

An Empire Divided: Gallienus and the Crisis of the Third Century

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Figure 1 - Bust of Gallienus

"Bust of Roman Emperor Gallienus." Cinquantenaire Museum. Ancient History Encyclopedia. Bruxelles.

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Introduction

“From the great secular games celebrated by Philip, to the death of the emperor Gallienus, there elapsed twenty years of shame and misfortune. During that calamitous period, every instant of time was marked, every province of the Roman world was afflicted, by barbarous invaders, and military tyrants, and the ruined empire seemed to approach the last and fatal moment of its dissolution.”¹ Thus Gibbon describes the chaos of the third century, when the fate of Rome stood on the precipice. Contemporary personages easily lavished vitriol and criticism on the figures of the period, decrying their inability to stabilize the crisis, often the result of their meager character. In the case of Gallienus, figures such as Aurelius Victor and Eutropius in the Latin tradition heap extreme criticism upon almost every aspect of his reign and character, disparaging his allegedly indolent, indulgent, and unorthodox proclivities as well as his inability to manage the empire as it was swallowed up by chaos. On an immediate superficial level, there exists some veracity to these statements, as the empire throughout his reign remained divided with two contending powers occupying imperial territory in both the east and west as barbarians continued to remain a constant threat. This assessment, however, ignores the pivotal accomplishments and reforms of Gallienus, many of which extend far beyond his reign and form core aspects of the late empire. While he can be rightfully criticized for unresolved matters and issues such as his economically debilitating policy of currency debasement, he proved to be competent in his military leadership and his defense of the empire, with his military and administrative reforms providing much of the basis for the future

¹ Gibbon, *The History of The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol I Chapter X

structure and composition of the army and even the state itself as a mobile cavalry army came to form a core part of a military now dominated by equestrians in the privileged positions of command once held by the increasingly marginalized senate. In examining the economic and military accomplishments and actions of Gallienus, and more pertinently his place in the trends continued or established both before and after his reign, what emerges then is a capable and influential emperor whose legacy was maligned by the historians of his period and overshadowed by those who followed him.

Problems of Scholarship

The time period of 235 – 284², during what is often referred to as the Crisis of the Third Century, creates particular difficulties in terms of the source material originating from the period. Gone were the days of Livy, Tacitus, Plutarch, Appian, and the other great historians and biographers who flourished during the glory days of the late Republic and early Empire. Even among the works of later authors, the volumes of Cassius Dio only reach to the reign of Alexander Severus. Herodian's *History of the Roman Empire* describes events up until the beginning of the reign of Gordian III. What remains among the works encompassing the reign of Gallienus is a rather sparse selection of authors, most of questionable veracity and often contradictory with each other on even the most significant events. Even more troubling, many prominent sources detailing this time period have been lost or only survive in fragments and footnotes. The works of Ammianus Marcellinus detailing the events of the Crisis of the Third Century are unfortunately lost, and at most only a few references in the later surviving parts describe this period. The texts of Dexippus, a prominent Athenian who organized the defense of Athens against the Goths during the reign of Gallienus, have also been lost beyond a few fragments and perhaps as a source in works such as the *Historia Augusta*. From the remaining few works, particular to Gallienus is the hostility of the Latin tradition (although the Greek tradition is generally more favorable) towards his reign.

Of the sources depicting his reign and the general period of the 3rd century, the *Historia Augusta* emerges as one of the most prominent, if dubious, depictions. Despite concerns over

² All dates in AD unless otherwise stated

its accuracy, it remains one of the most comprehensive documents for the time period, where many other contemporary sources are lost, brief, or otherwise fall under the same uncertainties, and thus difficult to abandon as a source notwithstanding its obvious unreliability. Purported to be a collection of biographies from Hadrian to Carinus composed by six authors around the time of the Tetrarchy, little is spared in its criticism of Gallienus. The emperor is depicted as an indolent and morally questionable ruler indifferent to the various troubles facing the empire and inferior to many of the other figures of the period such as Odenathus, whose “brave deeds...had shown himself worthy of the insignia of such great majesty, whereas Gallienus was doing nothing at all or else only what was extravagant, or foolish and deserving of ridicule.”³ These lurid accounts portray a depraved portrait of Gallienus’ character, who “continuing in luxury and debauchery, gave himself up to amusements and revelling and administered the commonwealth like a boy who plays at holding power” and was “born for his belly and his pleasures, wasted his days and nights in wine and debauchery and caused the world to be laid waste by pretenders about twenty in number, so that even women ruled better than he.”⁴ This inglorious life of Gallienus simply ends with the line “For he used to frequent public-houses at night, it is said, and spent his life with pimps and actors and jesters.”⁵ What emerges then is a character depiction which consistently features as a key part of the rest of the major Latin authors: extravagant, indolent, and in poor company. Another key source is Aurelius Victor’s (attributed) work, the *Epitome de Caesaribus*, a history of the Roman Empire from Augustus to Constantine II. The *Epitome* is unfortunately brief,

³ *Historia Augusta, The Two Gallieni*, 10

⁴ *Historia Augusta, The Two Gallieni*, 4, 16

⁵ *Historia Augusta, The Two Gallieni*, 21

providing only a condemnation of father and son, describing Valerian as “stupid and extremely indolent, unfit by mind or deeds for any holding of public office,” while Gallienus is given only the brief description that he took a barbarian concubine from the Marcomanni and met his end fighting Aureolus.⁶ Aurelius Victor’s other major work, the *De Caesaribus*, pours far more vitriol on the beleaguered emperor. Describing the lives of the emperors from Augustus to Constantius, the reign of Gallienus is portrayed as largely responsible for the meager condition of the empire during his tenure, where

“he shipwrecked the Roman state, so to speak, to such a degree that the Goths freely penetrated Thrace and occupied Macedonia, Achaëa, and the border regions of Asia, the Parthians seized Mesopotamia and bandits, or more accurately a woman, controlled the east. At that time too, a force of Alamanni took possession of Italy while tribes of Franks pillaged Gaul and occupied Spain, and some, after conveniently acquiring ships, penetrated as far as Africa. Even the territories across the Danube, which Trajan secured, were lost...And at the same time the plague was ravaging Rome...During these events Gallienus himself frequented taverns and eating-houses, kept up friendships with pimps and drunkards and abandoned himself to his wife, Salonina, and to his shameful love-affair with the daughter of Attalus, a king of the Germans, whose name was Pipa.”⁷

In a similar manner to the *Historia Augusta*, the character of Gallienus is denigrated with even the same examples of frequenting taverns and keeping friendships with characters of little repute. Rounding off the Latin authors, Eutropius wrote in the *Breviarium ab Urbe Condita*, where a more mixed but still largely negative opinion is given, that Gallienus “exercised his power at first happily, afterwards fairly, and at last mischievously” and the survival of the empire is attributed instead to the efforts of Postumus and Odenathus: “while Gallienus abandoned the government, the Roman empire was saved in the west by Postumus, and in the east by Odenathus.”⁸ While at first Gallienus “performed many gallant acts in Gaul and Illyricum, killing Ingenuus, who had assumed the purple, at Mursa, and Regalianus,” he later

⁶ Victor, *Epitome de Caesaribus*, 159-160

⁷ Victor, *De Caesaribus*, p. 33

⁸ Eutropius, *Breviarium ab Urbe Condita*, 9.8-11

became “for a long time quiet and gentle; afterwards, abandoning himself to all manner of licentiousness.”⁹

With regard to the Latin sources, of particular note is the importance of one basic source, the *Kaisergeschichte* or History of the Emperors, a hypothesized 4th century text first postulated in 1883 by Alexander Enmann, due to the various similarities found in Victor’s *De Caesaribus*, Eutropius’ *Breviarum ab urbe condita*, and parts of the *Historia Augusta* among others. Although not all material in these works derive from the *Kaisergeschichte* nor share the exact style, such as Victor’s greater tendency to include personal comments to Eutropius’ brevity, the major authors of this period share many of the same mistakes, structural order, and even wording and phrasing.¹⁰ As one such example of this, a common error, marking out a common source for Victor and Eutropius, is the chronology of the usurper Nepotianus. Victor and Eutropius imply a date of 351 for his usurpation despite his usurpation and death occurring in 350.¹¹ The material within the *Kaisergeschichte* itself, and thus the breadth of information Victor, Eutropius, and other Latin authors could acquire from it, extended to the time of the Tetrarchy. Enmann first suggested an ending date of 284 around the ascension of Diocletian, but based on similarities in Eutropius and Victor going to 357, concluded this as the terminal year.¹² Although this final date is far from definitive and often questioned, what is pertinent is the inclusion of the years for Gallienus’ reign within this timeframe of the *Kaisergeschichte*.

⁹ Eutropius, *Breviarium ab Urbe Condita*, 9.8-11

¹⁰ Victor, *De Caesaribus*, p. xii

¹¹ Burgess, "On the Date of the Kaisergeschichte." pp. 118-119

¹² Burgess, "On the Date of the Kaisergeschichte." pp. 111-114

Thus, one can possibly attribute part of the negative narrative of his reign due to the influence of this common source.

From the Greek sources, one of the foremost is Zosimus, writing around the turn of the 6th century his *Historia Nova*, describing the period from Augustus to 410. He presents a neutral to positive description of the reign of Gallienus, where, while he disparages Valerian in the last part of his reign as “so effeminate and indolent,” his description of Gallienus simply describes his military actions without much judgment on his character or faults.¹³ Another important source comes from the Byzantine Era in the form of John Zonaras writing the *Epitome Historiarum* in the twelfth century around the reign of Alexius Komnenos. While far removed from the events of the 3rd century, Zonaras presents a copious amount of information regarding the reign of Gallienus, and evidently possessed access to much contemporaneous material now lost. In a similar manner to Zosimus, Zonaras passes little of the character judgment the Latin sources provide, instead primarily concerning himself with the military actions of Gallienus.¹⁴

What can be gathered, then, is a very different opinion depending on whether one reviews the Greek or the Latin sources. Of particular interest in this regard is the shift in senatorial power Gallienus helped to facilitate. The power of the Senate had declined throughout the third century as the military assumed the preeminent position in Roman politics. While Aurelius Victor’s claim that Gallienus issued an edict prohibiting senators from a military career lacks veracity and only appears in his work, what is clear is the shift in command structure, as Illyrians, Dalmatians, and other men of Balkan stock dominated the army and, in

¹³ Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, Book 1 18-23

¹⁴ Zonaras, *The Epitome of Histories*, 596-603

the absence of a strong senatorial presence, came to comprise the top ranks of the army and even placed many of their own on the imperial throne following Gallienus.¹⁵ As demonstrated in figures such as Victor himself, who although not originally of senatorial stock came into its ranks as rose he through the *cursus honorum* and took positions such as proconsulships and the urban prefecture of Rome, it is clear that the shifts in the structure of the empire which Gallienus facilitated brought him no friends in the Senate from which many of the historians originated.¹⁶

While Gallienus inspired no great acclamation from the Senate, relations were not so perpetually stained as the often-portrayed enmity between Gallienus and the Senate might incline one to think. Although his command staff was primarily comprised of equestrians and other non-senatorial personnel, he still knew and associated with many individual senators and received its honors. They were not actively or systemically deprived of their wealth or prestige, nor were they prosecuted by the emperor. The Senate, although battered and deprived of some of its former influence and political power, at this point still held prestigious status and, although no longer exclusively, filled many of the governmental posts. While senators were replaced in many military commands, whether by edict or not, given the desperate straits of the empire, they lacked the experience to fill the ranks required when capable commanders were paramount, which in turn further limited opportunities for senatorial military experience.

