

A REASSESSMENT OF GALLIENUS' REIGN

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Abstract

This thesis examines and reassesses the reign of the Roman emperor Gallienus in the mid-third century CE. Specifically, this paper analyses Gallienus' military and administrative policies, his conception of his emperorship, and the influence his policies had on his successors. Gallienus ruled over the Roman Empire during a period of unprecedented calamities. The misfortunes of the Roman Empire during this period, and the biases against Gallienus in the writings of the ancient Latin authors, left a less-than-favorable impression of Gallienus' reign. However, a re-evaluation of Gallienus and his policies unveils a remarkably capable emperor, who should be credited with not only saving the Roman Empire from complete collapse, but laying the foundation for the Empire's recovery in the late third century CE.

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Introduction

The third century of the Roman Empire was a particularly tumultuous period, and the role of the emperor had shifted to be primarily based around his relationship, and success with, his legions. Noted for the dearth of comprehensive contemporary sources that can be reliably drawn upon to make any accurate assessment of the century, the window for differing opinions is considerably wider than for other periods of the Roman Empire. The third century, or more specifically the period from 235 to 285 (all dates are CE unless otherwise noted), was characterized by chronic warfare and calamities never before witnessed in Rome's history. This was the period of the soldier-emperor, and commonly referred to by present day scholars as the 'crisis'.¹

In the midst of this period reigned P. Licinius Egnatius Gallienus (Gallienus), as joint ruler with his father from 253-260, and then sole emperor from 260-268. This period has been recognized as comprising the darkest days of the Empire, and because of that the importance of Gallienus' rule has been largely disregarded. The goal of this thesis is a re-evaluation of Gallienus as Roman emperor, not only his role in saving the Empire from total collapse, but the influence his policies had on his successors and the recovery of the Empire in the years following his death.

¹ John Drinkwater, "Maximinus to Diocletian and the 'Crisis'", in *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. XII, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 65.

When dealing with the mid-third century, it is necessary to acknowledge the lack of reliable sources available, and the subsequent problem that leads to in attempting to produce an accurate depiction of the peoples and events during this period. The introduction will provide an overview of the major sources and some of the problems historians have had to try to overcome when piecing together a comprehensive picture of the period. A brief narrative of the events that unfolded from 253-268 will follow the description of the major sources in order to outline the numerous complications Gallienus and his administration faced.

From the death of Marcus Aurelius to the reign of Gordian III (180-244), we have the luxury of the contemporary historians Cassius Dio and Herodian. Dio lived from approximately 163 to 229 and is very valuable as a source for this period, as he witnessed many of the events he describes. Dio was even a consul in 205 and served in this capacity again alongside Severus Alexander in 229.² It comes as no surprise, however, that Dio's works are written with a senatorial bias, as we see in his treatment of Commodus, who is made out to be a monstrous emperor (and just so happened to hold an anti-senatorial stance).³ In addition, some of his writings have only been transmitted in the form of epitomes created in the

² Oliver Hekster, *Rome and its Empire, AD 193-284*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2008), 7.

³ Cassius Dio, *Dio's Roman History*, trans. Earnest Cary (London: W. Heinemann, 1914-27), 73.

eleventh and twelfth centuries by the monks Zonaras and Xiphilinus.⁴ Herodian writes from a non-senatorial view, and though contemporary with the events he describes, it has been argued that his 'anecdotal style' leads him to ignore facts at times, and hence he is often considered somewhat less than reliable.⁵ Nevertheless, the Greek writer is still a valuable source, but unfortunately only covers the first three years of the 'crisis of empire'.

