuchs, the ancient authors would have gained little from distorting the truth entirely, and, as long as one remembers the agenda of particular authors, there is no reason not to use these sources when investigating the influence of court eunuchs under Theodosius II. The context also certainly allows for powerful eunuchs, seeing that Theodosius was not a particularly strong emperor and his sister Pulcheria also achieved an unusual amount of influence. I would thus argue that the discrepancy between the sources and reality, at least with regard to eunuchs, does not appear to have been too large.

Conclusion

In late antiquity palace eunuchs were no novelty but had precedents both in the earlier Roman Empire itself and in other empires such as Achaemenid Persia. As *castrati* who were often foreigners, they were outsiders and were consequently well-suited for imperial service. The fact that they could not advance their own dynastic interests because they could not conceive children also meant that eunuchs posed no threat to the royal succession and could thus operate within the most private areas of the court, close to the emperor himself. What is more, their position as outcasts from society meant they were entirely dependent upon the emperor for protection. The two most prominent eunuchs from the reign of Theodosius II fit in well with these general characteristics. Antiochus was a Persian who was sent as a representative of the Persian emperor Yazdgerd to take his place as Theodosius' guardian, and he lost his office in 414 most likely due to Pulcheria's influence on Theodosius, being dismissed from the court entirely in 439 by Theodosius himself. His dependence on Theodosius is thus clearly visible. As for Chrysaphius, his origins are unclear, but he was killed off painfully soon after the death of Theodosius, indicating that his fate was closely tied up with that of the emperor

indeed. He had antagonised a lot of people, and with the emperor dead there was no one to protect him.

The eunuchs of Theodosius' court were certainly part of its machinery. In their roles as intermediaries that relayed messages back and forth between the emperor and others, transcending the boundaries of access that constrained the inner court, and in operating within close proximity to the emperor and his family, eunuchs formed the engine of the courtly machine. Hopkins' theory, which has eunuchs forming the key point of contact between the now isolated emperor, who was distinctly in need of human interaction, and the rest of the court[186], seems plausible when applied to the reign of Theodosius II. It explains how palace eunuchs could come to hold such a key position. This position made them viable to being bribed by those looking to influence the emperor himself; the fact that mere handmaidens were offered gold by Cyril of Alexandria in 431 speaks to the inherent power present in the factor of proximity. The *praepositus sacri cubiculi* in particular held an office with many possibilities and duties. He was in a good position to control the flow of information, which is often seen to be equal to power, and he had a recognised role in religious politics as the emperor's representative. The eunuchs' sphere of influence was thus not entirely limited to the palace itself, but because they were a point of contact for outsiders as well as the emperor, they could influence events in other spheres, too.

The two prime examples that have been discussed in this chapter vividly illustrate the heights to which eunuchs could rise. Antiochus, in his function as *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, basically functioned as a regent of some sorts for the underage emperor. He managed to make a seamless transition between the reign of Arcadius, during which he was already present at the court as *cubicularius* and tutor of young Theodosius, and that of his son and successor. In contrast to Chrysaphius, Antiochus was powerful because he could operate relatively independently. Chrysaphius became powerful as a result of his strong influence on the emperor during the latter part of his reign. He epitomises the cunning and plotting eunuch and can be seen to have been in a position to influence the emperor's decision-making, as opposed to Antiochus, who until he was deposed from his office as *praepositus* in 414 was most likely in a position to orchestrate decision-making. When Priscus states that everything that Theodosius did was under the influence of eunuchs, who distracted him as you would a child with toys (Priscus fr. 3.1), it is certainly highly exaggerated but nonetheless contains a core of truth: eunuchs did achieve actual political influence during the reign of Theodosius II. A quote from the eunuch Lord Varys from the popular HBO series *Game of Thrones* seems fitting: 'Power

[186] K. Hopkins, 'The political power of Eunuchs', in: id., Conquerors and Slaves (Cambridge 1978) 197-242.

resides where men believe it resides. It's a trick, a shadow on the wall, and a very small man can cast a very large shadow.'[187]

[187] HBO series *Game of Thrones*, season 2 episode 3.

5. Royal women

Throughout history royal women have played a variety of roles. The further back one goes in time the rarer it becomes to see women ruling in their own right. More often they functioned as regents for underage kings – often their sons – who could not yet take up the reins by themselves. At the most basic level the wife of the ruler was important because she bore him children and thus secured the continuation of the dynasty; but the flipside meant that women who proved to be barren could find themselves in a less favourable position. An extreme example of the misfortunes that could happen to women who did not manage to bear their husband a son is found in the person of Henry VIII of England, who infamously divorced two of his six wives and beheaded two. Often the ruler's mother proved to be the most dominant[188], however, having been around during his formative years rather than marrying into the family and then building up her influence as the ruler's wife did. Either way, royal women were located at the heart of the court and within close proximity of the emperor, to whom they had an intimate form of access, and they are often described to have been powers behind the throne. They could moreover have an impact on court ceremonial[189] and the palace's social and cultural configuration.

The court of Theodosius II certainly housed some women worthy of further investigation. Even though Eudocia did not bear her husband Theodosius a male heir that lived beyond childhood, the couple's daughter Licinia Eudoxia did marry the western Roman emperor Valentinian III. Moreover, Eudocia did manage to play a role during the reign of her husband. His mother was not around; Aelia Eudoxia died in 404 and thus played no role during his reign. His sister Pulcheria took a vow of virginity and never married nor bore any children; she thus constituted an influence in her own right. There were two more siblings (that survived infancy, that is; their eldest sibling Flaccilla died young) – Arcadia and Marina – and they were also present at court and thus in a potential position to influence their brother. Unfortunately they are barely mentioned in the sources at all. The influence of these women on Theodosius will be the focus of this chapter's investigation.

Women of the Theodosian dynasty

In order to more appropriately assess the status of the royal women of Theodosius II's court, their dynastic predecessors, among which were some great women, deserve some attention. The first eye-catcher is Aelia Flavia Flaccila, wife of Theodosius the Great, who married him at the latest in 376-78. The *nomen* Aelia denoted descent from Spanish

[188] Anne Walthall (ed.), *Servants of the dynasty. Palace women in world history* (University of California Press 2008) 1-2.
[189] Walthall, *Servants of the dynasty.* 1-2.

aristocracy and, from Flaccilla onward, was given to other imperial women that belonged to the eastern branch of the family as a title of female distinction as well as dynastic exclusiveness.[190] After her death Flaccilla, who had not been specifically important, was raised in status by her contemporaries. The virtues – chief among which piety - that were reflected in her career were exalted by her contemporaries, suggesting that an imperial image for women was deliberately created for her, proclaimed chiefly by Gregory of Nyssa. This image would also be passed on to other female members of the family.[191] Flaccilla was moreover proclaimed *augusta*, still a relatively rare honour, the reason being both her piety and her success in childbearing.[192]

After her death Theodosius I married again in 387, this time to Galla, mother of the famous Galla Placidia. No other children survived, though, and after the death of Theodosius in 395 his son Arcadius by his first wife succeeded him. He married Eudoxia, who also assumed the *nomen* Aelia and was proclaimed *augusta*.[193] She enveloped herself in the image of imperial womanhood as it was first bestowed upon Flaccilla, demonstrating piety by for instance employing her imperial resources to matters of faith.[194] She was a strong woman who fought for her convictions and stood her ground, most famously so in her quarrel with John Chrysostom, the Patriarch of Constantinople. This mother of the future Theodosius II bore five children, the first of which, named Flaccilla, is thought to have died young. She died of a miscarriage in 404.[195] She thus certainly emulated Flaccilla in both imperial image and devotion to childbearing.

Aelia Pulcheria

Aelia Pulcheria would carry the image of piety as it was passed on by Flaccila, as well as her mother Eudoxia, to a whole new level. She had the fire and ambition of her mother. Born in 399, after the death of her mother and older sister, followed in 408 by the death of her father Arcadius, she became the oldest member of her core family. Sozomen, who was a direct contemporary of Pulcheria, settling in Constantinople at least before 406 and dying around 450, paints a vivid picture of a pious and talented woman. He writes that when she was not yet fifteen Pulcheria took a vow of virginity and persuaded her sisters to do the same, henceforth allowing no man to enter her palace. Pulcheria had

> …received a mind most wise and divine above her years (…) [and] after quietly resuming the care of the state, she governed the Roman empire excellently and with

[190] Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 22.
[191] Ibid. 23-24.
[192] Ibid. 30.
[193] Ibid. 48.
[194] Ibid. 54.
[195] Ibid. 53.

> great orderliness; she concerted her measures so well that the affairs to be carried out were quickly decreed and completed. (…) She caused all affairs to be transacted in the name of her brother, and devoted great attention to bringing him up as a prince in the best possible way and with such information as was suitable to his years.
> (Soz. IX.1).