¹⁵ Victor, *De Caesaribus*, p. 34 - Although the veracity of the edict is often called in doubt, it would appear Gallienus did remove the exclusive right of senators to hold the ranks of *tribunus laticlavus* (senior legionary tribune) or *legatus legionis* (legionary commander) and thus removed the influence of the Senate in the contest for the imperial throne as well as induced greater efficiency in the army

¹⁶ Victor, *De Caesaribus*, pp. ix-x

Nevertheless, the military interests of the Senate had been in decline for a while, as although they maintained their hold over the top military and gubernatorial commands under Augustus and equestrians were still primarily involved in financial and assistive civil functions, later emperors such as Marcus Aurelius found, during events such as the Marcomannic Wars, it difficult to find a sufficient quantity of senators with the requisite experience and ability for high command. These positions, however, remained staffed by senators prior to the third century, but with the rise of the soldier emperors following the Severans, the path towards the military closed as the more capable equestrians took over the once exclusive positions of the senators, senatorial participation in highest ranks of the military and civil government was no longer exclusive. While senators still held many positions in administration, again this was another area of senatorial decline, as the management of the empire had changed considerably. With the disappearance of many junior magistracies as well as the senatorial appointments in the hands of the emperor, there were few appointments to those of ambition, and the role of the emperor highlighted a natural target. Moreover, the normal *cursus honorum* was disrupted; whereas before governorship of a praetorian province paved the way to the consulship and thus other appointments, now they were limited to civil appointments in Rome or Italy more generally, divorced from posts and commands in the imperial provinces where most of the armies were stationed. Even those of consular rank were restricted in the further posts available, and the remaining accessible positions depended on the discretion and favor of the emperor.¹⁷

¹⁷ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, pp. 94-96

What follows then is an unsurprising negative assessment of Gallienus for his role in the restriction of senatorial ambitions. With the military pathways closed as a result of his focus on experienced commanders over eminent but inexperienced senators (a practice not exclusive to Gallienus among the emperors of the third century), what remained were a selection of civil appointments, many of which depended on the emperor himself, a new system which provided a convenient target for those suitably ambitious and hampered by the new order in the imperial system.

Moreover, in another division between the Greek and Latin sources, these Latin senatorial writers are keen on assessing Gallienus' moral character, where accusations of licentiousness, indolence, and sloth form a key part of their overall evaluation of his reign. Although one can disregard any personal shortcomings in assessing his legacy in favor of the material political, military, and economic policies which affected the empire, even an examination of the moral assessments demonstrates a lack of veracity on the part of the Latin authors, likely the result of exaggeration to degrade the reputation of an emperor who won the enmity of a few senators such as Victor. As a first matter, Gallienus can not completely be absolved of some of the moral accusations, as his private life demonstrated a number of unacceptable inclinations; Bray suggests that Gallienus had many instances of eclecticism and exotic interests, such as his involvement in the Eleusinian Mysteries and occurrences of casual infidelity.¹⁸ Yet the most prominent examples used to demonstrate Gallienus' character fail to demonstrate much accuracy upon closer examination.

¹⁸ Bray, *Gallienus: A Study in Reformist and Sexual Politics*, p. 124

One key instance which is brought up to substantiate claims of a debauched morality is his Marcomannic marriage. The Marcomanni were a barbarian tribe on the north of the Danube, located close to the provinces of Raetia, Noricum, and Pannonia, and raiding the empire from the early days of Gallienus' ascension as junior emperor. It was during this period where he established relations with the tribe, and in particular took a bride named Pipa, a rather ignoble offense considering the barbarian status of Pipa and Gallienus' current marriage to Salonina. Victor describes this event as a "shameful love-affair with the daughter of Attalus, a king of the Germans, whose name was Pipa."¹⁹ The *Historia Augusta* notes that "He loved also a barbarian maid, Pipara by name, the daughter of a king."²⁰ The *Epitome* provides the same account, but notably provides the extra detail that a "portion of Pannonia Superior had been conceded through a treaty," and that with Pipa's father, "king of the Marcomanni, he had accepted in a kind of marriage."²¹ This account of territorial concession and marriage is unique to the *Epitome*, and indeed this account of his barbarian concubine is limited to these Latin sources alone, as Zosimus and Zonaras do not mention this event at all. While it is certainly possible to account for actions such as the territorial concession, as it was not uncommon in the late empire for tracts of land to be granted to barbarian tribes as Roman clients, leaving an easy exaggeration for Victor. Furthermore, this account is linked to a Teutonic influence on Gallienus, as the *Historia Augusta* states that with the marriage, "Gallienus, moreover, and those about him always dyed their hair yellow."²² The resulting influences of this action leaves a

¹⁹ Victor, *De Caesaribus*, p. 33

²⁰ *Historia Augusta, The Two Gallieni*, 21

²¹ Victor, *Epitome de Caesaribus*, 33

²² *Historia Augusta, The Two Gallieni*, 21

great deal of ammunition for any Latin author eager to despoil the name of Gallienus. As a first matter, the legality (and public perception) of the marriage was challenged on account of the non-Roman status of the bride and Gallienus' status as already married. Moreover, this close association with Germanics furthers the prior narrative of Gallienus' galivanting and association with those of low status and ill repute, and thus another example is added to support this portrayal of his character. Nevertheless, the entire sequence of events is brought into question by its distinctive lack of correspondence with the Greek sources and even among the Latin sources.

This is not the only occurrence of an inconsistency in the depiction of Gallienus' character. The *Historia Augusta* mentions, following his suppression of revolt in Moesia, "he left none exempt from his cruelty, and so brutal and savage was he, that in many communities he left not a single male alive."²³ This account is not mentioned anywhere else in either the Latin or Greek tradition. While the Latin authors are quick to provide accusations of idleness or apathy, this charge occurs only here. Zonaras even provides a contradictory description, where "He was magnanimous in outlook...he did not punish those who opposed him or those who associated with would-be usurpers."²⁴ The idea that Gallienus committed such actions stands on little ground given Gallienus' penchant for pragmatism and the condition of the empire of the time. To devastate the population of the Balkans, a key area from which he drew much of his soldiers, could be described as foolhardy at best with the Alemanni invading Italy just as he put down rebellion in Moesia.

²³ *Historia Augusta, Thirty Tyrants*, 9

²⁴ Zonaras, *The Epitome of Histories*, 602

Although I have attempted to refute many of the claims made against Gallienus' character, this aspect of the evaluation I have only lightly considered in favor of giving precedence to more material concerns regarding his actions. So long as these aspects of his character do not interfere with his official responsibilities, they bear no further mention. The appraisal of the moral considerations of the Latin authors serves more to draw greater doubt as to the veracity of their negative statements. As such, while Gallienus can not be fully determined to have never possessed some of these negative attributes ascribed to him, either in whole or in part, they do not play any further role in this assessment of his reign.

Altogether, the resulting uncertain nature of many of the primary sources compels a reliance on secondary material as well as alternative sources of information, such as numismatic evidence for imperial reigns, victories, and economic data. Although the overall material of the third century remains sparse and subject to much debate, what is clear, at the very least, is the untrustworthy nature of the Latin sources due to their contradictory elements with both the Greek sources of the period and generally accepted historical opinion. Despite this, although the Greek sources are not themselves exempt from questions of veracity, as often they remain the only source of information regarding numerous events, I have generally trusted their accounts where no obvious contradictions emerge with other sources or the general convention. Even among the Latin sources, details which are not covered by other sources and do not conflict with different accounts prove to be valuable. Taking these considerations into account regarding the primary material, one has a starting point from which to challenge this negative conception of a much-maligned emperor.

Historical Background

The reign of Gallienus can hardly be discussed without considering the context in which he lived. From the assassination of Alexander Severus by his soldiers in 235 to the reign of Diocletian in 283, Rome faced unprecedented turmoil in what is often called the crisis of the third century. Throughout this period, the Roman Empire confronted the extraordinary and simultaneous pressures of numerous barbarian invasions, a rising Sassanid Empire, civil war, plague, and economic calamity. Emperors in this time arose with support from the army, their power dependent upon military might, but rarely would they last longer than a few years, as usurpers declared by various factions constantly disputed the title of emperor in the opportunities created by the chaos engulfing the empire. Rome barely escaped collapse until a series of capable soldier emperors at last began to restore order and stability.