From Gordian III to Carinus (283), we have to depend, for the most part, on the imperial biographies of Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, and Festus. Not only were all of these works written in the fourth century, but it is also believed that they all drew from a single lost work, also of the fourth century: the so-called *Kaisergeschichte* (KG). This theory was first postulated by Alexander Enmann in 1883 after he found similarities between the texts.⁶ Enmann noticed that the epitomizers Victor and Eutropius made the same mistakes, shared similar wording and phraseology, and generally recounted the same events in much the same order. An example of this, pointed out by R.W. Burgess, is an error in the chronology of the usurpation and death of Nepotianus (Vic. 42.6-8, Eutr. 10.11.2), which happened in 350, yet both epitomizers place in 351.⁷

⁴ Hekster, 8.

⁵ Michael Grant, *The Ancient Historians*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 345.

⁶ Drinkwater, 65.

⁷ R.W. Burgess, "On the Date of the *Kaisergeschichte*," *Classical Philology* vol.90, no.2 (April 1995): 119.

Enmann's theory has since been widely accepted, and other ancient historians are believed to have consulted the KG as well (relevant to this paper, in addition to those historians already mentioned, are Ammianus Marcellinus and the author of the *Historia Augusta*). Another source exists in the *Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle*, which is valuable as it is the only contemporary written account covering political events of the Roman Empire between 238 and the reign of Constantine. Even this source, however, is notoriously opaque, as the Greek text is based on supposed prophecies from an oracle. The mention of Christian persecutions have also led some historians to believe it was written by a Christian, or that it was at least subject to Christian interpolation.⁸

The period's major historical source is the *Historia Augusta (HA)*, which is renowned for its fabrications and inaccuracies, making it frequently unreliable and further compounding the problem of examining the period.⁹ The *HA* claims to be a collection of biographies from multiple authors concerning various second and third century emperors (Hadrian to Numerian), and thus gives an overview of all the emperors and usurpers within that period.¹⁰ The current consensus, however, is that the *HA* is the work of a single author of the late fourth century, in large part due to evidence of a single author's idiosyncrasies found throughout the text,

⁸ Hekster, 9.

⁹ Richard Lim, "The Later Roman Empire", in *the Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 549.

¹⁰ Hekster, 8.

such as the consistent use of synonyms like *interficio* and *occido*.¹¹ Other problems include the fact that the biographies of emperors between 244 and 253 have been lost, and the biographies of the Valeriani are only fragmentary. The HA is also regarded as being written from the perspective of the non-Christian, senatorial aristocracy of Rome, and the emperors are assessed in terms of their behavior toward that class.¹² In addition, much of the content (including documents, events and names) in the biographies is pure fiction. Some of the earlier 'lives' contain useful information, most likely because the author consulted earlier original sources for the period. This information, however, must be cross-referenced with other more reliable literary or archaeological sources to confirm its veracity.¹³ Apart from the HA, historians have to rely largely on non-contemporary authors such as the aforementioned Aurelius Victor and Eutropius, as well as the works of Zosimus, Zonaras, Dexippus, and Eusebius, amongst others I will discuss.

The dubious nature of the literary sources compels the modern historian to rely extensively on other forms of evidence. Epigraphy has long been very helpful in providing details of social, political and military history. Unfortunately, the commissioning of inscriptions became more rare as the third century progressed for reasons largely unknown (perhaps

¹¹ J.N. Adams, "On the Authorship of the *Historia Augusta*," *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, vol.22, no.1 (May 1972): 186.

¹² Inge Mennen, *Power and Status in the Roman Empire, AD 193-284* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 15.

¹³ Hekster, 8.

because of the economic downturn).¹⁴ Some non-Roman inscriptions have been particularly useful; a prime example is the Sassanian relief at Naqsh-e Rostam, which depicts Valerian's capture by Shapur I.¹⁵ Numismatic research is important, especially for the later third century, when there was an increase in the issue of imperial coins and number of mints. The identification of such mints and the analysis of their products are helpful in establishing names, titles, and the chronology of emperors and usurpers, as well as their policies and military campaigns.¹⁶ Another form of material evidence to consult is papyri, mostly found in Egypt, which makes valuable contributions in providing a reliable chronology of events. Building activity seems to have lessened during the third century, but archaeological evidence still serves to provide new knowledge and confirm other findings. The walls of Aurelian stand to this day, for example, and the necessity of such a defensive precaution around Rome provides us with a glimpse of the alarming growth in both the number and aggression of attacks from 'barbarian' forces along the eastern and western frontiers of the Empire in the third century.