According to Sozomen, Pulcheria was responsible for Theodosius' upbringing and his education in princely manners such as how to walk and carry himself properly, restrain his laughter as well as to treat those who petitioned him with courtesy and inquire into their matters. She moreover made sure he was taught in letters, horsemanship and the practice of arms, for which the most skilled men were employed. (Soz. IX. 1). It thus appears that she embraced her role as older sister, taking care of her younger brother while at the same time assuming an authoritative sort of power, governing the state because Theodosius was still so young. Philostorgius mentions that Pulcheria 'administered and directed the imperial rescripts (Philostorgius XII. 7). The piety of Pulcheria and her sisters is emphasised and listed as the prime among their many virtues (Soz. IX. 3), directly correlating with the aforementioned imperial image as it was passed on by Aelia Flavia Flaccilla.

Theophanes, who wrote in the eighth century and relies among others on Sozomen, fully supports the image Sozomen paints (Theoph. AM 5901). He adds that 'In the same year Antiochos the Persian departed and the blessed Pulcheria gained complete control of affairs.' (Theoph. AM 5905). Theophanes gives 412/13 as the concerning year, but it would appear logical that this event occurred when Pulcheria was fifteen, in 414, the year in which she was moreover proclaimed *augusta* by Theodosius and is said according to Sozomen (who was a direct contemporary) to have taken control of the government. However, Antiochus was not the only hurdle Pulcheria had to overcome; the powerful praetorian prefect Anthemius had been in office since 405 and had been entrusted the management of public affairs (Soc. *HE* VII. 1). A vast amount of imperial laws were addressed to him. His road to power was through his office, whereas that of Pulcheria was through her family ties and personal connection with the emperor.

Kenneth Holum argues that Pulcheria managed to break the dominance of Anthemius and his accomplices through her godly resolution (i.e. vow of virginity) and in this way managed to prevent the spreading of their influence.[196] The taking of this vow by her and her sisters entailed that there would be no suitors or husbands congregating at the palace, leaving them as autonomous as possible and capable of influencing their brother independently. If the sisters had married, men would either have taken up a

[196] Ibid. 111.

prominent position in the royal household at court or they would have been sent away to live with their husbands - if these were, for instance, princes of the western dynasty.

Kathryn S. Chew states that Pulcheria's purpose in taking the vow was twofold. Firstly, she aimed to convert the palace into a monastery of sorts, wishing to bar all non-consanguineous men from attaining access to the affairs of the imperial household. This would prevent any allegations of sexual misconduct from being put against her or her sisters; against this sort of sexual slander imperial women had no defence, so it was better to ascertain that these situations could never occur. Secondly, Pulcheria wanted to monopolise her hold on her brother and protect him from outside interference.[197] Whether Pulcheria's resolution of virginity formed the direct key to her dismissal of Anthemius and Antiochus is hard to assess, but it certainly gave her the autonomy and space she needed in order to enhance her power.

Once Pulcheria was in control, she broke with Anthemius' pragmatic and broad-based regime, instead placing emphasis on orthodox Christian piety and its virtues that were regarded as underpinning the well-being of the state.[198] In general, Pulcheria divulged from the ruling class's values and traditions, with her godly resolve transforming the palace.[199] Immediately her power with regard to policy-making can be detected: her treatment of the Jews shows an almost complete reversal of the previous policy, in which Jews were protected. Now, the construction of new synagogues was prohibited and those that stood in desert places were to be demolished without violence.[200] The receptiveness of Hellenes is another area in which a break can be detected: in a constitution sent to Aurelian in 415 'those polluted from the error or, rather, the crime of pagan worship' (*Codex Theodosianus* 16.10.21) were excluded from service in the army and in administration.[201] This was the first case in which pagans were excluded from imperial service in general, and it appears to have had an effect, seeing that according to the statistics of Von Haehling, during the entire reign of Theodosius only three high office-holders can be identified positively as pagans (all three were *magistri militum*).[202]

Aelia Eudocia

However strong her hold might have been on the emperor, in 421 a marriage was arranged for Theodosius with an Athenian beauty named Athenaïs, who was christened Eudocia. Pulcheria and her sisters were now not the only ones with close personal access

[197] Chew, 'Virgins and eunuchs', 215.

[198] Blockley, 'The dynasty of Theodosius', 134.

[199] Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 98.

[200] Ibid. 98.

[201] Ibid. 100.

[202] Ibid. 100. Cf. R. von Haehling, *Die Religionszugehörigkeit der hohen Amtsträger des Römischen Reiches seit Constantins I. Alleinherrschaft bis zum Ende der Theodosianischen Dynastie: (324-450 bzw. 455 n. Chr.)* (Bonn 1978) 600-605.

to the emperor. John Malalas recounts that Theodosius wanted Pulcheria to find him a wife with the help of his childhood friend and office-holder Paulinus. He states that the Greek girl Athenaïs was in Constantinople to petition against her brothers concerning her father's will before Pulcheria, who 'gave orders that the girl and her aunts should wait under the watchful eye of cubicularii, and said that she would take her petition from her and go in to see her brother the emperor Theodosius.' (Malalas 14.3-4). She was deemed a suitable bride – Theophanes declares that she was 'remarkable for the beauty of her body, for the intelligence of her mind, and for her culture' (Theoph. AM 5911) - and the couple were married on June 7 421 (cf. Evagrius 1.20). Theophanes furthermore confirms that it was Pulcheria who advised her brother to take Athenaïs as his wife (Theoph. AM 5911). In contrast with what Malalas and Theophanes say, Holum believes that the marriage must instead have been designed by Pulcheria's enemies, seeing that it worked against her interests.[203] However, it is clear that the appearance of any woman at her brother's side must have formed an obstacle for her, and she surely realised that the dynasty needed an heir in order to continue. Her brother thus would have had to marry, anyway, and it would have been to her advantage if she were at least in charge of picking the bride. Malalas' story thus should not be discarded this easily. Whether she did or did not have a hand in this marriage, it had to happen and it did, and it did indeed caused Pulcheria problems.

The empress Aelia Eudocia, as she was styled, was proclaimed *augusta* in 423. Her presence at the court and the centre of power is felt in changing directions within policy during the years of Asclepiodotus' prefecture (423-25). As opposed to the regime of Pulcheria, clear affinities can be detected with the traditional style of Anthemius, who had long since been ousted.[204] An example is the fact that the Jews once again came under protection and would remain so until in the *Novellae* of 438 it was stated that both Jews and Samaritans were deemed unworthy of public office[205]. This is the year in which Eudocia made her first journey to Jerusalem and was thus temporarily away from the capital: perhaps this signalled a (temporary?) return to Pulcheria's stricter policies. What further illustrates Eudocia's effect upon marrying Theodosius is that Procopius, the son-in-law of Anthemius, was appointed *magister militum per Orientem* in 422 and was sent to negotiate a treaty with Persia, demonstrating that Eudocia's marriage to Theodosius had already influenced the distribution of high commands as well as the conduct of war.[206] Eudocia bore Theodosius three children; their eldest daughter, Licinia Eudoxia,

[203] Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 121.
[204] Ibid. 123.
[205] Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire*, 128.
[206] Holum, *Theodosian Empresses,* 122.

who was born in 422, was married to the western emperor Valentinian III in 437.[207] Their second daughter, Flaccilla, died young in 431, and their only son Arcadius did not even survive infancy. Eudocia could thus not exercise the traditional mother's means to power through her children. As a result of her Athenian origins and her being the daughter of a philosopher – she was well-educated – she probably had a cultural impact on the courtly atmosphere. There might even have been a classical revival.[208]

Two augustae

During the prelude and actual event of the First Council of Ephesus in 431 it became clear that both *augustae* were perceived to be important. Cyril of Alexandria wrote a long *Address* to Theodosius in order to secure a hearing at court for his theological view, but also approached both Eudocia and Pulcheria and her younger sisters. One *Address* is directed to 'the most pious Empresses' (literally 'Queens'), indicating the two *augustae*, Pulcheria and Eudocia. Another one was sent to 'the most pious Mistresses (*despoinai*), meaning Arcadia and Marina.[209] Apart from this, the only other situations in which Pulcheria's younger sisters are mentioned in the sources is when they are mentioned as Theodosius' sisters who followed Pulcheria's example in never marrying and led a life of religious devotion[210], and it seems like the three sisters possessed elaborate properties in the provinces and in Constantinople, the latter even housing quarters named after Marina and Pulcheria.[211]

Although no replies are known to us, it is clear that this episode points to a very real influence at the court of these ladies. They were clearly in a position to aid Cyril's cause. Cyril's ploy seems to have incurred the emperor's wrath, though; soon after he issued the summons for the Council of Ephesus on November 19, 430, he wrote to Cyril concerning his approach to Pulcheria and Eudocia (this might have been a later approach, seeing as it refers to two different missives which contained different contents that was sent to each). Theodosius wonders what business Cyril has in writing different things to himself, his sister and his wife? Did he intend to sow dissension?[212]

This was not the only episode in which the royal ladies were approached. It was wholly possible – perhaps normal? - for persons seeking influence in the making of imperial decisions to write formal letters to the ladies at the court, as is furthermore

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[207] 437 according to *Chron. Pasch.* (29 Oct) and Marcell. Com., but 436 according to Socrates VII.44 (see Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 410).

