



The Capture of emperor Valerian (260 CE) Source: Wikipedia Commons



The Triumph (Victory Parade) of Aurelian (274 CE) Source: Openverse

How the Roman World was Restored: An Analysis of the Last Decades of the Crisis of the Third Century

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Project Overview

- In 260, the Roman Empire was on the verge of collapse.
- By 284, it was a world power.
 - The Romans called this turnaround the "restoration."
- This project examines the restoration.

Key Terms

- Crisis of the Third Century: A period in Roman history from 235 to 284 AD.
 - Marked by domestic turmoil and conflict with neighbors
- The Late Crisis: a period in Roman history from 260 to 283 AD.
 - A time of economic and military resurgence.

Research Questions

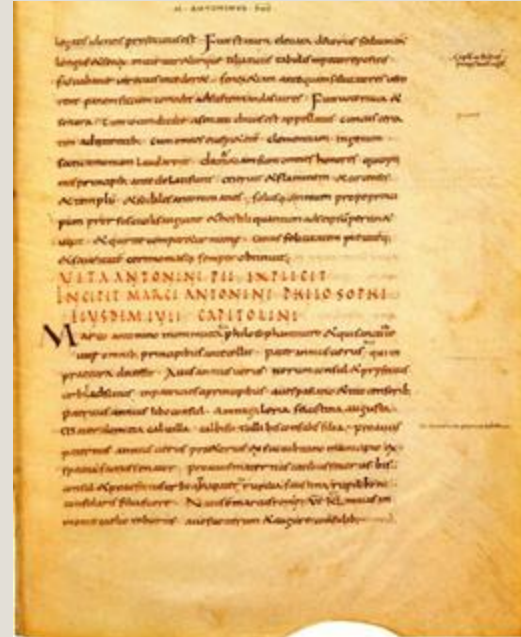
1: How did the Romans “restore their world?”

2: What is the broader significance of this period?

Primary Sources Part. 1

Historia Augusta

- Collection of 30 satirical biographies of emperors
- Author is unknown
- Its historicity is a subject of intense debate
- Translated into English by David Magie (Princeton University)



A medieval manuscript of the Historia Augusta.
Source: Wikipedia Commons

Primary Sources Part 2

Historia Nova

- Narrative of Roman history written c. 500 AD
- Author was a finance minister called Count Zosimus
- Focus on military history
- Considered reliable despite political agenda
- Translated into French by Francois Paschoud (University of Geneva)



Translator Francois Paschoud
Source: University of Geneva Photo Library

Other Important Primary Sources

Latin & Greek Epitomes

- Short summaries of history
- Some mass-produced, others written for monasteries

The *Scythika*

- Fragmentary work written by a contemporary historian

Aurelius Victor's *Historia*

- Hypothetical work written by 4th century politician.
- Used as a reference by *Historia Augusta's* author



Left: Paul the Deacon, a Latin epitome writer.
Source: Wikipedia Commons



Right: John Zonaras, a Greek epitome writer.
Source: British Museum

Types of Secondary Sources

Surveys of History:

- Comprehensive accounts of a specific period in time (or aspect of history)
 - *The Roman Empire at Bay* was an important survey for my project.

Imperial Biographies:

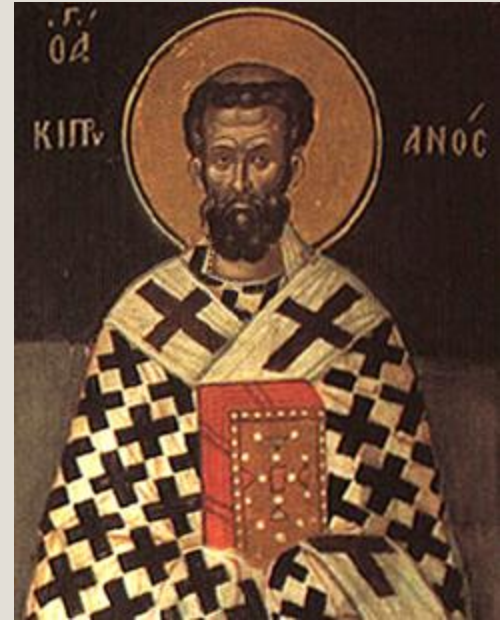
- *Der Kaiser Marcus Aurelius Probus und seine Zeit* is the gold standard for imperial biographies.

Monographs

- Works dedicated to answering a single academic question
- *The Lost History of Sextus Aurelius Victor* was an important monograph for my project.

The Chaos of 260

- The emperor Valerian was taken hostage while suing for peace.
- The general in command of the Danube frontier, Ingenuus, revolted.
- A Germanic tribe raided Italy.
 - While the emperor Gallienus was fighting the raiders, a second general named Postumus revolted in Gaul.



St. Cyprian, a bishop who documented the dire situation in the Roman Empire. Source: Wikipedia Commons

What Caused the Near Collapse?