The nature of the resources available to analyze the third century has provided a major challenge to historians trying to piece together this period of 'crisis', and any theories of this period will perhaps always be

¹⁴ Drinkwater, 65.

¹⁵ Fergus Millar, *The Roman Empire and its Neighbors* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1966), 219.

¹⁶ Drinkwater, 66.

highly debated. Though this period has traditionally been largely overlooked as compared with the other, more thoroughly documented stages of the Roman Empire, such as the reign of Augustus, there has been a fair amount published on the period since the early 1900s. Not surprisingly, the lack of conclusive evidence, especially for the mid-third century, has led to, *inter alia*, differing modern opinions on Gallienus and the state of the Empire under his reign.

Before analyzing Gallienus' reign and taking an in-depth look at the character and policies of the Roman emperor, it is necessary to make a brief survey of the period in which he ruled. What follows is an attempt to provide an overview of the state of affairs during Gallienus' reign and clarify the chronology of major events from 253-268 AD, though the order and even factuality of some events is confusing, and at times contradictory in the sources.

The old custom by which emperors invariably came out of the senatorial class had long since been discarded by the period under discussion; they were now invariably created by the armies. When the soldiers elevated their acclaimed Augustus, he usually informed the senators of his appointment and requested their approval, which by the mid-third century was just a formality, as the Senate, under threat of

coercion, would have no choice but to agree.¹⁷ Whether it was due to familiarity with an elevated commander, hopes of rewards and career opportunities, or a genuine belief in the capability of the selected candidate, the soldiers declared new emperors frequently, and the unfortunate rulers whom they superseded were almost always killed.¹⁸ A military victory by a frontier commander proved his worth to his own men, and coupled with perceived deficiencies or even the prolonged absence of the current emperor, was enough reason for frontier troops to attempt to raise their own commander to the purple. The instability of this situation paralyzed the empire's defense system, which did not go unnoticed by the Germanic tribes of the Rhine and Danube, or by the Persians to the East.

Raids across the frontier by external forces were nothing new to the Empire, but during this period the accelerated frequency and ferocity of the attacks were unprecedented. In the West, the Germanic tribes had been forming stronger coalitions amongst themselves since the second century, providing greater numbers to challenge Roman forces. In the East, the Sassanid Empire overthrew that of the Parthians (224), and brought a renewed sense of Persian tradition and vigour to reclaim

¹⁷ Michael Grant, *The Climax of Rome: The Final Achievements of the Ancient World AD 161-337* (Toronto: Little Brown, 1968), 13.

¹⁸ Fik Meijer, *Emperors Don't Die in Bed*, trans. S.J. Leinbach (London: Routledge, 2001), 83.

territory previously lost to the Romans.¹⁹ The external pressure and internal strife ultimately contributed to the failing financial and economic state of the Empire. The continued existence of the Empire depended on a well-functioning army, and any security of the throne depended on the soldiers' loyalty, which cost a substantial amount of money and put a strain on the finances of the empire.²⁰ By Gallienus' reign, soldiers' pay had been steadily increasing, and large donations or *donativa*, of gold were now customary and an important part of their income. The high cost of maintaining the armies slowed economic development. Production and trade were negatively affected, coupled with a population decrease (caused by plague) which led to the debasement of coins and inflation.²¹ This was a low ebb in the history of the Roman Empire, a situation of which Gallienus found himself in the middle.

Gallienus' father, P. Licinius Valerianus, or Valerian, makes his first appearance in the sources in 238 AD as an *ex-consul* and *princeps senatus* (leading member of the Senate) negotiating with the embassy sent to Rome by Gordian I's African legions to secure senatorial approval of Gordian's rebellion against the emperor Maximinus Thrax.²² This revolt was initiated by the African citizens' refusal to pay Maximinus' high taxes,

¹⁹ David S. Potter, *Empire at Bay, AD 180-395* (London: Routledge, 2004), 218.