[208] Alan Cameron, 'The empress and the poet. Paganism and politics at the court of Theodosius II.' in: YClS XXVII (1982) 273.

[209] Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire*, 153.

[210] Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 129, 723.

[211] Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 132

[212] Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire*, 153. See the *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum (ACO)* i.1.1. para 8 (p.73-74).

shown by the existence of letters sent from the Latin West to female members of Theodosius' family. These letters would then become part of the dossiers that were circulated generally, and they imply that the imperial women, and in particular, Pulcheria, played an acknowledged role in the formation of decisions.[213] There must have been a chain present at the Roman imperial court through which information was passed on to and from the emperor, presenting the persons located at various points along the chain with varying degrees of power; these letters reinforce the idea that the women, most notably Pulcheria but probably also her sisters and Eudocia, occupied prominent positions within this chain. If these women were the ones to write to in order to meddle in state affairs, they themselves must have been closely involved in the process, or at the very least Theodosius (or whichever specific functionary) must have valued their advice on matters.

To return to the Council of Ephesus itself, Pulcheria's correspondence with Cyril of Alexandria as well as the *Acta* from the Council indicate that she played an instrumental role in convening it, even if active participation cannot be detected.[214] Her part in the official correspondence is recognised and illustrates Pulcheria's role in religious matters. She was connected closely with the doctrine of the two natures of Christ that was opposed by Cyril; the doctrine she supported became the accepted theological view after the First Council as well as being instrumental in the deposition of Nestorius.[215] Moreover, thanks to the efforts of Pulcheria and her sisters to promote the cult of the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God (*Theotokos*), Marian theology was incorporated to be a central part of Christian belief. An example of her devoutness and upholding of Christian virtues can be found in Theophanes, who records how in (according to his dating) AD 427/8 Theodosius sent money that was to be distributed to those in need to the archbishop of Jerusalem, 'in imitation of the blessed Pulcheria' (Theoph. AM 5920). The strength of Pulcheria's position around this time (c. 431) is further illustrated by the fact that Cyril, in his *Address to the Pious Emperor Theodosius on the Correct Faith*, written in 431, describes her as 'she who takes part in the care and administration of your empire.'[216]

Theophanes furthermore records the following story. Around 437/8, severe earthquakes plagued Constantinople over a period of four months, causing the people to flee to the Campus, where the sainted Proklos ordered the people to sing a divine hymn, after the which the earthquake immediately stopped. Theophanes then writes that 'the blessed Pulcheria and her brother, marvelling exceedingly at this miracle, issued a decree that this divine hymn was to be sung throughout the whole world.' (Theoph. AM 5930). It

[213] Ibid. 35-36.

[214] Chew, 'Virgins and eunuchs', 209.

[215] Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire*, 108.

[216] Ibid. 108.

is quite striking that Theophanes here first and foremost mentions Pulcheria, while Theodosius is placed after her name and is only referred to as her brother, instead of by his name or his title of emperor. This would lead one to believe that Pulcheria might have been directly behind the design of this decree. One must bear in mind, however, that Theophanes is one of the writers who indeed mentions her by name quite often and seems to attribute real power to her. Eunapius, a contemporary of the empress, also records an instance in which Pulcheria's name appears in a telling fashion. He states that 'During the time of the Empress Pulcheria the provinces were up for public sale to whoever wished to buy their governorship.' (Eunapius fr. 72.1). Eunapius clearly envisions a time in which Pulcheria was dominant enough for it to warrant him referring to 'the time of Pulcheria' instead of referencing a point during Theodosius' reign, which demonstrates that at least in the eyes of contemporaries the empress was a highly important figure.

On the contrary, there are plenty of ancient sources who do not share in this characteristic: to Socrates and Theodoret the woman might as well not have existed, and Evagrius and John Malalas only accredit her with finding a wife for her brother.[217] This discrepancy can be explained either by a varying focus in the sources' works or by the position the writers where in at the time they were recording these matters: Socrates and Theodoret were contemporaries and were thus perhaps not always in a position to freely record events, but instead had to be constantly mindful of the political climate surrounding them. Theophanes wrote much later, in the eighth century, and could thus speak his mind and add his own interpretations. However, I would argue enough evidence can be found in the sources to support the image of a powerful *augusta*. As we have seen, Sozomen and Philostorgius acknowledge her role as governor of the Empire at least at the beginning of her brother's reign. Moreover, among the fragments that have survived of Eunapius' work there is one which paints a similar image to the one Theophanes presents in placing the emphasis on Pulcheria rather than her brother. It says that 'during the time of the Empress Pulcheria the provinces were up for public sale to whoever wished to buy their governorship.' (Eunapius fr. 72.1). Again, it is remarkable that this event is 'dated' by referring to Pulcheria's time rather than that of Theodosius or a specific high official.

Furthermore, material evidence such as the Trier Ivory relief and particular coins minted during Theodosius II' reign give Pulcheria's power a face. Even when keeping in mind that this type of evidence was intended as propaganda and played an ideological role, the conclusions that can be drawn from it are in accordance with my findings regarding the influence of Pulcheria. The Trier Ivory, which according to a majority of scholars originates in sixth century Constantinople, depicts a scene from around 420 in

[217] Chew, 'Virgins and Eunuchs', 208.

which the phase of *adventus* known as *propompe* takes place: holy treasure (the relics of St. Stephen) is ritually escorted through the city towards a church. An empress, identified as Pulcheria, stands before the open door of the church and has been recognised as prime patron of the relic due to her being the relief's focus of attention.[218] Kenneth Holum has convincingly argued that the relics interceded for Pulcheria herself and not for her brother, and that the fact that she holds a cross contains the promise that Persia would be defeated by the Roman armies, thus inspiring victory.[219] Coins (a new type of solidus) minted around 420-22 in Constantinople, depict this same victory symbolism: the reverse shows Victory holding a long cross, while the obverse shows Pulcheria herself.[220] What is more, a victory column erected at the Hebdomon after the invasion of Persia in 421 contains an inscription, of which fragments are extant, which declares that the victor pacified the Roman world because of the vows of his sisters.[221] Sozomen offers an interpretation of the taking of their vows, which according to him secured God's favour and dispersed all wars started against Theodosius (Soz IX. 3.3). The propaganda is thus very clear on the nature of Pulcheria's power.

Although such mention is never made of the empress Eudocia, she was by no means an insignificant player in this game, as has already been illustrated by the letters sent to her. Around 439 a protégé of hers, Cyrus of Panopolis, rose to prominence: he has been identified as a highly powerful man in Constantinople between at the latest 439[222] – but perhaps as early as 437[223] - and 441. He was a poet who became prefect of Constantinople at least by March 439 and by December of the same year he became praetorian prefect of the east, too. He is credited with restoring and beautifying the city. At the height of his power and despite being viewed as one of the most efficient, active and popular of Theodosius' ministers, he was unexpectedly dismissed from his offices, among which that of consul in that very year[224], in 441[225] - most likely through the influence of the eunuch Chrysaphius. If this man was indeed Eudocia's creature it certainly gave her an avenue through which to exercise an influence of her own. Their fates, at least, appear intertwined: in 443 Cyrus was made bishop of Cotyaeum in Phrygia, nicely out of the way, which followed the downfall of Eudocia and her permanent

[218] Kenneth Holum and Gary Vikan, The Trier Ivory, "Adventus" Ceremonial, and the Relics of St. Stephen, in: Dumbarton Oaks Papers , Vol. 33, (Harvard University Press 1979) 115, 121-122.
[219] Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 108.
[220] Ibid. 109 (see page 105 for images of the coins).
[221] Ibid. 110-111.
[222] Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire*, 106.
[223] Cameron, 'The empress and the poet', 221.
[224] Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 338. He refers to the *Fasti*, *BGU* II 609 for this information.
[225] Cameron, 'The empress and the poet', 221-22.

retirement to Jerusalem in 443 (Suid. K. 2776).[226] The empress had supported him because of his literary activities (Suid. K. 2776).[227] It seems like a logical step for the empress, who had been deprived of the possibility of attaining influence through her children, to instead attach powerful men such as Cyrus to herself. Perhaps Cyrus was placed in a powerful position through her efforts, thus securing his loyalty to her. Conversely, Eudocia could have recognised a rising star and secured his connection with her.