Prior to the crisis, the reign of Septimius Severus (193 – 211) sowed the seeds of future distress even as the empire was brought to a new height. The earlier reign of the emperor Commodus proved to be the end of the Antonines, a much-lauded golden age for the empire, and in the disorder which followed the murder of Commodus, five claimants arose to contest the imperial throne. Severus ultimately quelled the civil wars following the death of Commodus and defeated other imperial contenders such as Albinus and Niger to secure the stability of the empire and his reign. Outside the empire, among Rome's foreign enemies, the Parthians were defeated and northern Mesopotamia annexed. All the while the army was expanding as the treasury grew full. Though the empire was on the surface prosperous, problems festered below. The Germanic barbarians to the north were a different beast from the days of Arminius, as a steady flow of goods and the threat posed by the Roman army encouraged the formation

of larger polities along the horizon of Roman power. Pay and largesse to the army continued to be increased. The silver content of the currency continued to be debased, from ~70% during the reign of Marcus Aurelius to ~50% under Septimius Severus.²⁵ Finally, the very composition of the upper echelons of the Roman state continued to shift. The Senate became further neutered as it lost power to propose legislation and appoint magistrates, while the equestrian order continued to rise in their place and fill the important offices of the empire. Power became increasingly rooted in the army high command, as opposed to any civil institution.²⁶

The reign of Caracalla (211 – 217), following his father Severus, further exemplified the problems underlying the empire, as inflation, spending, and a dependence on the army characterized his rule. To secure the loyalty of the army, especially against his brother and co-emperor Geta, he promised higher pay, pay-raises which were underwritten by tax increases and currency debasement. Inheritance and manumission taxes were increased from 5% to 10%, while Caracalla's edict granting citizenship to all free men within the empire increased the tax base. These actions shifted the balance of political power from civil society and the traditional offices of the Senate toward the imperial military bureaucracy which increasingly served as the bulwark of imperial power. The effects of this would continue to be felt for the rest of the Severan Dynasty and beyond, as Caracalla's successor Macrinus (217 – 218) did not even bother waiting for the Senate to bestow the imperial titles upon him, instead acting on his own authority. Nevertheless, while he attempted to avoid offending the army, he ignored some of the arrangements under Caracalla; although privileges were not withdrawn, the lavish

²⁵ Michell, "The Edict of Diocletian: A Study of Price Fixing in the Roman Empire." p. 2

²⁶ Faulkner, *Rome: Empire of the Eagles*, p. 258

payments Caracalla provided were ended. Thus, when Elagabalus (218 – 222) was raised as a claimant by his grandmother Julia Maesa, Macrinus' soldiers deserted him and Elagabalus became emperor. Elagabalus, as with the previous emperors, was necessarily required to appease the soldiers, such as providing 2,000 sesterces each to soldiers in the east to maintain loyalty and prevent them from sacking Antioch, another indicator of the army's capability to turn against the emperor should he fall out of their favor. With the reign of Alexander Severus (222 – 235) following the assassination of Elagabalus, the powerbase from which the emperor derived his power remained the same given that the favor of the army remained paramount if Severus wished to maintain his position. Alexander Severus took great pains to keep the loyalty of his soldiers and issued coins proclaiming the fidelity of his soldiers with phrases such as *Fides Militum* and *Fides Exercitus* (Loyalty of the Soldiers and Loyalty of the Army), a proclamation which, considering the troubles with discipline in the east, often proved more wishful than reflective of reality. Ultimately, with his attempt to buy off the Alemanni along the German border, the lack of revenge against the raiding barbarians and the opportunity for glory and plunder pushed the soldiers to murder Alexander Severus.²⁷ While the Severan Dynasty attempted to grapple with internal problems, outside of the empire, a new power began to rise. The military activities of Severus and Caracalla had served to weaken the decaying Parthian Empire, and in the disorder Artaxerxes (Ardashir), one of the local commanders contesting power among the Persian shahs, defeated the Parthian king in 224 to crown himself

²⁷ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, pp. 57-63

Shahanshah (king of kings) and establish an energetic and imperialistic Sassanid Empire which threatened Roman power in the east for centuries to come.²⁸

With the death of Alexander Severus and the end of the Severan dynasty following his attempt to bribe the German tribes rather than contest their advance, rule of the empire fell to a quick succession of soldier emperors. With this began the “Crisis of the Third Century,” characterized by its instability. Each emperor was unable to manage all the crises rending the empire apart, further limited by the brevity of their tenures as assassination and usurpers ended the reigns of many emperors if they lost the favor of the army. Of course, the importance of the army had always been vital to any leader of Rome since the days of Marius. Augustus would have found it far more difficult to attain supremacy over his rivals and establish the empire without the support of most of the soldiers. Vespasian relied on the legions to push his claim to power following the death of Nero. Severus likewise relied on the army to support his endeavor in the period following the death of Commodus.²⁹ As a general matter of fact the role of the army was not qualitatively new, but its importance reached a new dimension in the period following the Severans, as almost every emperor lived and died by the loyalty of his men and any emperor neglecting such an obligation or facing another more able to lavish largesse upon the military quickly found himself deposed. With this military focus, another problem arose during the period. Tax revenues were increasingly insufficient to support the size of the army, a recurring pattern throughout this period as war, disease, and insurrection made collection ever more difficult even as the army demanded its great share. Maximinus Thrax (235

²⁸ Faulkner, *Rome: Empire of the Eagles*, p. 250

²⁹ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, p. 51

– 238), the man acclaimed emperor by the Pannonian legions in the chaos following the death of Alexander Severus, tightened tax collection while making extraordinary requisitions from rich and poor alike to maintain the large pay and donatives of the army. While his successors Papienus (238), Balbinus (238), and Gordian III (238 – 244) attempted to reduce the unpopular tax burden instituted by Maximinus, few solutions aside from the continued debasement of the currency existed, as economic troubles remained in the face of Gothic threats along the Danube and a resurgent Persia. Philip (244 – 249), following Gordian III, failed to address the wider financial issues as the currency continued to be debased and attempts to squeeze further taxes in Egypt led to rioting and rebellion, a problem which continued to the reign of Gallienus.³⁰

Along the military front, the legions had to be constantly shifted to deal with the ever-present threats along the borders of the empire, leading to weak points and localized devastation, further undermining the cohesion of the Roman state. Regionalism became more predominant as the inability of the emperor to protect all reaches of the empire led to factions eager to consolidate revenues and soldiers in their own locality. Outside the empire, barbarian invasions from tribes such as the Goths from across the Danube and a powerful Sassanid enemy in the east stretched the ability of the empire to defend itself. Gordian III was defeated by the Sassanids in the east, leading to his successor Philip buying off the Sassanids with a large indemnity and conceding Armenia to Persian control.³¹

Following Philip, Decius (249 – 251) faced the threat of the Goths, where key cities such as Philippopolis were sacked in the invasion, and died in a disastrous defeat. His successor

³⁰ *The Cambridge Ancient History*, pp. 30-38

³¹ Faulkner, *Rome: Empire of the Eagles*, pp. 245-255

Trebonius Gallus (251 – 253) then reached an embarrassing agreement with the Goths, allowing them to leave with plunder and captives as well as providing payment of an annual indemnity. The issues remained unresolved, however, as the empire shortly afterwards faced renewed attacks from the Sassanids and Goths.³² These threats were further magnified by plague spreading throughout the empire, depopulating areas for fifteen years, and by repeated revolts from various usurpers taking advantage of the instability of the imperial throne, such as Aemilian (253) against Gallus, where the increasing regionalism of the empire and Gallus' delegation of defense to regional authorities led to Aemilian's rebellion.³³ When Valerian came to the throne in 253 following the deaths of Gallus and Aemilian at the hands of their soldiers and his own proclamation of the imperial title from his soldiers, he faced disorder from the various factions vying for control in the empire and a crumbling frontier in the face of barbarian and Sassanid invasion. To secure the western frontier, Valerian appointed his son Gallienus as co-emperor, first to the rank of Caesar in 253 and to Augustus in 254, but it was Valerian who maintained control over high policy for the duration of his reign. Setting out to the east and leaving Gallienus in command of the western armies, Valerian had initial success in repelling Sassanid incursions but ultimately his capture at the Battle of Edessa in 260 left Gallienus as sole emperor. Following the capture of Valerian, one of his officers, Fulvius Macrianus, rallied the remnants of the eastern army and declared his own two sons emperor. The power vacuum in the east also allowed for the rise of Odenathus and the Palmyrans to take the place of the emperor in the fight against the Sassanids. In the west, the collapse of the Rhine defenses led to

³² Campbell, *The Romans and their World*, p. 196

³³ Bray, *Gallienus: A Study in Reformist and Sexual Politics*, pp. 36-37

forces in Gaul, Germany, Britain, and Spain to consolidate and rally around Postumus. Even the prefect of Egypt, Aemilianus, would throw his backing behind Macrianus. It is from this nadir that Gallienus began his reign as sole emperor.³⁴

³⁴ Faulkner, *Rome: Empire of the Eagles* pp. 254-255

The Reign of Gallienus

During the reign of Valerian, Gallienus had been sent to the provinces along the Rhine, later venturing toward the Danube and Illyricum. The events which occurred during this period are generally vague with regards to Gallienus, but even among the hostile Latin sources, what is described of Gallienus' actions during this period is generally positively, as authors such as Eutropius describe him as gallant and effective in fighting invaders in Gaul and Illyricum.³⁵ During this period of his co-emperorship, Gaul was under severe pressure from the Alemanni and Franks along the Rhine border and faced numerous incursions and breakthroughs. Gallienus himself had taken command of the Rhine army and fought the Alemanni and Franks successfully while he developed his cavalry during this period.³⁶

Although written sources are sparse regarding this period, numismatic evidence points toward several victories and accomplishments attributed to Gallienus during the period he jointly ruled with his father, Valerian. From the issues of the mint in Milan, coinage commemorates both the loyalty of the legions and their help in winning a great victory over the Alemanni in 258 or 259. Around the New Year of 261, a short period following the capture of Valerian and prior to many of his major actions as sole emperor, a sixth acclamation is noted from the mints of Cologne and Milan, likely referring to the suppression of the usurper Ingenuus. A contemporary gold medallion from Cologne likewise names Gallienus *imperator sextum* for a sixth acclamation. An issue of the Roman mint brought out soon after the capture of Valerian has as its chief theme a third victory, one which likely refers to the same victory

³⁵ Eutropius, *Breviarium ab Urbe Condita*, 9.8

³⁶ De Blois, *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus*, p. 6

over Ingenuus. The likely cause of this discrepancy is the break of Gallienus with the policies of Valerian, starting anew and omitting the victories achieved under the auspices of his father. Following Valerian's capture, Gallienus attempted to distance himself from the memory of his father, as indicated in his dramatic change in policy in such aspects as his lifting of the prosecution of Christians. With the *patria potestas* of his father gone in addition to Valerian's deposition and disgrace, so too was there a shift in the reckoning as Gallienus could now begin his reign as he saw fit.³⁷ This shift, however, was not universal through the mints of the empire, and in Egypt the old numbering continued concurrently; the timing of the third victory celebrated in Rome and Milan, indicating the suppression of Ingenuus, is identical to the sixth victory of the old numbering.³⁸

These hard-fought victories continued from the start of his reign to its very end, as from the onset of his sole reign, Gallienus was faced with numerous rebellions, invasions, and usurpers from a wide array of sources. From outside of the imperial borders, the Sassanids continued to push far into the empire following the disastrous Battle of Edessa and the capture of Valerian, advancing as far as Antioch and sacking the city. Along the Danube, barbarian tribes such as those identified as the Goths also plundered many of the Empire's European cities as they took advantage of the empire's weakness in the wake of the collapse of imperial power and authority (Figure 2).³⁹

³⁷ Bray, *Gallienus: A Study in Reformist and Sexual Politics*, p. 129

³⁸ Alföldi, "The Reckoning by the Regnal Years and Victories of Valerian and Gallienus", pp. 8-9 – Six victories recorded by the suppression of Ingenuus