²⁰ Meijer, 84.

²¹ M. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 471.

²² Zosimus *Historia Nova: The Decline of Rome*, trans. James J. Buchanan and Harold T. Davis (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1967), I.14.

and supported by the Senate because of its disapproval of the Thracian emperor's low station of birth, in addition to his indifference toward the Senate as a whole.²³ Valerian, unlike most of the soldier-emperors of this period, came from an old senatorial family. As Mennan notes, Valerian and his son Gallienus were the last emperors in the third century who were definitely part of the traditional senatorial aristocracy, which no doubt meant his ascension to the throne in 253 was a welcome change in the eyes of the Roman Senate.²⁴ Valerian immediately named Gallienus Caesar in 253 and then elevated him to co-emperor the next year.²⁵ I will attempt to place the major events between 253 and 268 in a loose chronological order, first dealing with events in the East and then West, but the confusing and often questionable sources for the period make some statements conjectural rather than factual.

At that time, the Empire was under external pressure from the Persian king Sapor I, who launched a massive campaign against Rome and its allies in 252-253, so when Valerian left to defend Roman territory in the East in 254, he placed Gallienus in charge of the western half of the Empire.²⁶ Valerian was able to restore a measure of order in the East, and returned to Rome, but peace was short-lived, as Dura Europos and

²³ Drinkwater, 30-31.

²⁴ Mennan, 27.

²⁵ Lukas De Blois, *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus* (Leiden: E.J Brill, 1976), 1.

²⁶ A. Alföldi, "The Crisis of Empire AD249-270," in *The Cambridge Ancient History* vol. XII, ed. S.A. Cook, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 170.

Antioch fell to the Persians in 256, which required the emperor to hasten back to Syria.²⁷ By 257, however, Valerian was able to recapture Antioch and remained there to rebuild the city and protect it from further attacks.

At this time, however, Asia Minor was suffering from pirate raids by the Goths and the Borani, neighboring tribes of the Black Sea region. The Borani acted first, crossing the Black Sea to attack the Roman outpost town of Pityus, which was defended admirably by its governor, Successianus.²⁸ Valerian, not fearing a subsequent attack in this area, sent for Successianus and made him prefect of his guard. The Borani were not deterred though, and again crossed the Pontus to attack Pityus, this time successfully. They then captured Trapezus before returning home, enriched with booty.²⁹ The Goths soon emulated their neighbors and marched on Chalcedon, Nicomedia, Nicaea, Apamea and Prusa successively, capturing them all without much opposition and returning home with their spoils.³⁰

Valerian, upon hearing of the invasions, sent one of his officers, Felix, to take command at Byzantium, as he advanced into Cappadocia to reinforce Bithynia. His expedition was cut short, however, as plague ravaged his army, and news came that Sapor was once again

²⁷ Zos. I.31—37.

²⁸ H.M.D Parker, *A History of the Roman World from A.D. 138 to 337* (London: Methue & Co., 1958), 169.

²⁹ Parker, 169.

³⁰ Parker, 170.

advancing against Antioch.³¹ With a depleted force and, most likely, soldiers that were uninspired by the feebleness of their emperor, Valerian engaged the Persians outside Edessa in 259. It was at this time that disaster struck not only Valerian and his army but the Empire itself. Valerian was captured by the Sassanids.

This was an unprecedented disgrace; never before had a Roman emperor been captured by enemy forces, and the humiliation was felt throughout the Empire.³² There are numerous stories about how exactly Valerian fell into the Persians' grasp. Some ancient sources attest that he was captured in battle, while others have Valerian attempting negotiations with Sapor or freely handing himself over to the enemy for fear of mutiny amongst his own soldiers.³³ However the disastrous event occurred, most agree that while in Sapor's custody he was subjected to humiliation and his body was later desecrated, perhaps even skinned and stuffed to be kept as a trophy. This lurid detail, however, was probably added by Lactantius and subsequently copied by Eusebius: an easy explanation for this is that both were Christian writers and saw Valerian's fate as retribution for his earlier persecution of the Christians.³⁴ Valerian

³¹ Alföldi, 170

³² De Blois, 2.