- The constant removal of inadequate emperors caused domestic turmoil.
- Starting in the 240's, Germanic tribes raided Roman territory.
- Iran conducted organized campaigns against Rome starting in 230.



Left: Shapur I, *shahanshah* of Iran (240-270)
Right: Band-e-Kayser, a bridge and dam built by
Romans in Iran.

Source: Wikipedia Commons

Late Crisis emperors

Gallienus: (253-268)

- Reformer and intellectual who ruled during Rome's nadir

Marcus Aurelius Claudius (268-270)

- Died of illness early in his reign

Aurelian (270-275)

- Reconquered two breakaway states.
 - Considered one of the best Roman Emperors

Tacitus (275-276)

- Assassinated early in his reign

Probus (276-282)

- Ruthless but effective general and reformer.

Carus (282-283)

- Campaigned in Iran and was "struck by lightning"

Military Policy

- Reliance on an elite field army
 - The field army won almost every battle it fought.
- Scorched earth tactics
- Giving battle in advantageous locations
 - Ambushing enemy forces crossing a river was common
- Recruiting German raiders into the Roman military
- Fighting alongside local militias

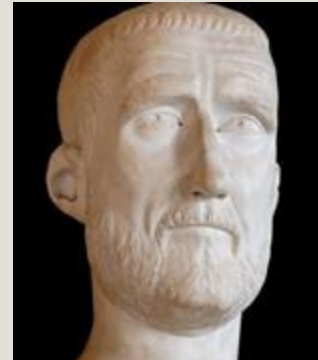


Odaenathus, a militia leader
Source: Wikipedia Commons

Clemency v. Brutality

- During the Late Crisis, emperors used both clemency and brutality for political purposes.
- When fighting on Roman territory, they were usually merciful.
 - Aurelian is associated with this policy
- When fighting in foreign lands, they tended to be ruthless.
 - Probus is associated with this policy
- There were exceptions to this rule

Right: Aurelian, whose clemency made reconquering breakaway states easier
Source: Classical Numismatic Society



Left: Probus, who defeated several Germanic tribes in a bloody reprisal campaign
Source: Wikipedia Commons

Monetary Policy

Monetary System

- The Roman Empire mainly used silver and gold coins.
- Coins were traded based on how much precious metal they contained.
- 36 pounds of silver was worth one pound of gold.

Monetary Policy

- Until 269, emperors debased their currency.
- After 269, emperors raised the fineness of coins.
- Aurelian caused inflation in 274 by claiming the value of silver was not related to gold.



An antoninianus coin, the denomination used to pay soldiers. Source: Wikipedia Commons

Civil Policy

The civil goals of Late Crisis Emperors varied.

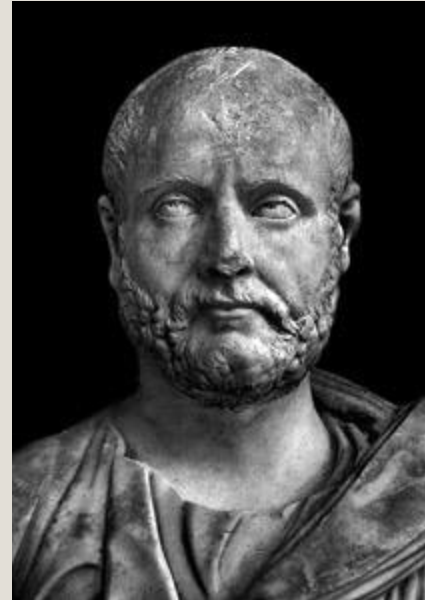
- Gallienus and Aurelian invited intellectuals to their court.
- Gallienus abolished government positions reserved for *Viri Clarissimi*.
- Aurelian expanded the grain dole and built a temple to Sol Invictus in Rome.
- Probus gave the Senate supreme judicial powers
 - He also ordered soldiers to rebuild infrastructure that had been abandoned.



Left: Sol Invictus, the god worshiped by the Roman military. Source: Wikipedia Commons

Timeline of Recovery

- 261: Odaenathus defeats retreating Iranian army near Edessa.
- 261: General Postumus creates a breakaway state called the Gallic Empire.
- 265: Gallienus goes on symbolic visit to Greece.
- 267 & 271: Large Germanic raiding armies defeated in battle.
- 270: Palmyra "revolts."
- 272: Aurelian recaptures Palmyra.
- 274: Aurelian reconquers the Gallic Empire.
- 274: Aurelian celebrates a triumph.
- 278: Probus leads major campaign in German territory.
- 283: Carus campaigns inside of Iran.



The emperor Carus.
Source: Wikipedia
Commons

Conclusions

1 Excellent Military leadership

Late Crisis Emperors were better rulers than their predecessors.
They restored the Roman Empire through battlefield success.

2 Eclectic Civil policy

Late Crisis Emperors had differing civil goals and were generally able to achieve them.

3 Context of Decline

This was an era of prosperity in two centuries defined by gradual decline. These emperors and especially Aurelian, were extraordinary leaders in a long era of mediocrity.

Thank you for listening!