³⁹ Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, Book 1 23-24

In the west, Gallienus' move toward the Danube led to a weakening of the Rhine border as he took with him *vexillationes* from the Rhine legions. Thus, the Alemanni and Franks were able to break through and ravage much of Gaul. With Gallienus elsewhere, it was the general Postumus who was able to defeat many of the invading barbarians and take possession of their spoils. According to Zonaras, rather than returning the plunder and sending it to Gallienus' commander Albanus (or Silvanus according to Zosimus) and the younger Gallienus (Saloninus) at Cologne, Postumus contrived to induce his soldiers to revolt, appropriating the plunder for themselves, and then captured the city, executing Albanus and Saloninus. Thus, Gaul and Britain were wrested out of the emperor's control.⁴⁰ The *Historia Augusta* provides a much more courageous and judicious depiction of Postumus to contrast with its negative image of Gallienus, as "the Gauls, by nature unable to endure princes who are frivolous and given over to luxury and have fallen below the standard of Roman valour, called Postumus to the imperial power."⁴¹ Regardless, despite the historical inconsistencies surrounding Postumus and his motives or character, what is clear was the Rhine army's lack of confidence in the ability of the emperor to defend their province from invasion and their resulting proclamation of Postumus as someone capable of supporting their interests. Once the die was cast and rebellion began, there was no possibility of compromise or retraction. Thus, Saloninus, as Gallienus' representative needed to be removed, whether it was truly Postumus' order or not. Postumus' true aims, however, are also unclear, as while he promoted himself and undertook the actions of an emperor, such as issuing coinage proclaiming himself restorer of Gaul and a bringer of

⁴⁰ Zonaras, *The Epitome of Histories*, 597-598

⁴¹ *Historia Augusta, The Two Gallieni*, 4

security to the provinces, his power was ultimately predicated upon his ability to defend the Rhine and its hinterland, an aspect which stymied any of his ambitions outside Gaul, Britain, and Spain. Whether he had ambitions of displacing Gallienus as the sole emperor remains a matter of academic debate, but, regardless of any verdict on this matter, what is relevant regarding Postumus is his governance of the Gallic Empire in the manner of a Roman emperor, complete with Roman institutions and annually elected consuls, his occupation with the defense of the Rhine which prevented aggressive operations, and his unrecognized status from Gallienus.⁴²

In the east, the capture of Valerian and subsequent collapse of imperial authority in the region brought about a number of usurpers. The usurper Regalianus revolted in Pannonia while Macrianus, an equestrian in charge of logistics under Valerian, saved the remainder of Valerian's army, but quickly broke with Gallienus along with Valerian's Praetorian Prefect Ballista (also known in some sources as Callistus) and the governor of Egypt, Aemilianus. While not claiming the imperial throne himself, he declared his two sons, Quietus and the younger Macrianus, *Augusti* in the wake of Valerian's capture and began to march on Rome with the younger Macrianus, leaving Ballista and Quietus in charge of the east. The two Macriani, however, were crushed by Aureolus, the general of Gallienus, while Ballista and Quietus were defeated by Odenathus, who rose to control much of the east from Palmyra, repel the Persians and establishing himself as Gallienus' commander of the east, with de facto control over much of the eastern provinces.⁴³

⁴² Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, pp. 97-100

⁴³ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, pp. 100-103

Odenathus, in a similar manner to Postumus, commanded a vast swath of Roman territory, yet unlike Postumus he was not entirely divorced from Gallienus or his authority. While Postumus made an overt claim of the imperial title and rejected Gallienus, Odenathus was officially recognized as *dux Romanorum* and commander of the east by Gallienus and never claimed the imperial dignity. As always, debate surrounds the exact relation between Gallienus and Odenathus, such as how much his loyalty outweighed his self-interest and whether his command extended to all forces in the east or simply a substantial independent force. For the moment, however, Odenathus primarily acted as a loyal ally, as he launched campaigns against Persia, reaching even Ctesiphon, assisted against Gallienus' usurpers, and fought Goths invading Roman territory in Asia Minor. Doubt has been cast on his true intentions, such as reaching out to the Persian King Shapur prior to allying with Gallienus, but for the duration of his life he was primarily content, at least nominally, to act as Gallienus' subordinate and to secure the eastern frontier.⁴⁴

Considering these circumstances, it remains remarkable that Gallienus could maintain the empire at all, much less last the longest of the emperors during the Crisis and defeat the many dangers afflicting the empire. Despite the hardships and many compromises in his policy, however, the empire remained intact. The usurper Regalianus was killed in an invasion by the lazyges and Roxolani. Macrianus and Ballista, as mentioned earlier, were put down by Aureolus and Odenathus. In Egypt, Theodotus, the general of Gallienus, put down the usurper Aemilianus. The Sassanids, through the efforts of Odenathus, were pushed back to their earlier

⁴⁴ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, pp. 100-103

borders. In the east, although Gallienus was unable to assert control over Palmyra either at the onset of his sole reign or when Odenathus was assassinated, it was not a sign of a cowardly and weak emperor unable to assert imperial power over the provinces of the empire, but rather of the issue of priority when every issue demanded attention. Other dangers offered more immediate threats to himself. The Alemanni, who penetrated Italy and reached the gates of Rome itself, were a more immediate threat and necessitated an immediate response by Gallienus, leading to his victory near Milan and ridding the empire of their threat until they resurfaced after the end of his reign in 268. It is valid to question his long-term objective or ability to reassert control over Palmyra, as while the situation remained stable so long as Odenathus was content to continue the legal fiction that he was merely acting in the name of Gallienus, this still left the ability of the Emperor to exert actual influence over the east uncertain, an authority which would only grow more uncertain with less cooperative successors in Palmyra as seen with the actions of Zenobia following the death of Odenathus in separating the authority of Palmyra from Rome. Certainly, his biographers pile on criticism for this inability to assert his imperial prerogative over large stretches of the empire, but Gallienus possessed limited resources, perhaps far less than any earlier emperor, with the empire torn apart and what remained devastated by invasion and plague. A more prudent choice was to deal with the more imminent barbarian threat. Even this would take considerable effort, one which distracted even the reign of his successor Claudius from dealing with the Gallic Empire and Palmyra, a facet of his reign which is conveniently ignored by the likes of Victor despite their rebukes of Gallienus for this very fact. In any case, his policy of working with Odenathus paid greater dividends than immediate conflict, as he served as a sufficient buffer against the

Sassanids and assisted against usurpers and barbarians. Even Postumus ably kept up the defense of the Rhine frontier.

Every year of Gallienus' fifteen-year tenure was occupied by campaigning and invasion, with the exception of a relative calm in 262-265. During this small period of peace, Gallienus found time to devote to philosophy, particularly his appreciation of Platonism and the philosopher Plotinus, an aspect which again left him open to criticism and accusation of indolence from the Latin sources. Yet he can hardly be accused of inaction; Gallienus was not entirely successful, but he clearly experienced important victories and successes in this part of his reign. True, he failed an attempt to reconquer the Gallic Empire in 265, and in 267 large groups of barbarians poured into the Balkans, but although unable to clear the whole area, he was able to defeat the Heruli in Illyricum and afterwards follow up with a victory at Nestus. He was, however, unable to personally continue his campaign because of the revolt of Aureolus, an incident which resulted in his death. These events, however, refute any claims of inactivity and he succeeded in keeping the empire alive, paving the way for key reforms taken by later emperors as the empire dragged itself away from the brink of dissolution.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, pp. 102-108

Military Reforms

Among the many accomplishments of Gallienus, perhaps his most critical and long lasting were his reforms to the military. These shifts in the structure of the army and the role of the emperor were not necessarily qualitatively new. Even preceding his reign, from the beginnings of the empire, the army and its relation to the realm was changing. While Augustus had long removed himself from the direct conduct of military operations, successive emperors took far greater roles in military affairs. Vespasian built his renown on military success as a general and supported his bid for power with the backing of his army. Severus, likewise, seized control with the army and engaged in frequent military activity. By the time of Maximinus Thrax and the beginning of the strife which characterized the third century, it became standard that the emperor direct major campaigns, and more notably personally participate in the battle line as an effective emperor needed to be an effective general in war as well.⁴⁶ Gallienus then represented the continuation of a trend which featured the development of the soldier emperors through his powerbase in his soldiers and his personal military leadership.

Nevertheless, in terms of the composition and structure of the army, the particular changes which occurred under Gallienus altered the military in a far greater fashion than many of his fellow soldier emperors. The legion, with its staple heavy infantry, had long been the backbone of the Roman army. The role and number of auxiliary troops, however, was steadily increasing, and distinctions between the citizens and non-citizens in the legions and auxiliaries were eroded by actions such as the expansion of citizenship under the Edict of Caracalla. In

⁴⁶ *The Cambridge Ancient History* Vol. XII, pp. 110-113

addition, the third century saw the growing usage of troops from ethnic groups who were kept together, often retaining their own characteristics and organization, and used to great effect, such as Moorish cavalry used in the campaigns of Philip, Valerian, Gallienus, and Aurelian.⁴⁷ With regards to Gallienus, adaption and innovation was required as he continued to shift the structure of the Roman army, as he possessed few of the resources earlier emperors had enjoyed. Even emperors on constant extensive campaigns facing abundant threats such as Severus had the advantage of their numerous crises being more temporally and geographically isolated, compared to the crises facing Gallienus. Gallienus only had a motley collection comprising his forces, primarily drawn from his Rhine and Danube legions amassed for his initial campaigns, including the Praetorians and *II Parthica* from Italy and vexillations from Britain, Germany, Raetia, Noricum, Pannonia, Moesia, and Dacia. His most famous change from this amalgamation was that of the cavalry. The need for mobility was greater than ever and the traditional organization did not suit Gallienus' purposes. Utilizing a mobile cavalry army from Milan, Gallienus merged legionary horsemen drawn from his vexillations, primarily Moorish, Osroeni, and Dalmatian, rather than placing them in auxiliary units or attaching them to an army.⁴⁸ The army lists of the *Notitia Dignitatum* indicates the importance and size of these new units of cavalry such as the *equites Dalmatae*, which representing some of the best cavalry units in the later empire.⁴⁹ Two important themes emerge then, the increasing usage of detachments from larger units, *vexillationes*, and the growing importance of the cavalry in the army as a whole.

⁴⁷ *The Cambridge Ancient History* Vol. XII, pp. 110-113

⁴⁸ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, pp. 88-90

⁴⁹ Speidel, *Roman Army Studies*, p. 391

This shift from the traditional structure of the army, where the legions formed from heavy infantry comprised the basis for Rome's military, was in some regards a process stretching since the beginnings of the empire. Over time, it was shown to be more convenient to shift legionary detachments as opposed to full legions when need required forces shift from one province to another. Under Vespasian, the centurion Salvius Rufus commanded *vexillationes* from no fewer than nine legions. Marcus Aurelius made extensive use of detachments in the Marcomannic Wars, while Septimius Severus gathered together detachments to form armies to fight in his campaigns against usurpers.⁵⁰ Until the middle of the third century, however, most troops were still assigned to the frontier provinces under the command of provincial governors. Expeditionary forces might draw forces from the whole empire under the command of the emperor, but as of yet these actions were reactions to circumstances rather than any definitive shift toward a core field army capable of shifting easily among various theaters of operation.