³³ Zonaras, *The History of Zonaras*, trans. Thomas M. Banchich and Eugene N. Lane (London: Routledge, 2009), XII.23

³⁴ D.S. Potter, *Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire: A Historical Commentary on the Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 336; Lactantius, *The Manner in which the Persecutors Died*, trans. Sir David Dalpymple (Edinburgh: Printed by Murray & Cochran, 1782), ch. 5.

appears to have died a year or so after his capture, leaving Gallienus in sole command of the Empire.³⁵

Entrusted with the western half of the Empire by his father, who set out to protect the eastern frontier, Gallienus was not idle long, as his presence was required on the Rhine and Danube frontiers to defend against Germanic invasions as early as 254.³⁶ The first few years of Gallienus' co-emperorship were spent quelling the invasions by the Empire's northern neighbors, which had become endemic. From his accession in 254 through to 259, Gallienus was continually engaged in 'fire-fighting' to defend the borders of the Rhine and Danube. Though the precise chronology of exactly which barbarian tribe attacked, and when, has been argued and reinterpreted a number of times, I will follow Pat Southern's chronology.³⁷

Gallienus' first campaign was in Pannonia against the Marcomanni in 254, which ended successfully.³⁸ He was soon after called to depart from the Danube frontier to face the Franks in Gaul. Upon his departure, he installed his son, P. Licinius Cornelius Valerianus (Valerian the Younger)

³⁵ The date of Valerian's death is another highly contested subject. Again the lack of quality sources and the fact that he was a prisoner make it difficult to know exactly when he died/was executed. Most recent works agree, at least, that the date was most likely either 259 or 260, and I am inclined to agree with the latter.

³⁶ Michael Grant, *The Roman Emperors: A Biographical Guide to the Rulers of Imperial Rome 31 BC-AD 476* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985), 168.

³⁷ Pat Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine* (Taylor & Francis, 2001), 216.

³⁸ De Blois, 4.

as Caesar.³⁹ Reaching the Rhine frontier with his army, Gallienus established his headquarters at Cologne, also moving the imperial mint there from Viminacium to facilitate paying his Rhine troops, who had temporarily quelled the unrest on the frontier.⁴⁰ Again, in 256, Gallienus led his armies to victory over the Franks in Gaul; this year also saw the Goths raid the settlements around the Black Sea. Shortly after, in 258, the threat of a renewed invasion by the Marcomanni inspired the usurpation of Ingenuus, governor of Pannonia. Usurpers were nothing new to the emperors of the third century, but Ingenuus was the first of the challengers to the throne that Gallienus had to deal with while simultaneously defending the frontiers.⁴¹

It is likely that Valerian the Younger was killed in the revolt of Ingenuus, and after Gallienus put down the revolt, he came to an agreement with Attalus, the chief of the Marcomanni, which allowed the Marcomanni to possess land in Pannonia in exchange for guarding the Roman border. In addition, Attalus' daughter, Pipa, was given to Gallienus, allegedly as a concubine.⁴² This agreement to conscript a barbarian tribe to defend Roman territory speaks to the desperate situation in which Gallienus found himself at that time.

³⁹ Alfoldi, 181.

⁴⁰ Southern, 78.

⁴¹ De Blois, 4.

⁴² De Blois, 4.