Alan Cameron sees 444 as the year of Eudocia's break: Marcellinus records that when two of her clerics were killed by an agent of Theodosius, she personally (according to both Marcellinus and Priscus) murdered the murderer.[228] However, I have not come across the mention of this episode in any other studies, and to interpret this as Eudocia's break seems a bit of a stretch. We have to remember that sources are selective and do not know or record everything, so if Eudocia indeed killed a man in person at this point it might not have been the first time. Of course, it is not even certain it is true at all: no other ancient sources mention Eudocia in such a ruthless capacity. Furthermore, Eudocia went into permanent exile at Jerusalem in 443, which indicates that the avenues to influence had become quite difficult to exploit, indeed.

According to the sources, the eunuch Chrysaphius' plotting made life at court difficult for not only Eudocia but Pulcheria as well. First off, in 439 Eudocia returned from a journey to Jerusalem, after which discord was sown between her and Pulcheria by Chrysaphius.[229] Theophanes (AM 5940), in a story which has the eunuch Chrysaphius manipulating Eudocia throughout the entire affair, depicts Eudocia and Pulcheria in some sort of stand-off, with Eudocia trying to obtain a *praepositus sacri cubiculi* for herself because Pulcheria had one. The emperor refused, however, after which Eudocia allegedly attempted to convince Theodosius to make his sister a deaconess. In order to avoid this crippling sentence, Pulcheria went into exile at the Hebdomon palace.

Consequently, in 441, Eudocia's friend Cyrus of Panopolis was removed from the scene. In a document dated to 441 that has been identified as being from Cyrus' hand, Cyrus describes himself as a bee – honest and industrious – who was ousted from the emperor's favour by 'baneful drones', namely Chrysaphius and his partner Nomus[230], who was consul and *magister officiorum*. In 443 Eudocia herself travelled to Jerusalem to go into permanent exile, but it is hard to judge the reliability of the story that surrounds it. Malalas describes how Eudocia was given an unusually large apple by her husband and how she passed it on to Theodosius' childhood friend and *magister* Paulinus. He was

[226] Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 338.

[227] Ibid. 338.

[228] Cameron, 'The empress and the poet', 260. The Priscus fragment he refers to is fr. 8.

[229] Ibid. 264.

[230] Ibid. 235 (see p.239 for the dating).

unaware of the apple's original origins and sent it to Theodosius as a gift. Theodosius then asked his wife what she has done with the apple he had given her. When she claimed that she had eaten it, it led Theodosius to suspect that she was in love with Paulinus, who he then sent into exile and had executed. Eudocia herself consequently requested leave to travel to Jerusalem. (Malalas 14.8).

Seeing that it would fit with Chrysaphius' strategy to isolate the emperor from those who were closest to him, Kathryn Chew suggests that the eunuch may have been the designer of the whole apple scenario[231], but this must remain speculation. To be fair, the whole story seems a bit fairytale-esque, and it is hard to determine the truth of the matter. The results are clear, though: in a short time-span both of the powerful women in Theodosius' life were removed from the court.

For Pulcheria, all was not lost, though. She made a come-back; her exile was only temporary, unlike that of her sister-in-law. By the time of the Second Council of Ephesus in 449 she was back at the court; at this point Chrysaphius had taken a blow as a result of the failed plot to assassinate the Hunnic king Attila, so Pulcheria might have seen her chance clear to take advantage of this situation. Conversely, since the exact moment of her return is unknown, the passage of time might have helped facilitate her return, or perhaps she simply stood up to the eunuch. She was still the emperor's sister, after all, and she had played a dominant role throughout his reign.

Regarding the events leading up to the Second Council of Ephesus Theophanes has the following to say. He describes the quarrel between Chrysaphius and Flavian and concludes by saying that, thus, 'on this account there was a considerable feeling of grievance between them, though Pulcheria was not informed of it.' (Theoph. AM 5940). It is interesting that she is suddenly mentioned here and that it is deemed extraordinary that she was not informed of such a matter, implying that she was thus normally notified of such happenings. The story of the quarrel is found in Evagrius (2.2), but no mention is made there of Pulcheria, so it is unknown where Theophanes got this information (or whether he was merely exercising a bit of literary freedom). It does convey the author's opinion of Pulcheria; Theophanes clearly sees her as a very influential figure.

Conclusion

On the 28th of July, 450, Theodosius died as a result of a riding accident. Both Evagrius and Theophanes record that it was Pulcheria who selected Marcian as the new emperor. Evagrius states that after Pulcheria had suggested it, Marcian was approved unanimously by the senate as well as men of all ranks (Evagrius 2.1), whereas Theophanes describes how Pulcheria proclaimed Marcian emperor before the patriarch and the senate (Theoph. AM 5942). John Malalas, however, has Theodosius himself notifying Marcian that he

[231] Chew, 'Virgins and eunuchs', 222.

should succeed him on his deathbed (Malalas 14.27). None of these authors were direct contemporaries of the event, though, which might help explain the differing accounts. Whatever the exact details were, Pulcheria managed to ensure that her powerful position would not be taken from her when her brother died, because she married the new emperor. When she died in 453 she could thus look back upon a very successful life, if it was power that she valued the most; for a woman, she certainly appears to have achieved an unusual degree of power and influence. Besides her sisterly closeness and influence on Theodosius, Pulcheria used piety and religious devotion as the basis for her power, thus building on the dynastic precedent of her grandmother Flaccilla and her mother Eudoxia. Eudocia fits more closely with the traditional ways in which a royal woman could achieve influence; her personal proximity to the emperor bestowed her with some power, though it remained much more limited than that of Pulcheria. Perhaps things would have gone differently for her if she had borne Theodosius a son and heir.

This brings our historical examination of three different branches of power – high officials, eunuchs, and royal women – to a close, opening up the way for a detailed analysis of the roots of their power and influence, which is what will be presented in the next chapter.

6. Analysis

After having investigated the power held by both office-holders as well as eunuchs and royal women at the court of Theodosius II, it is now time to analyse these courtly dynamics and uncover the workings of this system of influence. Firstly, the initial conditions of the reign that formed the backdrop against which power unfolded will be discussed. Secondly, the power of high officials, eunuchs and royal women will be analysed in turn. Lastly, the ways to influence decision-making will be placed into a comprehensive system that will highlight the avenues to power as present at Theodosius' court. This chapter will function as the effective conclusion of this study, although a short separate conclusion in which my research is briefly recapped will also be provided.

The conditions that helped shape this emperor's reign were, among others, the ruler's personality and the duration of his reign; the strength and stability of the empire at this moment in time as well as of the bureaucratic system; and the external threats that were posed to it. From 408 until 450 Theodosius was the sole ruler of the eastern half of the empire, ascending to the throne when he was merely eight years old. The fact that he was so young facilitated an opportunistic atmosphere at the court. Norbert Elias describes how, at the court of Louis XIV, power was deliberately fragmented at the court so the monarch could oversee it; the power of the nobles thus converged upon his person.[232] However, at Theodosius' court, as we have seen, the precedent for the fragmentation of power had already been set by the time he was crowned. Growing up in such an atmosphere, the young emperor thus had to struggle to gain control; the fragmentation worked against him rather than it being a tool he could use himself. It might even be argued that Theodosius never managed to reach the elevated position necessary to oversee and direct this fragmentation and that he, as a consequence, never fully controlled his court. Personality-wise the sources do not present Theodosius as a very strong character; he is variously depicted as unwarlike and cowardly (Priscus fr. 3.1),

Despite this fragmentation of power, Theodosius' reign was long and fairly stable. This is in part due to the strength of his dynasty: as stated in chapter one, the monarch's position could be boosted by capable relatives who helped protect him. The flipside to this was a possible threat coming from family members who wanted to claim the throne for themselves. However, in Theodosius' case, he had no close male relatives; his sisters could never hope to govern in their own right. Pulcheria of course knew this and thus had to protect her brother and use her influence on him in order to gain any kind of power.

[232] Norbert Elias, *Die Höfische Gesellschaft* (1969) 197.