To what extent then were the reforms of Gallienus an *ad hoc* temporary measure versus a more permanent and intentional structural change? Gallienus certainly had little compunction about rejecting old systems and traditions in favor of pragmatic choices, a characteristic which demonstrated itself in his relationship with the Senate and the social mobility of the late empire. De Blois indicates that this pragmatic behavior resulted in a military restructuring which was not intended to be a uniformly introduced structural reform but rather an emergency measure to ensure his own and the empire's survival. Rather than following some pre-

⁵⁰ *The Cambridge Ancient History* Vol. XII, p. 113

conceived plan, the focus instead was on the immediate actions available to address the various issues afflicting the empire. Among these immediate implementations of Gallienus' reforms was the creation of a mobile cavalry force, reorganizing the core structure of the army. De Blois attributes the development of the cavalry corps to a need to find a solution to the problem of mobility in the struggle for the Rhine fords against the Germans and a simple pragmatic reaction to the sudden emergency, an adaptation of existing military resources.⁵¹ Speidel points towards the employment of *stratores*, personnel responsible for the supervision of horses and part of a governor's legionary staff, as critical in the formation of new independent cavalry units. As to his cavalry reform itself, while it is disputed whether the cavalry army he established was the true forerunner to those of the late empire, Gallienus was the first to establish cavalry regiments (*tagmata*) placed under an independent commander answerable only to himself who occupied a powerful and influential position. Indeed, it is telling that the emperors who followed, Claudius and Aurelian, came from cavalry commands under Gallienus. With a primary center at Milan, where Gallienus headquartered himself and his cavalry, Aquileia, Sirmium, Poetovio, and Lychnidus were fortified and received vexillations from which they could occupy strong points and react to invasion.⁵²

While Gallienus himself was reacting to the circumstances surrounding him, where the disintegration of central authority and control led to *ad hoc* measures to address the crises afflicting the empire, the actions of Gallienus demonstrated a radical new strategy in the value of strong independent units capable of rapid response, an extraordinary measure which, even if

⁵¹ De Blois, *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus*, pp. 83-84

⁵² *The Cambridge Ancient History* Vol. XII, pp. 115-116

not intended as permanent, created a solid base from which the individual responses by later emperors to the problems of the empire demonstrated its effectiveness, one which would eventually find a permanent implementation. The fate of Gallienus' particular cavalry army is somewhat obscure. Clearly his immediate successors in Claudius and Aurelian utilized cavalry to great effect, an aspect attested to in the historical record where, "In this war, throughout its whole length, the valour of the Dalmatian horsemen stood out as especially great, because it was thought that Claudius claimed that province as his original home."⁵³ In Zosimus' description of Aurelian's campaigns, the Roman cavalry take center stage in the battle against Zenobia, where "the Dalmatian cavalry, the Moesians and Pannonians" play key roles in the victories at Immae and Emesa.⁵⁴ It was perhaps under the reign of Carinus that the cavalry army was dispersed, leaving Diocletian and Constantine the task of reforming the contingent which would become the basis for the *comitatenses* and the mobile field army of the later empire.⁵⁵ It is then entirely possible to view the cavalry army more as another *ad hoc* formation of detachments, one which could be disbanded under another successor should its utility end. Yet one also finds evidence for the endurance of this reorganization. Gallienus, in addition to his mobile cavalry force, was also likely the founder of the *equites stablesiani* stationed in most major military areas of the empire. Crucially, most remained within the provinces from which they were raised, serving as mobile reserve units for the armies of the provinces. If so, then one can also find a forerunner in the regional field armies as well in the reforms of Gallienus.⁵⁶ Nevertheless,

⁵³ Historia Augusta, *Life of Claudius*, 11

⁵⁴ Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, Book 1 25-26

⁵⁵ De Blois, *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus*, pp. 29-30

⁵⁶ Speidel, *Roman Army Studies*, pp. 392-396

one must still take care in attributing Gallienus credit in the ultimate formation of the late Roman army, but what is clear is the effectiveness of his measures, one which shored up the defense of the empire within his own reign, where the borders along Italy, Raetia, Pannonia, and the Danube were strengthened and the barbarian threat was more effectively dealt with.

In addition to his cavalry and army reforms, Gallienus, through controversial policies, altered the command structure of the army, employing more men of equestrian rank than any emperor before at the expense of senatorial commanders. With the empire in desperate straits, incompetent senatorial commanders with little experience were a luxury he could not afford. While his reform was not entirely without precedent, as equestrian prefects were utilized as temporary military governors and from the reign of Augustus equestrians had increasingly been employed in official administrative posts, the command structure of Gallienus utilized equestrians to an extent never before seen, as equestrians made up most of the command positions and temporary appointments to manage regions became commonplace with almost every region invaded or threatened.⁵⁷ The previous role of the equestrians in the government had been to supplement senatorial administration, and emperors such as Severus recognized this senatorial prerogative, even as relations became more and more strained. What occurred increasingly under Gallienus, however, was the supplanting of traditional senatorial governors with equestrian *agentes vices praesidis* invested with all the privileges of traditional governors. Equestrians had traditionally held procuratorial positions, commanding the fiscal responsibilities in a province, but what the conditions of the time favored was the

⁵⁷ Mennen, *Power and Status in the Roman Empire, AD 193-284*, pp. 216-222

concentration of military, administrative, fiscal, and judiciary powers into a single person. Particularly in the most troubled provinces, an experienced equestrian officer was capable of extracting the maximum value out of the land through their extensive contacts with the army to maintain the stability of the region. These equestrian governors could even be placed in command of entire fronts regardless of the provincial divisions in the area. While senators were not entirely excluded, as at times the equestrian *praeses* was succeeded by a senator, these new *agentes vices praesidis* by and large came from a much humbler class than the old governors. In areas such as Pannonia, Arabia, Cilicia, and Hispania, the governors were primarily former equestrian officers, many of whom rose from the ranks of the soldiers to the equestrian offices. What is clear is a distinct shift in administrative policy in favor of the soldiers, which as a consequence empowered the lower rungs of the Roman hierarchy as it furthered the social mobility displayed in the army.⁵⁸

A comparison between chief officers of the two emperors Severus and Gallienus demonstrates this shift from senatorial to equestrian commands. Septimius Severus, at around 193 during his initial rise to power, counted on the support of Clodius Albinus, Fabius Cilo, Iulius Avitus Alexianus, Iulius Laetus, Iulius Septimius Castinus, Marius Maximus, and Valerius Valerianus. Clodius Albinus figures prominently as a key early supporter, as a senatorial governor of Britannia and commander of three legions. Cilo was appointed as *consul designatus* and may have been *consul suffectus* at the beginning of Severus' rise. Laetus led Severus' advance guard during his march on Rome, but his status is rather unclear. Castinus and Marius

⁵⁸ De Blois, *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus*, pp. 53-55

Maximus were at the very start of their senatorial careers at the start of Severus' reign. Avitus Alexianus likewise held only a procuratorship, but later succeeded to a position of governor of Raetia and a suffect consulship. Valerianus served as an equestrian procurator in Cyprus and cavalry commander. Later in his reign, he counted on the support of Claudius Candidus, a praetor during the reign of Commodus, and Cornelius Anullinus, who achieved the governorship of Africa, against the rebellion of Pescennius Niger.⁵⁹ What this composition of Severus' top aides demonstrates is the still dominant senatorial class at the top of administrative and military structure. He counted powerful and eminent senators such as Cilo and (at first) Albinus among his supporters. While some, such as Severus himself and Anullinus came from equestrian backgrounds, they had become members of the senatorial elite, governing imperial provinces and commanding legions with consular authority. Although not all his supporters were from such distinguished and powerful positions, such as Castinus and Maximus who were low ranking members at the start of their senatorial careers, or more middling positions such as Claudianus who held the rank of praetor when he first supported Severus, they still represented a strong senatorial component in his ranks. Some such as Valerianus and Alexianus were clearly equestrian commanders, and Valerianus would never rise to senatorial rank, but clearly there was a strong connection between the senatorial body and military, where equestrians still represented a rare group among the highest echelons of command, a situation Severus did little to change.

⁵⁹ Mennen, *Power and Status in the Roman Empire, AD 193-284*, pp. 194-199

By contrast, the men under the command of Gallienus arose from quite different backgrounds from those of the days of Severus. Among his top ranks numbered Aureolus, Claudius Gothicus, and Aurelian. Aureolus is recorded as having held the position of *dux equitum*, cavalry commander, and accordingly directed the mobile cavalry army formed under Gallienus. From humble backgrounds, he apparently was a Dacian shepherd who joined the army under Valerian, distinguishing himself and rising to become cavalry commander. Claudius Gothicus was likewise from inauspicious origins; although he was recorded as possibly the son of one of the Gordians, the veracity of this is in doubt. Regardless of his origin, from this probable humble background he served in the army and, according to the *Historia Augusta*, rose to become a commander, *dux totius Illyrici*, under Valerian. While this fact from the notoriously dubious *Historia Augusta* is likely fictitious, he probably served in the army for a considerable period prior to his promotion as a cavalry commander for Gallienus. Rounding out the figures, Aurelian unsurprisingly comes from obscure but humble origins as well and rose to become cavalry commander (*dux equitum*) as well.⁶⁰ Beyond his cavalry commanders, several officers received the distinguished title of *protector* from Gallienus, a rather vague designation but one which generally marked out its members for further distinction. Among its members the names Petronius Taurus Volusianus, Aelius Aelianus, Traianus Mucianus, and Valerius Marcellinus are recorded. Volusianus rose rapidly to the pinnacle of an equestrian career, where he commanded troop detachments for special imperial service and directly served under Gallienus under a number of positions before reaching the rank of praetorian prefect. Marcellinus held the ranks of legion prefect and legate and is attested to have eventually