Though he was successful in defending the Empire's borders in the first few years, as commemorated on coins with titles such as *restitutor Galliarum* (restorer of Gaul), the frontier situation was unraveling quickly.⁴³ The Roman Empire was being threatened on four fronts in 258. While Valerian was occupied in the East by the Persians, and Gallienus was re-establishing authority over Illyricum, the Alamanni began threatening the frontiers of Germany and Raetia, while the Goths were attacking the Black Sea coastal settlements.⁴⁴

The impossibility of defending all of the western provinces meant some regions would be left to fend for themselves. After Valerian the Younger's death, Gallienus had installed his younger son, P. Licinius Cornelius Saloninus, as Caesar. Saloninus was left at Cologne while Gallienus returned to northern Italy and set up new headquarters at Milan and braced for battle against the Alamanni.⁴⁵ It was now 260, a year of seemingly relentless disasters which Alfoldi refers to as "one of catastrophes unexampled in Roman history."⁴⁶

The capture of the emperor Valerian by Shapur allowed the Persians to take control of the East, being unchecked for the first time. Whether it was because of the capture of one of the emperors, or a self-

⁴³ H. Mattingly. et al, *The Roman Imperial Coinage* (RIC) V.5, pt.1. Gallienus 27-35. (London: Spink, 1994),

⁴⁴ Southern, 79.

⁴⁵ De Blois, 7.

⁴⁶ Alfoldi, 182.

help solution against the sheer number of threats on the frontier, usurpers appeared in several places in 260.⁴⁷ The same troops who had proclaimed the short-lived Ingenuus as emperor now raised Regalianus, the governor of Pannonia, to the purple at Carnuntum to fight against various barbarian tribes, though he held this position no more than a few weeks before being crushed by Gallienus.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the remnants of the eastern army left by Valerian chose Callistus (referred to as Ballista in some sources) and Macrianus, two generals, to lead them; it should be noted that neither of them declared themselves emperors, but Macrianus was quick to raise his two sons, Titus Fluvius Junius Macrianus and Titus Fluvius Junius Quietus, to Augusti.⁴⁹

When the news of Valerian's demise reached Gaul, the soldiers there too declared their governor, Postumus, emperor. Postumus, with the support of the Rhine army, besieged the young Caesar Saloninus and his tutor Silvanus at Cologne, eventually taking the town and executing them both.⁵⁰ Gallienus was preoccupied with the Alamanni advance into Italy, meaning he could neither attempt a rescue of his father in the East, nor march on Postumus. This allowed Postumus to consolidate his position, eventually gaining Gaul, Britain and a large portion of Spain, which formed the "Imperium Galliarum" (Gallic Empire), an entity which

⁴⁷ Southern, 79.

⁴⁸ Alföldi, 185. Note: P. Southern believes the tribes in question to be the lazyges and Roxolani.

⁴⁹ Southern, 79.

⁵⁰ De Blois, 6.

remained until 273.⁵¹ With Gallienus hemmed in at Milan fighting the Alamanni, Macrianus and his eldest son of the same name marched on Rome, leaving his other son, Quietus, and Callistus in charge of the eastern provinces. Gallienus sent his general, Aureolus, to engage the two Macriani, which he did successfully, defeating them in Pannonia.⁵²

Meanwhile, Gallienus was in need of assistance to deal with not only the remaining two usurpers in the East but also the Sassanids. This aid came in the form of a prominent leader of Palmyra, Odenathus.⁵³ Palmyra had remained loyal under Roman jurisdiction and Odenathus had successfully pursued and attacked Shapur as the Persian army headed back across the Euphrates. Odenathus then eliminated Callistus and Quietus in the name of Rome, help which Gallienus could ill-afford to turn down, and Odenathus' victory essentially gave him *de facto* rule over the eastern provinces, along with command of the eastern army.⁵⁴ Though Gallienus had little actual control over Palmyra, Odenathus stressed his allegiance to Rome until his death in 267, when his wife Zenobia seized control and set out to achieve Palmyra's independence.⁵⁵

In 262, Gallienus returned to Rome to celebrate his *Decennalia*, or tenth year as emperor, a notable achievement in the third century. It was

⁵¹ De Blois, 6.

⁵² Southern, 100.

⁵³ Hekster, 24.