Internally, during this period the empire saw the creation of the first of the two great law books that were compiled in late antiquity, the *Codex Theodosianus* (the other being the *Codex Justinianus*), which was completed in 438. This is what Theodosius became known for and it both aided the stability of the empire and provided an opportunity for the high officials that were involved with its creation to influence the laws that were recorded in the *Codex*. This period also saw the summoning of two Councils at Ephesus, the first in 431 and the second in 449, that are testaments of the religious turmoil of the age. This is also apparent in the varying religious attitudes to for instance the Jews, who were persecuted in 415 but protected again during Asclepiodotus' prefecture in 423-25, only to be deemed unworthy of public office in the *Novellae* of 438.[233] The nepotism that coloured the Second Council of Ephesus, more ominously known as the Robber Synod, cast a shadow onto the final years of Theodosius' reign, so much so that after his death in 450 the need for another council, to right the wrongs, was brought forward, and the Council of Chalcedon was duly summoned in 451.

Regarding external threats to the empire during the first half of the fifth century, it can be said that the western half was in much more dire straits than the eastern half, its low point being the sack of Rome by Alaric in 410. The eastern part saw no such direct threats within the proximity of the capital Constantinople, instead remaining more stable, as a result of which the civic base of the empire remained intact and its bureaucratic system and administration proved highly effective. [234] This left room for delegation to high officials for varying state matters; the emperor was more of an overseer rather than someone who directly and personally took care of all state matters. Importantly, this means that influencing the emperor was not the only road to power nor did it give access to all aspects of government, seeing that there were many different departments taking care of different state matters. Although the heart of the eastern Roman empire was not threatened in the same way as it happened in the western part, hostilities broke out around its borders multiple times throughout Theodosius' reign, most notably with Persia (war in 420-22 and a short-lived invasion in 441); the Huns (difficulties throughout the entire reign); and the Vandals (treaty needed in 435, but renewed hostilities between 439-42). These hostilities were troublesome and indeed dangerous, and although the end of Theodosius' reign, with the failed assassination attempt on Attila the Hun and further threats from the Vandals did not paint a bright picture, threats were dealt with and complete disasters were prevented.

The backdrop against which power unfolded during the reign of Theodosius was thus a relatively stable one. This child emperor stayed on the throne for forty-two years, issuing a great law code, battling with religious turmoil - the prime examples of which are

[233] Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire*, 128.

[234] Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire*, 102-103. See also: McCormick, 'Emperor and court', 136.

the two Councils of Ephesus – and border threats, all the while retaining a highly effective bureaucratic system. Within this context high officials, eunuchs and royal women sought to exercise influence on decision-making: after having examined the historical evidence in the three previous chapters, the precise machinations of this process will be analysed next.

High officials

The functionaries present at the court, as well as the consistory and the senate, constitute the formal sphere in which power was negotiated. We have seen that the high officials' involvement in the process of decision-making happened predominantly through the system of *suggestiones*; proposals that were sent – often by praetorian prefects - to the emperor that were discussed by the consistory, the top palatine officials and, after 446, also by the senate, before being drafted into constitutions by the quaestor.[235] Theoretically, at least, the emperor had the final word in decision-making, but Theodosius II delegated to a large degree – perhaps even to an exceptional extent[236] - and thus left room for his officials to play important roles in this process.

When investigating the cogs and wheels that enabled the court officials to operate and play a part in decision-making, Michael Mann's theory on power might prove illuminating. He states that 'in its most general sense, power is the ability to pursue and attain goals through mastery of one's environment.'[237] Understood in this way, both Theodosius himself and greatly varying members of his court held at least some form of power; the high officials usually headed several departments and were in a position to achieve some of their goals. It is thus their office that formed the basis of the power of these particular courtiers. This does not sufficiently explain the more prominent ways in which officials could achieve power, though. Figures such as the *magister officiorum* Nomus, who together with Chrysaphius convinced the emperor to summon the Second Council of Ephesus, aided Dioscorus in capturing Athanasius, and was depicted by Theodoret as a highly influential figure and advisor of Theodosius on whose knowledge and judgment all affairs depended on (Theod. *Ep.* 58), clearly exceeded this basic form of power attributed to them by their office. Naturally, personality must have been a factor in its own right; this much needs no further illustration.

But, while the nature of their office enabled high officials to attain a degree of power, this does not tell the whole story. Mann describes how, when pursuing their goals, people set up cooperative power relations, in which a division of labour is created. This collective power is directed and overlooked by a top, though, which accrues a huge

[235] Harries and Wood, *The Theodosian Code*, 8-9.

[236] Ibid. 9.

[237] Mann, *The sources of social power*, 6.

organisational superiority over the rest.[238] It is clear that Mann is here referring to the ruler and the ruling class or group controlling the masses, but that does not automatically imply that such an analysis cannot provide insights regarding the more narrow sphere of power relations as it was present at the court. The conclusion we can draw from this is that those in power are seen to depend on their environment – i.e. their context and networks – in order for them to uphold their positions and their ability to pursue their goals. One might expect that those who were in a favourable position within this context or were in control of it had enlarged possibilities of gaining power.

To take it a step further, according to Mann's theory the power wielded in the formal sphere at Theodosius' court falls within the category of authoritative power, that is, power that is willed by groups and institutions as well as encompassing definite commands and conscious obedience.[239] This corresponds to the structure of the courtly hierarchy with all its different departments and posts, as well as the bodies of the senate and the consistory. Mann states that within authoritative power, a central role is played by logistics: important questions regarding power structures concern the way in which commands are physically transmitted and implemented, as well as the question of what sort of control by which power groups is fostered by logistical infrastructures in a routinely or erratic way.[240] For application to the court, I would like to specify these logistics as information and communication, as well as recognising that the *suggestiones* fit well into this idea.

Another one of Mann's notions is linked to this, and I will discuss this to illuminate the situation further. When he describes the importance of ideology, he puts forward Max Weber's metaphor of 'switchmen' (of railways) who are responsible for determining down which of several tracks social development proceeds. Mann alters Weber's metaphor in the following manner: 'tracklaying vehicles' are what constitute the sources of social power. They lay differing stretches of tracks across the historical and social landscape.[241] While this can be applied to a society's fabric at large, it can certainly also be relevant for the court, which formed the arena in which policy (in itself surely a 'track') was made. The persons that could in some way influence the laying of these particular tracks formed the key to decision- and policy-making. The high officials were thus akin to 'tracklaying vehicles' in the formal sphere.

Mann's work implies that control of communication and information (of 'networks') – which existed in the context mentioned above within which the officials operated - were vital aspects of power. In my view, a chain of information must have existed at the court

[238] Ibid. 6-7.
[239] Ibid. 8-9.
[240] Ibid. 8-9.
[241] Ibid. 28.

along which communication ran and could be manipulated. If one could control the flow of this communication and direct the contents of information that was passed on, this would entail a substantial amount of influence on the highest spheres of the court to which this information was ultimately directed. The office that stands out when applying such an analysis is that of the *magister officiorum*, because he dominated communications with the emperor, most notably by overseeing the couriers and public post inspectors (the *agentes in rebus* or *magistriani*), and also coordinated audiences and supplying foreign envoys with interpreters. Crucially, these *agentes*, who headed staffs of prefects, diocesan vicars and specific generals, could act as informers or even spies in the provinces, putting them in an important position to control information.[242] Because the *magister officiorum* controlled them, in turn, he was thus in a very favourable position within the chain of communications and information; a position that was further enhanced by his superiority to the *sacra scrinia* of the chancellery, which oversaw legal affairs as well as general imperial communications. The careers of both Helion and Nomus support the notion that the office of *magister officiorum* could potentially offer a great deal of influence.

Another office that can be seen to take up a prominent position within this chain is that of the praetorian prefect, who was in control of many departments and was the figure to which provincial officials turned and headed a post-service through which government dispatches were transmitted.[243] He moreover formed the principal source of *suggestiones*.[244] The most famous praetorian prefect from Theodosius' reign was Anthemius, who accrued a vast amount of power and acted almost as a regent to the young emperor from 408-414. However, the main reason for this power was not so much his control of logistics, but had more to do with the emperor's young age and the resulting possibilities to take advantage of what was almost a power vacuum. Perhaps it can be claimed, then, that in normal circumstances this control of logistics in the form of information and communication enabled high officials to exercise power and in some way influence the process of decision-making, while in extraordinary situations other factors took precedent.

It must be noted, however, that the fact that an office-holder had finished his tenure did not automatically imply that he had also lost his influence. The *Acta* of the Council of Chalcedon, as well as letters such as the one by Theodoret (*Ep*. 95) make this sufficiently clear. To what extent these figures retained the resources to put their envisioned influence to good use is hard to tell, though. What it does hint at is the way in which formal and informal power were connected and combined. Seemingly losing one's

[242] Barnish e.a., 'Government and administration', 172.

[243] Fairley, *Notitia Dignitatum*, 7.

[244] Harries and Wood, *The Theodosian Code*, 8.

formal power did not automatically result in a loss of informal power, and when there were situations in which figures that were ex-office holders that were still perceived to be the go-to persons when one needed to achieve something, it speaks to the strength and tenacity of this informal influence indeed.