⁶⁰ Osier, "The Emergence of Third-Century Equestrian Military Commanders" p. 686

become an equestrian governor of Mauretania Tingitana under Probus. Aelianus similarly held the ranks of legate and prefect and was most likely equestrian governor of Mauritania Caesariensis. Mucianus rose from the ranks of the ordinary soldiers to accompany Gallienus on campaign as a cavalryman in the praetorian guard. One notable change then is apparent in the composition of Gallienus' military aides, a lack of senatorial representation compared to Severus. In addition, one sees the career military backgrounds of these figures as well as their commands in the cavalry, again indicating the shifting structure of the army as it changed from its old senatorial appointments and reliance on the traditional legions of heavy infantry. His measures proved to be to the advantage of those all the way to the lower military ranks, ordinary soldiers who could now hope for an equestrian career in the army or administration. In comparison to the Republic and early Principate, the old social stratification in the command positions diminished as great number of equestrian posts opened up to the lower ranks.⁶¹

The very position of emperor itself had shifted from the stranglehold the senatorial class once held. Over time, the accessibility of the office increased as emperors came from increasingly humble backgrounds. While the Julio-Claudians may have come from long and distinguished senatorial families, Vespasian came from an equestrian family and only in his life achieved senatorial status. Pertinax began as the son of a freedman but was a distinguished senator by the time he became emperor. Macrinus, as the Praetorian Prefect, was of equestrian status when he ascended to the imperial throne, and most notably did not transition to the higher senatorial rank, although his ascension did not create as great consternation as one

⁶¹ De Blois, *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus*, pp. 42-43

might expect, a fact explained by Dio as perhaps the relief of the senators over Caracalla's disposition that they did not notice at first the lesser rank. The end of the Severan Dynasty, however, would pave the way for even greater access to the title of emperor. Maximinus Thrax was of low birth who, rather than rise through the ranks through the traditional offices, instead worked his way through the ranks of the army and avoided the traditional administrative offices of the empire altogether.⁶² Philip's early origins are obscure, although the unreliable *Epitome de Caesaribus* alleges that he was of humble birth from a father who was a notable commander of brigands.⁶³ As Praetorian Prefect under Gordian III, however, he would have been of equestrian rank, or at least risen to it in his lifetime.⁶⁴ Although Gallienus himself was of a distinguished senatorial background, his commanders, from whom arose many of the emperors who followed him, came from far lesser backgrounds; afterwards, a senatorial emperor would be the exception rather than the rule as the army came to be the origin for the emperors in place of the senate.⁶⁵

As a result of these reforms, Gallienus had essentially divorced senators from military commands, separating the civil from the military. The reliance on vexillations, commanded by capable equestrian commanders, appointments of equestrians as *duces* in control of multiple vexillations, and even equestrian appointments to traditional senatorial commands such as legion commands and provincial governorships altered the composition of the military leadership.⁶⁶ Even the very position of emperor itself found occupants from undistinguished

⁶² Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, pp. 55-64

⁶³ Victor, *Epitome de Caesaribus*, 159

⁶⁴ Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, p. 70

⁶⁵ *The Cambridge Ancient History* Vol. XII, p. 41

⁶⁶ *The Cambridge Ancient History* Vol. XII, p. 118

social backgrounds, as the emperors who followed Gallienus, Claudius Gothicus, Aurelian, Probus, and Carus, came from much humbler backgrounds. While Aurelius Victor's claim of a formal edict from Gallienus explicitly excluding senators from military commands lacks veracity, experienced equestrian commanders undoubtedly replaced senators in key military roles during this period, as senatorial opportunities for military experience became further restricted; many were not up to the standards the commands required, as they increasingly took on civic administrative positions with little opportunity for military experience, which further limited the pool of senators with the experience required for command. This, in combination with the increasing democratization of the army, where social mobility and career prospects for even ordinary soldiers was increased, shifted the ruling order towards a non-senatorial military class. It is telling that in addition to the rise of the equestrian order, the locus of power was shifting away from the imperial center to the provinces, where every emperor from Claudius Gothicus through Theodosius was of Balkan origin. In any event, it was increasingly the army alone through which one could rise to political prominence. The office of *dux* began to appear during this period along the border provinces as well as in small field armies, a development which continued through the reign of Gallienus as the empire became reorganized. While the separation of civil and military administration was by no means instant, as some governors retained military functions, by the reign of emperors such as Diocletian provincial governors became more confined to civil administration compared to the *duces* in command of military forces in the provinces.⁶⁷ More and more equites dominated the entourage of the emperor, and in the troubled areas of the empire, civil and military commands folded into the authority

⁶⁷ *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare*, p. 273

of equestrian *praeses*, no longer bound by the need to become a part of the senatorial order or hold the traditional civil offices to advance their career. While many did end their careers with adlection to the senate, it was clearly no longer necessary and the high ranks of the army and government increasingly came into the hands of this new equestrian order, one which drew its members from the soldiers and separated itself from the old concepts and ideas of the senate.⁶⁸

Thus, following his reign, Claudius Gothicus, Aurelian, and Probus continued to utilize the military monarchy and foundations built by Gallienus in their re-establishment of imperial power. Claudius reestablished control from the usurper Aureolus, ejected the Alemanni from Italy, and broke up a Gothic invasion in the Balkans. Aurelian, following Claudius, maintained the counter-offensive by driving out the barbarian invaders and ultimately put an end to the Gallic and Palmyran Empires which had established themselves as separate political entities from Rome. Probus continued to defend the empire Aurelian reunited, defending it against the Germans along the Rhine, Vandals on the Danube, Nubians south of Egypt, and numerous usurpers, paving the way for Diocletian's eventual ascension and the end of the third century. Those actions, however, predicated themselves upon the reforms of Gallienus, where the new military complex expanded at the expense of the traditional civilian aristocracy and the heavy infantry which had long been the basis of Roman military power was replaced with the fast-moving shock cavalry. A new bureaucratized military elite emerged following Gallienus to

⁶⁸ De Blois, *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus*, pp. 61-62

supplant the old regime, one which, despite its faults, proved itself able in bringing the empire through the tumult of the third century.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Faulkner, *Rome: Empire of the Eagles*, pp. 259-262

Economic Troubles

In analyzing the financial policy of Gallienus, it is important to account for the economic context in which he arose. For a long period preceding his reign imperial income had long since failed to match expenditure. Even under the relative stability of the Severan dynasty, the increasing demands of the army had led Caracalla to debase the currency to help maintain its loyalty, a pattern which continued for the following Severan emperors. Under the earlier reign of Marcus Aurelius, the last of the Five Good Emperors, the silver content of the *denarius* had already dropped a third relative to the essentially pure silver *denarius* of Augustus. The reign of Septimius Severus saw further debasement, continuing throughout the governance of the Severan Dynasty as the demands of the army outpaced the empire's ability to satisfy. Such debasement reached its apogee during the reign of Gallienus, where the immense requirements of the army and a declining tax base reduced the silver coin to essentially copper.⁷⁰ Direct taxation, the major source of state revenue, failed to provide the funding necessary for the payment of the army due to a combination of factors. Gallienus ruled over a truncated empire and thus tax base, where Gaul and Britain were lost to Postumus and much of the east was under the control of Odenathus. Of the remaining empire, barbarian raids and usurpers had taken their toll, where numerous cities, such as Athens in 267, were regularly sacked in the wake of imperial weakness. Even within relatively secure areas, large landholders with power and influence could evade taxation, a problem exacerbating the financial crisis. Gallienus was running an emergency fiscal policy, supported by often crippling taxation and

⁷⁰ Michell, "The Edict of Diocletian: A Study of Price Fixing in the Roman Empire." p. 2

requisitions as well as debasement. While for the duration of his reign the empire was saved by these policies to maintain the army, in the long run this had disastrous effects.

Long preceding the third century, the empire had already seen a steady decline in the purity of its currency. The *denarius* of Augustus was effectively pure silver, a purity which dropped to 94% by the time of Nero. By the time of Marcus Aurelius, the *denarius* declined to 68%, indicating much more serious debasement of the currency, which had further degraded to 50% by the reign of Septimius Severus.⁷¹ The troubles Aurelius faced along the frontiers presaged the disorder which would come at the end of the Five Good Emperors and the increasing dependence on the army. The reforms of Septimius Severus, while restoring order in the chaos following the death of Commodus, signaled a change in the Roman order. The Senate became increasingly marginalized as equestrians and other orders came to fill the ranks of the imperial governors and commanders. Moreover, the army was enlarged and empowered, expanding from 25 legions under Augustus and 30 under Aurelius to 33 under Severus. Within the army, senatorial commanders slowly came to be replaced by those of more common origin as aristocratic privilege decreased and the rift between the civil administration and military apparatus grew. Fiscally, all this had a further cost; as emperors came to rely increasingly on the loyalty of the army, so too did Severus bestow generous largesse on his soldiers, increasing pay in addition to the size of the army. Nevertheless, for his reign at least, the realm remained at least solvent. Under Caracalla, this policy of spending continued, now beginning to strain the resources of the empire. Army pay continued to increase and revenue continued to be difficult

⁷¹ Michell, "The Edict of Diocletian: A Study of Price Fixing in the Roman Empire." p. 2

to find. Caracalla's famous edict granting citizenship to all free men was intended to increase the number of citizens obligated to pay taxes while the currency continued to be debased. A new double-*denarius* was introduced, but at a lower silver content than the two *denarii* it was supposed to represent, and it was itself further debased.⁷² Following the death of Alexander Severus, however, one sees the nadir of the empire's economic decline and an end to the old currency regime in place since Augustus. The extensive and stable system of a trimetallic system with stable fixed relationships gave way to the cessation of coins such as the bronze *sestertii* as well as provincial silver and bronze coinages, as debasement rendered their production uneconomic and disrupted the exchange relationships among the coins.