Outside of the traditional roles and tasks their offices gave them, few high officials are highlighted in a particular way by the sources. Notable exceptions are Nomus and Anthemius, who are indeed mentioned to have accrued especially influential positions. By contrast, the sources paint a much more vivid picture of the influence of eunuchs and royal women on Theodosius. We must remember, however, that this discrepancy does not necessarily do justice to reality: ancient authors would have found it much more interesting to write about exceptional situations – indeed, of eunuchs who according to Priscus dominated Theodosius and distracted him 'as children are distracted with toys' (Priscus fr. 3.1), and of the she-wolf Pulcheria who allegedly gained 'complete control of affairs' when she was merely fifteen years old (Theoph. AM 5909) – than about the 'normality' of the power that was inherent in the offices of high functionaries. It can be rationally deduced that these officials would have had more direct power than these other groups, because they headed departments and were given varying ranges of governmental responsibilities, which included being part of important meetings and such. They would logically have had an impact on the emperor's decision-making; but this was not as extraordinary as it was in the cases of eunuchs and royal women. Thus, the extraordinary nature of their influence will be analysed next.

Eunuchs

In fifth century Constantinople, eunuchs had already been integrated into the structure of the court. They ran the institution of the 'sacred bedchamber' and had positions as chamberlains of varying ranks. Eunuchs were part of the household and thus of the informal sphere, as opposed to the formal sphere in which the previously discussed high officials' power was rooted; the offices held by eunuchs were directly connected with the household, such as the *comes sacrae vestis* or keeper of the wardrobe and the *castrensis* who took care of the technical management of the palace. This made them insiders to a high degree, but they were also outsiders in a sense, considering that they were foreigners who were, as *castrati*, outcasts from society and relied on the emperor they served for both protection and favour. The top eunuch office of *praepositus sacri cubiculi* entailed regulating access to the emperor as well as involvement in religious politics.[245]

Eunuchs were thus ambiguous figures in many ways: they were both outsiders and insiders; they oversaw the most inner part of the court, namely the *cubiculum*, but the more highly placed eunuchs had wider-reaching offices; and they were not full men

[245] Scholten, *Der Eunuch in Kaisernähe*, 68-69, 105, 117.

any longer. Importantly, they often functioned as intermediaries who could relay messages back and forth between the inner and outer circles of the court, between the emperor and others. In this process they transcended the boundaries of access within the court that were obstacles to others: instead, they were in control of access. I would like to argue that it was precisely their ambiguous status and intermediary role - which enabled them to transcend boundaries at the court - that formed the nucleus of their power and influence. To this must be added the fact that eunuchs operated within close proximity of the emperor, a position that made them valuable players to be contacted by 'outsiders' who wished to influence the emperor. Because they were involved in other people's attempts to influence the emperor, the eunuchs themselves could have exploited this and exercised an influence of their own. The possibility for them to influence the emperor in widely differing matters was already present, to begin with, due to their close personal proximity to the emperor. The *praepositus sacri cubiculi* in particular could attain power through a combination of proximity, regulation of access, and his recognised role in religious politics as the emperor's representative.

Eunuchs were thus in a prime position to control the flow of information within the court and in particular to and from the emperor. They represent the informal side of the chain of information mentioned above: they were not involved in dealing with *suggestiones* but rather with for instance personal requests to the emperor. By controlling whether certain pieces of information, or certain people who sought audiences, reached the emperor or not, eunuchs could indirectly influence his decision-making. Moreover, one can imagine that because of their proximity to the emperor they had ample opportunities to try and influence his opinions directly. Jeroen Duindam's views related to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century court tie in nicely with this: according to him, rather than decision-making taking place in splendid isolation, life at court was defined by schemes and intrigues, and the corridors of the court (or, in this case, including the bedchambers of the court) formed the stage on which politics were determined to no insignificant degree.[246] This appears to ring at least partially true for the fifth-century court at Constantinople, where the informal side of the chain of influence wound its way through corridors and private apartments, and even when looking at the PSC's role in religious politics to the council chambers.

The *spatharius* Chrysaphius certainly epitomises the cunning and plotting eunuch – negative stereotypes that were often attributed to eunuchs by society – and demonstrated that one did not need to be a formal part of the decision-making process to exercise some kind of influence on it. His closeness to the emperor and his clever removal of rivals for the emperor's ear allowed him to not only convince Theodosius to summon the Second Council of Ephesus – which served his personal agenda by aiding his

[246] Duindam, *Myths of power*, 92-93.

friend Eutyches against Flavian, who had got on the eunuch's bad side – but, if we may believe Priscus, to also design a plot versus Attila that was allegedly approved by the emperor and the *magister officiorum* (Priscus fr. 11.2). The fact that he was named at the acclamations at Edessa supports at least the bare essentials of his role in these episodes. What is striking is that Chrysaphius was not a *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, indicating that the holding of a top eunuch office was not a prerequisite for obtaining an unusual amount of influence on the emperor and his decision-making. By contrast, at the start of Theodosius' reign the eunuch *praepositus* Antiochus managed to take advantage of what was more or less a power vacuum, considering the emperor's young age; the office he held certainly helped here.

Thus, it appears that the influence of eunuchs on the emperor's decision-making was due to their ambiguous status, their intermediary and access-regulating role and proximity to the emperor's person, which allowed them to transcend the boundaries present at the court and participate in the determining of politics in the corridors of the court. Although situated within the sphere of the household, because of their functions their impact was not wholly limited to it; powerful eunuchs had the possibility to function as a power behind the throne. Still, we must not exaggerate their power and blindly follow Priscus when he states that everything Theodosius did was under the influence of eunuchs (Priscus fr. 3.1). What is clear, though, is that eunuchs such as Chrysaphius and Antiochus achieved unusual amounts of power; this was of course interesting and 'juicy' material for the ancient authors to dive into. It would be wrong to focus too much on the power of these eunuchs and disregard the role of the formal sphere of the court had in politics, however. As stated previously, because there was nothing unusual about the involvement of high officials in politics, the sources are much less likely to focus on them. Moreover, there is one more side to this story, as we have yet to analyse in detail the influence of royal women.

Royal women

Although traditionally they did not 'belong' in the political sphere, royal women throughout history played various roles at the court, ranging from wife and mother of the heirs to regent for an underage king and in rare cases even to a queen ruling in her own right. At the court of Theodosius II the royal women were part of a dynasty that was no stranger to powerful women, most notably Aelia Flaccilla and Aelia Eudoxia, and, moving to the western empire, Galla Placidia. This is a precedent that must be remembered when analysing the origins and the nature of the extraordinary influence of the royal women of Theodosius' court.

A clear division should be made between Eudocia and Pulcheria, because apart from them both being present in the emperor's personal sphere their influence had a

different source. Regarding Eudocia we can be fairly brief. It is clear, as Norbert Elias has already recognised, that intimate contacts with the ruler could result in influence[247]. In theory, at least, from the time of her marriage to Theodosius in 421 Eudocia was the leading female figure at the court, and she would have had a sizeable staff at her disposition. Elias argues in his analysis of Louis XIV's court that women engaged in intimate contacts with the ruler served as brokers of the king's patronage, while the ruler himself remained more distanced.[248] This seems to apply at least partially to the court of Theodosius, too, as it is visible in Eudocia's ties with for example Cyrus of Panopolis and the letters that were sent to her. Moreover, as the emperor's wife she was responsible for the continuation of the dynasty, which obviously made her important. However, despite the couple's daughter Licinia Eudoxia marrying the western Roman emperor Valentinian III, no further children survived infancy and no heir was provided. This deprived Eudocia of one of the traditional means of influence held by empresses, meaning the roots of her power were confined to her intimate relation with- and close proximity to the emperor, her high status, and her ability to function as broker for her husband's favour. It is clear that, although not reaching the level of Pulcheria, Eudocia's hand can be detected in certain matters of decision-making and the formation of policy, most notably the more traditional directions – for instance the protection of the Jews - that emerged after her coronation as *augusta* in 423, which contrasted with the more radical attitudes associated with Pulcheria.

Pulcheria, on the other hand, although standing within close personal proximity to her brother, of course did not have the intimate connection with Theodosius that Eudocia had. However, with both of their parents dying when they were still young, Pulcheria embraced her role as big sister and instantly came to the foreground at her father's death, determined to play a decisive role in her brother's formative years. This is the first crucial source of her subsequent power. It has already become apparent that rather than the emperor using fragmentation as a tool to divide his court and oversee it, this fragmentation instead worked against him at the time of his ascension. He consequently had to struggle to regain control, and it is no stretch to claim that he never became a strong ruler. Theodosius was thus vulnerable in this early part of his reign, and his sister stepped up to guide him through it by taking care of among others his education and, from 415 onward, by taking control of the government.

The second crucial factor - one that bolstered her power and helped safeguard her - is her taking of the vow of virginity. This left her free of a husband's grip and helped her monopolise the influence of her and her sisters, who also took the vow, on Theodosius. The household sphere was thus remarkably void of relatives and extended

[247] Ibid. 155.
[248] Ibid. 155.

family vying for the emperor's ear. It is clear that Pulcheria used her status as a paragon of piety - which so well suited the dynastic precedent set by her mother and grandmother – to play a role in especially in religious politics. When following Mann's theories, this imbued her with ideological power. Mann describes ideological power as follows. Firstly, concepts and categories of meaning are needed to understand the world, allowing those who monopolise a claim to this meaning to wield both collective and distributive power. Secondly, sustained social cooperation requires norms, and these are often brought forward by ideological movements like religions. Thus, the monopolisation of norms is a route to power. What is more, ritual practices form a source of ideological power, and Christianity itself is classified as a form of ideological power.[249] Pulcheria's 'regime' insisted on strict Christian orthodoxy and was active in sponsoring for instance churches, as well as sporting a highly intolerant attitude to Jews, pagans, and heresies in general. These attitudes (or norms) were seen throughout the reign, most specifically in the two Councils of Ephesus.

Considering the fact that actual changes in policy can be attributed to her, Pulcheria can be designated as a sort of 'tracklaying vehicle', just like the high officials, despite officially belonging to the informal sphere. Perhaps the informal sphere in general could not so much lay the tracks of policy themselves, but rather influenced the direction in which the tracks were headed or played a part in operating the switches. Pulcheria seems to have transcended this role, and, concerning the very end of Theodosius' reign, the same can to some degree be said about Chrysaphius. It is clear that throughout his reign there were many who sought to control him: the danger for him was not being replaced for being a 'weak' emperor, but rather that people attempted to use him as their puppet. This means that influencing the emperor was indeed an important objective. However, throughout most of the reign but especially during the first part of it, Pulcheria appears to have acted in her own right to a significant degree. Thus, besides the emperor's own shadow, it was hers that loomed the second largest and the longest, as a prominent figure unaffected by the changes of office the high officials frequently went through. It must be noted, though, that the high officials possessed formal power which was increased because of Theodosius' delegation to them. Unfortunately it is unclear how Pulcheria's position worked in practice; she must have sent many letters, but it does not become apparent from the sources if she had her own staff or if she could perhaps use the emperor's officials to conduct her government business.

Regarding Arcadia and Marina we can only assume that they played some sort of role in politics, which is apparent from the letters they received in 431, but the extent of this role remains unknown. The fact they followed their sister's example in choosing to remain virgins at least indicates that they had no husbands who controlled them and that

[249] Mann, *The sources of social power*, 22, 302.

they would have boasted a fair degree of autonomy, but it is unclear what exactly this allowed them to achieve.

I do not feel it is justified to depict Theodosius as a puppet emperor, dominated by women and eunuchs, but his sister certainly demonstrates that it was possible for female family members to achieve actual power because of their proximity to the emperor and their pious status. It is important to note that although some policy changes can be attributed to Pulcheria and Eudocia (and to some extent Chrysaphius), the only reason we can identify these changes is because the ancient authors provide us with quite a lot of information on these figures because of their extraordinary positions. A lot less is known about individual high office holders, of course also because they were not around for as long as the royal women; this means that it is much more difficult to identify their effect on policy. However, 'Theodosius' policy' will have been established through discussion with the high functionaries and bodies, even if figures from the informal sphere might also have presented an influence.

Synthesis

By now a fairly clear image of the dynamics present at the court during the process of decision-making has emerged. The figure below shows a highly schematised and simplified representation of these dynamics. One should bear in mind that in reality the formal and the informal sphere were not separated this rigidly, but that it in this chart it helps to clarify matters.

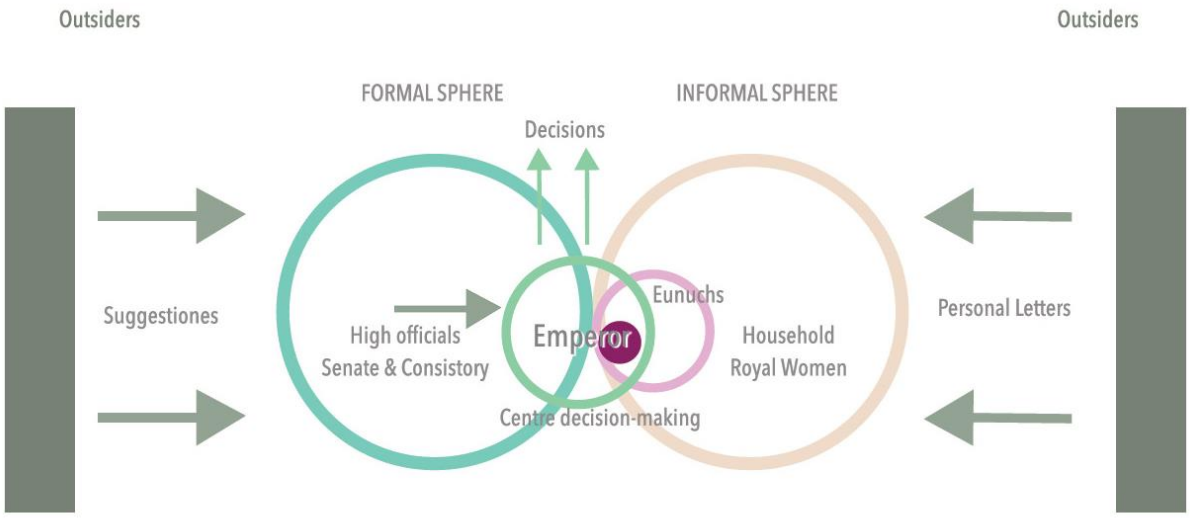

Figure 1. Court dynamics and the process of decision-making during the reign of Theodosius II. A larger version can be found in Appendix I, page 92.

The centre of decision-making was officially situated in the formal sphere, encompassing the emperor himself (the large purple dot) and the high officials, senate and consistory. Outsiders as well as the functionaries themselves could send in *suggestiones* that were consequently discussed. Once decisions had been agreed upon, with the emperor in theory having the final word in this, they were processed in the formal sphere by the functionaries and resulted in constitutions or laws. However, the informal sphere, which encompassed the household, royal women and eunuchs, was closer in proximity to the emperor than the formal sphere, enjoying personal contact with him. This proximity made them viable as receivers of personal letters from outsiders who sought to influence the emperor or achieve his favour, as well as allowing them to exercise influence on the emperor in their own right, which indirectly translated their informal power to influence in the formal sphere. The eunuchs of the sacred bedchamber held a special position because they regulated access to the emperor.

This analysis should in theory hold up not only for the court of Theodosius II but also that of his direct predecessors and successors, provided no major changes were made to alter this balance. We have already seen that his direct predecessors were no strangers to the phenomenon of a strong royal woman (such as Flaccilla or Eudoxia), and the eunuch Eutropius was highly influential during the reign of Arcadius.

After having conducted a detailed investigation of this topic, what can by now be said specifically about courtly influence on decision-making during the reign of Theodosius is the following. Because of the early fragmentation of power at the start of Theodosius' reign, of which he became a victim due to his young age rather than being able to take advantage of it and use it as a tool, as some other monarchs have done, the door was opened to a higher level of delegation and influence on political matters by those present at the court. Even towards the end of his reign, when there was fierce competition between Eudocia, Pulcheria and Chrysaphius, Theodosius could not turn this rift to his own advantage. Rather, Chrysaphius came out on top after the two *augustae* disappeared from the court – in Eudocia's case permanently in 443; in Pulcheria's case temporarily. Theodosius was clearly not a 'clever' ruler in the way described by Elias, who could 'skilfully exploit his central position to reinforce his power.'[250] Elias makes this sound easy when describing how the court was the centre of competition for both status and prestige, where the monarch, as the laughing outsider standing above the 'chaos', could stimulate rivalries and competition for his favour.[251] Of course, matters were not as simple as this, but it does appear that the eunuch Chrysaphius made for a better 'laughing outsider' than the emperor himself ever did.

[250] Duindam, *Myths of power*, 90.

[251] Ibid. 15.

This fragmentation was given some cohesion by the prominent role adopted by Pulcheria early on in the reign, which gave her an influence that makes her identifiable as a 'tracklaying vehicle' of some sorts, a status that is shared by the high officials. These high officials gained power from Theodosius' above-ordinary level of delegation, which allowed them to operate more autonomously, indicating that influencing the emperor did not translate to controlling all aspects of political power. Through their instrumental role in the handling of *suggestiones* and thus their important position within the chain of logistics, information and influence, these officials not only found power in the direct functions of their office but were also in a position to influence the emperor's decision-making, being narrowly involved in the process. This chain of influence is made tangible by the *suggestiones*, the letters sent to the royal women, and the bribe list of 431.