As mentioned, the currency, or more specifically the silver *denarius*, had been on the decline since the beginning of the empire, from the almost pure silver coin under Augustus, to the silver content of the *denarius* reaching levels as low as 35% during the reign of Alexander Severus and reaching levels as low as 0.5% during the tenure of the emperors who followed after the Severan Dynasty.⁷³ The radiate, also known as the double-*denarius* or *antoninianus*, introduced during the reign of Caracalla, fared little better as it also faced issues with its exchange and value. While intended to have a 2:1 relationship with the *denarius*, it only contained around 1.6 times the silver content and led to a more natural exchange rate of 1.5:1. Following Caracalla, the production of the radiate varied depending on the policy of the individual emperor until its reintroduction by Balbinus and Pupienus in 238; the radiate rapidly replaced the *denarius*, with *denarii* struck on a small scale until its revival under Aurelian.⁷⁴

⁷² Faulkner, *Rome: Empire of the Eagles*, pp. 247-249

⁷³ Michell, "The Edict of Diocletian: A Study of Price Fixing in the Roman Empire," p. 2

⁷⁴ Mattingly, "Sestertius and Denarius Under Aurelian," pp. 219-220

Following the Severans, however, the radiate itself suffered the same debasement as the denarius, where it went from being a coin with around a 42% silver content during the reign of Gordian I, declining to 35% under Aemilian, to 15% at the end of Valerian's reign, and finally a decline to 2.5% during the reigns of Gallienus, Claudius II, and Quintillus. Elsewhere in the Gallic Empire, at roughly the same time as Gallienus, the usurper Postumus produced coins at a higher standard than even the emperor, with around a 15% silver content, but even he too had to lower this to 8% by the end of his reign, as the strains of defending the frontier and maintaining the loyalty of soldiers wore on. By the time of the last Gallic Emperor Tetricus, the radiate was debased to 1.5%, at a purity even lower than that of the reigning emperor Aurelian.⁷⁵

Gold coinage fared little better than its silver cousin. Throughout the history of the empire, the gold coin, the *aureus*, steadily declined in weight. From the time of Nero to Caracalla, the weight remained relatively unchanged with an average of 7.25 g. Caracalla reduced it to 6.5 g and, while it is possible there was an attempt to restore it to 7.25 g during the reigns of Macrinus and Elagabalus, after this period it ceased to be struck to a consistent standard. The mean weight, however, continued to decline, reaching 3.6 g under Trebonius Gallus and less than a gram under Gallienus. The lack of stability continued as well, as coins continued to be struck at increasingly variable weights. In terms of the variability of weight, Roman mints took care to ensure gold coins were struck at consistent weights prior to the end of the Severan Dynasty, as in the reign of Commodus where 95% of the gold coins were within a

⁷⁵ Metcalf, *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Coinage*, pp. 515-521

band of a quarter of a gram. This strict standard became more relaxed over time and by the reign of Alexander Severus this spread increased to almost two grams, a pattern which would continue until the reforms of Constantine. This spread became so wide that by the reigns of Valerian and Gallienus, all attempts at any sort of standard consistency appears to have broken down completely, which in combination with the large debasement of the currency destroyed the exchange rate between gold and silver currency.⁷⁶ Gold coinage as a whole came to be removed from circulation and take the role of ornamentation if they were not simply melted down. As with the *denarius*, they were struck independently of normal issues for special series.⁷⁷

The cause of this debasement can be found in many sources, among which was the lack of new bullion for the mints to finance the great demands of the army and empire in the wake of invasion, plague, and civil war hampering revenues. Principal silver mines in areas such as northern Spain became exhausted and large outflows of specie in the form of payments to the Sassanids or tribes along the Rhine and Danube exhausted the capacity of the empire. In gold coinage the scarcity of bullion was similar, as production of gold fell to its lowest level during the third century between Commodus and Diocletian.⁷⁸ Moreover, beyond the lack of bullion, the expanding expenses and the shrinking revenues resulting from the changing Roman governmental, economic, and military structures further contributed to the great problems of the day. The military had steadily gained importance as one of the key pillars of the Roman state, where emperors required the support of their soldiers and many themselves rose from

⁷⁶ Metcalf, *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Coinage*, pp. 520-524

⁷⁷ De Blois, *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus*, pp. 89-91

⁷⁸ Metcalf, *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Coinage*, pp. 520-530

the ranks. To maintain such loyalty, emperors like Caracalla provided large donations to their soldiers and increased pay to unprecedented heights. While this expense was relatively manageable during the reign of the Severans, the soldier-emperors of the third century would find it much harder to manage this increasing expense with the declining revenues from an empire devastated by invasions of Germanic tribes and Sassanids, plague wiping out a large portion of the labor pool and tax base, and civil war further placing provinces out of the reach and taxation of the emperor. This becomes an even greater problem given the tax exemptions in place in Italy, denying another important source of revenue. Moreover, this period saw the greater dominance of large estates which could easily buy out the distressed smaller farmers during this period of economic duress and themselves evade taxation, exacerbated by other farmers seeking protection under them to avoid taxation themselves. What resulted was a declining revenue stream with the still substantial demands of the army, now more important than ever with the defense of the empire a top priority. Thus, this is reflected within the currency, as emperors were encouraged to debase when there were few other means of acquiring the funding they required.⁷⁹

The consequences of this monetary policy, combined with the general economic instability, resulted in the disappearance of many coins from general circulation, most notably the *denarius*, the old main silver coin. Minor coins such as the *sestertius* and the *dupondius* fared little better and ended up withdrawn from circulation. From the old monetary system of the early empire, now the economy regressed to one which made do with barter trade and

⁷⁹ Faulkner, *Rome: Empire of the Eagles*, pp. 251-259

payments in kind, as only the radiate and small amounts of *aurei* still circulated independently, and continued debasement discouraged their spending. Alongside this decline in the currency was the sharp decline in prosperity, where trade, transport, and many other types of economic activity were wiped out.⁸⁰

This economic collapse which the empire faced only began to become rectified under Aurelian, whose reunification of the empire at last allowed for some respite from the constant threats which afflicted the empire. Aurelian began to reform the monetary system in 274, where he introduced new silver and gold coins, attempting to restore public credit and delivering new money in exchange for the depreciated old. Nevertheless, this monetary reform was largely a failure, as Aurelian still lacked the bullion to implement the exchange, at least beyond Rome, and his death shortly afterwards in 275 left little time to conduct this policy. Diocletian continued this policy of economic reform toward the end of the third century, attempting to restore the monetary stability of the empire. Even Diocletian, however, in his efforts to reform and stabilize the currency as well as issuing his Edict of Maximum Prices to cut down inflation, failed to prevent continued inflation, an issue which would only be largely solved under Constantine.⁸¹

Attributing the effects and blame with regards to monetary policy is a difficult issue, given the imprecision of economic data as well as the lagging impact of policy decisions, many of which were shared by different emperors. The demands of the army had been increasing since the beginning of the Principate, where the annual legionary salary of around 225 *denarii*

⁸⁰ Wassink, "Inflation and Financial Policy under the Roman Empire to the Price Edict of 301 A.D," p. 483

⁸¹ Wassink, "Inflation and Financial Policy under the Roman Empire to the Price Edict of 301 A.D," pp. 489-490

during the Augustan era increased to 300 *denarii* under Domitian, a rate lasting until the reign of the Severans. The exact upsurge in salary under the Severans is unclear, as there are only tangential mentions such as Caracalla's pay rise costing 70 million *denarii* a year and the later promise of Maximinus to double the pay of the soldiers under him. Third century-military accounts in Egypt credits to some soldiers an implied annual salary of some 800-900 *denarii*. In addition to this annual stipend, cash donatives were also issued by emperors to ensure the loyalty of their soldiers. These donatives were irregular until the later empire, tending towards an approximate value of 250 *denarii* or less, with some exceptions typically around an emperor's ascension to power. By AD 250, however, regular donatives were common, eclipsing the already inflated salary in terms of remuneration. These are only nominal values, however, and any real changes in welfare are complicated by the inflation which affected the empire. Domitian's increase likely represented a small increase in real terms, with the Severans showing a larger real increase. With the extreme inflation by the reign of Diocletian, the base stipend of a soldier would not match the maximum wage for a craftsman, but it still should be noted the importance of extra payments to soldiers in donatives, bribes, discharge bounties, corruption, etc. Consider one such example, during the reign of Gordian III;

"The villagers petitioned the Emperor Gordian in 238 to protect them against the predations of the soldiers of the nearby garrisons, who descended upon them demanding hospitium (in Greek *xenia* or *xenie*), literally 'hospitality' but implying much more than that. It was not exactly an illegal procedure, having its roots in Republican and early Imperial practice when soldiers were quartered not in barracks but in official lodging houses; in the case of Skaptopara it descended into blatant exploitation, because the soldiers seem to have interpreted it very loosely to embrace anything and everything that they wanted, all extracted free of charge."⁸²

⁸² Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, p. 69

Clearly, during this period, the exploitation from the soldiers could grow to remarkable heights as they took advantage of their position, often with little consequence as general law and order declined and the emperor, more than ever, depended on the patronage of his soldiers. What results is a very difficult assessment of Gallienus' role in such actions as the prioritization of the military and its continued payments. While he presided over an ever increasing burden, as with previous emperors, the exact nature of this impact is difficult to assess in real terms given the concurrent debasement, and it remains, in any case, a difficult issue unresolved even to the reign of Diocletian. While Gallienus made little progress on addressing the issue itself, his overall inability to do so should not indicate as great a blight on his legacy as perhaps one may attribute, when even the decades-long peace of Diocletian proved unable to address the central monetary issue.⁸³

What one can garner from the overall progression of Gallienus' monetary policy is its complete subjugation to the needs of the military. To maintain the army and ensure its loyalty to combat the various threats both within and without the empire required a policy directed almost entirely to the soldiers, manifested in policies such as the founding of mints behind concentrations of soldiers and ensuring the flow of gold issues to the soldiers to compensate for the decline in real terms of their wages.⁸⁴ In some regards this was a complete disaster for the civilian empire, as the silver currency was debased to being little more than copper and the non-military classes were severely drained economically and politically. Some of these effects of this policy did not manifest themselves until after his reign, as the largest rise in price levels

⁸³ *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare*, pp. 159-165

⁸⁴ De Blois, *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus*, p. 99

occurred in 270 after his death.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, despite the deleterious effects of his actions, Gallienus' accomplished his main goal of maintaining a strong, loyal, and effective army. The loyalty of his remaining men following 260 was ensured and he preserved a powerful core army able to achieve continuous victories against his enemies. His priority had been on the immediate concerns of the empire and what was needed to ensure its survival. While this does not invalidate criticism of the negative long-term effects of his economic policies, these actions remain crucial in allowing not merely the economy, but the empire as a whole to endure the events of the third century.

⁸⁵ De Blois, *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus*, p. 89

Conclusions

The achievements of Gallienus are remarkable considering the circumstances in which he reigned. He inherited an empire which had long been in decline and faced a culmination of threats which no emperor had dealt with simultaneously. Yet despite this, the empire emerged battered but still standing at the end of his reign and began the long road towards restoring order and stability. It was miraculous that any part of the empire remained at all, given the multitude of perils arrayed against it. It was under the capable leadership of Gallienus that the empire endured this grave period and arose from it intact.

The onset of his sole reign was characterized by an unprecedented situation. In the east, the capture of Valerian and subsequent collapse of imperial authority had allowed the Sassanids to make extreme inroads into Roman territory and sack critical cities such as Antioch. Otherwise, Gallienus had to contend with the Macriani usurpers and the rise of Odenathus in Palmyra. Along the frontier, Alemanni and other Germanic groups invaded deep into the empire's European territories, and in the chaos Postumus rose as an imperial contender with the collapse of the Rhine defenses. Gallienus, however, proved to be more than the simple indolent emperor of Victor's depiction, instead energetically campaigning against his enemies and acquiring remarkable success, where he decisively defeated groups such as the Alemanni and usurpers such as the Macriani. While he failed to bring the Gallic Empire back into the fold and his relationship with Odenathus was always vague and unclear, he succeeded in his priorities of eliminating the most immediate threats to the empire through his competent command and diplomacy. While one can point to the continued fragmentation of the empire,

Gallienus accomplished the incredible task of ensuring the empire survived at all with a strong military and some form of stability.

The organization of the late empire owes much to reforms which, if not entirely begun under Gallienus, found its actualization during his reign. His formation of the cavalry army, while under dispute as the direct ancestor to the later *comitatenses* field armies of the later empire, served him well as a capable defense against the multiple threats arrayed against him and a critical component of the armies of his successors Claudius and Aurelian in reunifying the empire. The army itself continued to become professionalized as Gallienus emphasized the capabilities of those in high commands rather than appointed politically eminent figures. The old structures of the Principate gave way as border defense came to become focused on strategic fortified points complementing the mobile army, while the old system of governors became far more elastic as equestrian governors were invested with combined military, judicial, and financial authority over vast swaths of territory.

This military reorganization was key in the protection of the empire and addressing the weaknesses of the imperial defenses. The strategic fortifications at significant points behind the borders allowed for a more flexible response, compensating for his lack of soldiers to sustain a more diffused defense system. His choice of experienced equestrian generals and governors over senators, while invested with extreme power and perhaps prone to revolt or betray their emperor, proved themselves just as able as Gallienus himself to command in his absence and achieve crucial victories. The development of the mobile cavalry unit provided a rapid force capable of moving to confront the dispersed threats against the empire.

Of course, for all his military considerations, it is true that Gallienus was responsible for continuing the disastrous economic policies of his predecessors, or at least neglectful in addressing the issues at hand. This aspect of his reign provides little support for even the most ardent apologist. The general conditions of the period lent little support to the general economic wellbeing of the empire, where barbarian invasions and disease ravaged most of the European and Asian provinces of the empire and, as a consequence, trade and productivity declined drastically. Further compounding this issue was that of inflation and requisition. As previously stated, Gallienus oversaw the continued debasement of Roman currency where the precious metal was reduced to some of its lowest levels. Moreover, beyond debasement, the quantity of currency was also increased with the foundation of numerous mints around concentrations of soldiers and the rapid striking of coinage for their benefit. Consequently, requisitions of goods in order to provide payment in kind increased as the breakdown of taxation and the monetary regime allowed few other options.⁸⁶

How much of the culpability fully rests upon the action of Gallienus, however, is not entirely clear. It is indubitable that his inflationary policies did little to address the problems at hand and passed down the economic catastrophes to his successors. While his own reign did not see the greatest instances of inflation, it must be noted that economic policies do not always immediately produce their full impact. In the same regard, however, it is folly to attribute all the economic misfortune to Gallienus alone as his own predecessors cannot be absolved of their own economic mismanagement as well.⁸⁷ While I support the severe

⁸⁶ Bray, *Gallienus: A Study in Reformist and Sexual Politics*, pp. 198-202

⁸⁷ Bray, *Gallienus: A Study in Reformist and Sexual Politics*, p. 204

judgment passed upon his economic policies, I do wish to note that such a task as restoring the Roman economy was not one any emperor could simply perform; even if one looks at long and prosperous reigns such as that of Diocletian, many economic issues still remained unaddressed, nothing short of a large reorganization of the economic and monetary structure would have sufficed, a gargantuan task particularly for an era without modern understandings of economic concepts. Such a change, moreover, could not occur without the stability of a militarily strong empire able to keep peace on its frontiers, and in this aspect Gallienus, despite the disastrous effects of his policies on the civilian aspects of the empire, succeeded in maintaining the ability to support a strong Roman army capable of defending its borders.

Thus, if one is to evaluate the achievements of Gallienus, what is clear is the importance of his competent military reforms and administration, a priority for an empire torn apart by war and any number of catastrophes which afflicted it during his tenure. If one judges his reign based upon the condition of the empire when he assumed the throne to that upon his death, while one can place an immense fault to his economic policies, as while not fully culpable for the dismal state of the Roman economy he took little action in addressing the problems at hand and in some cases exacerbating the issues, these actions were taken to maintain the primacy of the Roman military, as this resulted in a much stronger empire compared to the start of his sole reign. A stable and strong empire was the prerequisite to any sort of economic recovery; unaddressed issues of barbarian invasion and civil war presented greater hinderances than the sort of monetary debasement and requisition policy Gallienus presided over. While his military campaigns were unfinished, as Postumus continued to reign in the Gallic Empire while barbarians still remained at large in the Balkans, and some political

arrangements such as his relationship with Odenathus remained ongoing concerns, as Claudius and Aurelian would discover with the ascension of Zenobia, the immediate conflicts such as the invasion of the Alemanni and usurpers such as Regalianus and Macrianus were dealt with. The accusations of inaction on the part of the Latin authors are inaccurate on account of his consistent campaigns against barbarian invasion in the Balkans near the end of his reign. While there remained unaddressed matters, as the Gallic and Palmyran Empires persisted as separate entities, Gallienus succeeded in bringing the empire to a point of stability with an army capable of defending it, one which could ultimately reunify its breakaway portions, a grand achievement considering how it staggered on the brink of collapse following his ascension as sole emperor. His successors would waste none of this effort, as Claudius and Aurelian finished his work in defeating the remaining barbarians threatening the empire and the remaining breakaway usurpers, actions which predicated themselves on the stable foundation and military Gallienus painstakingly built and preserved. The very fact it was Gallienus who elevated Claudius and Aurelian to military commands indicates his competence and success in maintaining a powerful officer corps which, although of questionable loyalty, proved to be as able as Gallienus both during and after his reign in securing the empire.

While he is treated more kindly by the Greek tradition and some modern historians have attempted to rehabilitate his legacy, he remains consigned to the reputation of an obscure and inconsequential figure. Secondary literature has, to some extent, attempted to reevaluate the negative options of his reign. Figures such as Southern and Bray provide favorable accounts of his military reforms and question the authenticity of the available primary material. De Blois provides a more critical, but still relatively favorable depiction, particularly with regards to his

military achievements and reforms. In collating together these sources, among others, alongside the primary material, I have attempted to provide a concise but holistic account of the significant concrete characteristics of Gallienus' reign, namely that of his military and economic achievements and their relation to accounts in the historic record. From this, a simple determination comes about, that despite Gallienus' eclecticism and unconventionality, features which made him an easy target for criticism, his inability to ultimately bring the crises afflicting the empire to a definitive close, and the rather disastrous effects of his economic policy, he succeeded in the critical task of stabilizing the empire and reforming it in such a way as to allow his successors a strong base upon which the empire could be restored. It was his reign which saw the foundations of a new empire, upon which Aurelian and Diocletian depended to reunite and restore a battered Rome, and, despite the vast forces arrayed against him, it was Gallienus who brought the empire through its darkest hours.

Figures and Images

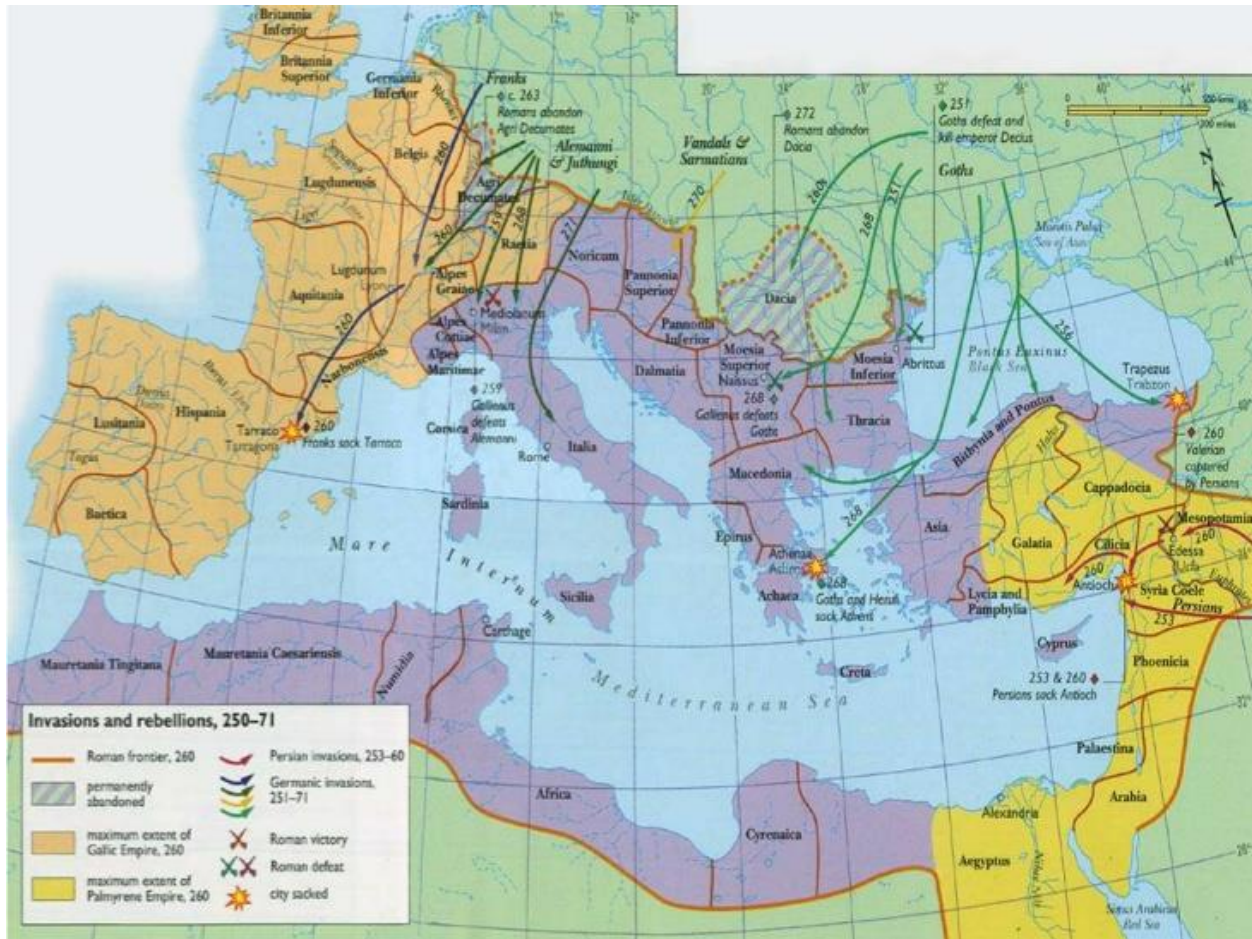


Figure 2 - Invasions around the reign of Gallienus

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