The existence of such a chain of influence, in which eunuchs moreover played an important role because of their control of access and ability to transcend boundaries at the court, supports the notion that not all aspects of policy were determined in the council chambers. Indeed, it is plausible that the corridors of the court provided the stage on which politics were, to some degree at least, determined. If we look at the figure of Chrysaphius it can even be speculated that schemes and intrigues played a vital role, too. What has certainly become clear is that a sharp division of formal and informal power does not hold up: those who technically stood within the household sphere could have political impact, and not just 'social' power. What is more, high officials could potentially remain influential figures even after their terms of office had ended. Powerful factors in the process of influencing the emperor's decision-making were made up by proximity to the emperor and by the ability to serve as broker for his power, both things which allowed eunuchs and royal women to compete with the high officials for a piece of the decision-making cake.

Ultimately, different layers can be detected that all, in turn, had an effect on court dynamics. At the most basic level, the historical context with its internal and external events and developments formed the background against which this specific court must be seen. For the Roman Empire, late antiquity was quite a turbulent age which saw the rise of Christianity and of threats by 'barbarians', as well as the splitting of the empire into western and eastern halves. We have seen that despite this turmoil, the reign of Theodosius was long and relatively stable, indicating that the 'background' was dealt with reasonably effectively. The next level is represented by the ruler himself; his personality and age of ascension added more specific elements to the background. In the case of Theodosius, because of his young age power was fragmented right from the start, and he does not appear to have been extremely dedicated to taking control of all aspects of government. The following level is made up by the organisation of the empire and its bureaucracy, which both aided the ruler and acted as a counterweight to his power. The

balance between the emperor's power and the prerogatives he held and the tools the bureaucracy could use to curb that power lies at the heart of the matter. In Theodosius' case, chains of information and influence ran through the courtly structure and empowered the high officials. While the turbulence of the age was visible in this emperor's reign, a very black and white deduction would be that because the emperor himself was a relatively 'weak' force, credit for dealing with this turbulence must go to the well-organised bureaucratic structure, in which the high officials played a key role. The final level is characterised by the presence of windows of opportunity for informal power. In this case, although the formal sphere did its job well enough, ultimately the emperor himself had the final word in matters of decision-making, and he proved quite malleable. Thus, when the situation is once more simplified greatly, the reasons for this level of courtly influence on the Theodosius' decision-making lay with his failure to rise above the fragmentation present at the court and his inability to become a 'laughing outsider' who oversaw competition for his favour.

What the theories of Norbert Elias, with Duindam's commentary, and of Michael Mann have made clear is that these sort of preconditions for royal power exist, and that the way in which they vary throughout history results in different power systems. Thus, Theodosius does not correspond with Elias' clever ruler who exploited his central position, largely because he became a victim of the fragmentation which according to Elias' model should have been a royal tool. Duindam's warning to remember the importance of schemes and intrigues makes one view the informal sphere at Theodosius' court in a different light. In explaining the role played by Pulcheria, Michael Mann can help to correct Elias, since Elias explains female courtly influence mostly through their intimate contacts with the monarch, but when following Mann we see that Pulcheria used religion as a tool of ideological power. This is very directly visible in the Trier Ivory. Mann's emphasis on the importance of logistics and the existence of 'track-laying vehicles' demonstrates that anyone who was in a prominent position in the chain of influence could help build the railroads of policy, be it through influencing the emperor or by operating in their own right, which happened in matters where the emperor delegated to his officials. Above all, those who functioned as intermediaries or as brokers of the ruler's power could claim a place in the limelight, and in the end, formal and informal power were not so rigidly separated and both spheres had roles to play.

Conclusion

By now, the dynamics of courtly influence on Theodosius's decision-making have become fairly clear. Seeing that in chapter six I have provided a lengthy analysis of all the material that was discussed in the other chapters, which effectively functions as the conclusion of this study, I see no need to provide an elaborate conclusion here. However, in order to put forward a useful overview of this study, a short recap of the findings presented in each chapter will be given.

This study aimed to uncover the workings and levels of courtly influence on the decision-making of emperor Theodosius II, and also, through analysis of the material by using theory, to gain a deeper understanding of the courtly structures, power and dynamics at play at his court. The first chapter showed how court studies have only recently become more popular, how the field is still balancing itself out and how it attempts to evade the bias that prevailed among the first wave of court studies. The ancient court is not well-represented yet, and no study had, up until now, focused on the process of decision-making. The chapter also established that especially the ruler's personality and the workings of the courtly hierarchy could impact court dynamics, and the theories of Norbert Elias, with Jeroen Duindam's commentary and ideas, and that of Michael Mann were presented. The second chapter gave a summary of Theodosius' reign, which was long and relatively stable considering the threats posed to it, and explored the fifth-century court, which was no longer itinerant as it was in the century before it but now resided permanently in Constantinople.

Chapter three, which focused on high officials, investigated the specific perks of the various offices as well as of the senate and the consistory. The process of having *suggestiones* or proposals turned into laws and decisions lay at the heart of the process of decision-making as it happened in the formal sphere. Offices that were involved with this in a crucial way were that of the praetorian prefect and the quaestor, although the emperor theoretically had the final word. The ending of an official's span of office did not automatically imply that he had also lost his influence. Seemingly losing one's formal power did not automatically result in a loss of informal power, as demonstrated by situations in which figures that were ex-office holders were still perceived to be the go-to persons when one needed to achieve something. This speaks to the strength and tenacity of this informal influence indeed.

The fourth chapter was concerned with palace eunuchs, who were outcasts from society and relied fully on the emperor for protection and favour. The eunuchs of Theodosius' court were certainly part of its machinery. They fulfilled roles as intermediaries that relayed messages back and forth between the emperor and others, were able to transcend the boundaries of access that constrained the inner court, and

operated within close proximity to the emperor and his family. As such, eunuchs were power-brokers who formed the engine of the courtly machine. Antiochus was powerful because he took advantage of the power void that was created after the death of Arcadius, and could operate relatively independently, functioning as a tutor to young Theodosius and most likely orchestrating decision-making rather than influencing it. Chrysaphius, on the other hand, became powerful because he managed to exercise a strong influence on the emperor during the latter part of his reign. He is the epitome of the cunning and plotting eunuch, who can be seen to have influenced the emperor's decision-making.

Chapter five explored the role of royal women. Theodosius' sister Pulcheria appears to have been a powerful figure throughout most of his reign, more prominently so at the start. Unlike Eudocia, she was only exiled temporarily, plausibly at the hand of Chrysaphius. By taking a vow of virginity (and convincing her two sisters to do the same) she made sure no additional men would be present at the palace. Besides her close sisterly connection to her brother, piety and religious devotion formed the basis for her power, following the dynastic precedent set by her grandmother Flaccilla and her mother Eudoxia. Eudocia achieved (a more limited kind of) influence through a more traditional way: by being within intimate proximity of the emperor. Unfortunately for her, she bore the emperor no son that survived infancy, so she was denied the influence a ruler's wife could traditionally wield through his son and heir.

In chapter six, the theories were applied to the material in order to give a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics of courtly influence. The high officials were identified as 'tracklaying vehicles' playing important roles in the laying of tracks of policy across the land. With logistics playing a key role, a formal chain of information and influence was identified. The ambiguous status of eunuchs, who functioned as intermediaries and regulated access, points to the existence of an informal chain of information and influence, too, which they were in a good position to control. While Eudocia gathered influence in the traditional way through intimate contact with the ruler, Pulcheria used religion as a route to ideological power, bolstering her overall influence, and both her and Chrysaphius can be counted as 'tracklaying vehicles' of some sort. The theories of Elias, Duindam and Mann furthermore make clear that the varying preconditions for royal power result in varying power systems. Nothing is black and white, yet for a theoretic analysis matters must be presented in a somewhat schematic way. I have attempted to show as many nuances as possible in this final chapter, and indeed throughout this study, and must remind the reader of a few last things. Power and influence were not static forces, but were fluid and could be harnessed in many different ways. The categories we create to explain these forces are artificial and should not be interpreted as exact representations of reality, but rather as ideas that can help

us visualise the situation as it might have existed so long ago. That being said, there are plenty of tangible conclusions that have been presented by this study. The emperor's decision-making was a multifaceted face made up not only of the face of Theodosius, but also of those around him that managed to achieve positions of influence in the chain as for instance intermediaries or power brokers.

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Appendix I.

Figure 1.