⁵⁴ Hekster, 24.

⁵⁵ Grant, *Climax*, 19.

also a time of relative peace, as Gallienus thought better of attacking Postumus, who seemed content with the Gallic Empire and made no effort to march on Rome. Between 262 and 265, Gallienus devoted his time to literature and the arts, most notably philosophy. This period of peace is again disapproved of by many ancient authors who see Gallienus as negligent for not actively campaigning to reunite the Empire. In addition, there was still a Gothic threat to the Danube frontier.⁵⁶

In 265, after preparing his forces, Gallienus finally began to march on the Gallic Empire, but was called to the Danube in 266 to expel the Goths. This campaign produced no tangible results, and in 267 it appeared the Empire was again at the mercy of tribes, generally referred to as 'Scythians', pressuring the borders.⁵⁷ Gallienus decided to concentrate on Illyricum, and first gained a few victories over the Heruli before defeating the tribesmen again at Nestus, when news arrived that his trusted general, Aureolus, had raised a revolt in Milan.⁵⁸ Gallienus left another general in charge of the campaign against the Scythians while he hastened to Milan to besiege Aureolus. A plot was hatched, led by one of his generals, Heraclianus, to assassinate Gallienus during the siege of Milan. There are, again, conflicting accounts of how the event took place, but the apparent complicity of Gallienus' generals, including future

⁵⁶ Southern, 105.

⁵⁷ Zos. I. 32.

⁵⁸ Southern, 106

emperors Claudius II and Aurelian, points to a general disenchantment with him or his policies. Gallienus was assassinated in July or August of 268.⁵⁹

The following content reassesses the significance of Gallienus' major policies and the influence his reign had on the later Empire. The first chapter will be an analysis of the military and administrative policies undertaken by Gallienus. Throughout the third century, and especially during Gallienus' reign, the legions were the most important aspect of the Empire. Constant warfare plagued Gallienus throughout his entire reign, as he faced both internal and external enemies, often simultaneously. This meant the fate of the Empire would hinge on the success of his legions, and the effectiveness of the policies he implemented.

Chapter Two examines Gallienus' conception of his emperorship. The numismatic evidence of his reign reveals the messages Gallienus felt it was important to propagate to the Empire. Gallienus also fostered culture in his court to a degree not seen by any of his immediate predecessors. The revival of art and philosophy and the images minted on his coins and medallions are revealing of a spirituality Gallienus fostered, which would have a great influence on his successors and the Late Empire.

⁵⁹ De Blois, 8; Potter, "Empire at Bay," 264.

The third chapter defines what makes a typical soldier-emperor, and more importantly, why Gallienus does not fit the archetypal mold. The chapter will also revisit the Latin authors' biases against Gallienus, and suggest why Gallienus, far from being the inept emperor they portray, should have been remembered in the same regard as the 'good' emperors of Rome's golden age. Gallienus' achievements, even today, are undervalued in terms of the role they played in saving the Empire from what seemed like certain collapse, and his policies built the foundation which would allow his successors to recover and once again find stability ruling the Western world's foremost power.

Chapter 1

Gallienus made some significant changes to the military and administrative structures of the Roman Empire. The reorganization of the army and administrative posts were often not wholly original reforms initiated by Gallienus himself, but rather a continuation or revival of measures initiated by previous members of the Roman Principate. The extent and lasting effects of Gallienus' reforms, however, were more substantial than those of almost all of his predecessors. Of his military reforms, the most significant, and consequently, the most discussed by both ancient and contemporary authors, is the formation of his independent mobile cavalry. This chapter will address this aspect of Gallienus' military at length as well as other important innovations regarding the defensive strategy of the Empire and the command structure of the legions. The administrative reforms brought forth by Gallienus are not only as important as his military policies, but very much intertwined with them. Under Gallienus, there was a very important power shift when it came to military careers, one that saw the rise of the equestrian class at the expense of the Senate in both military posts and provincial governance. It was his treatment of the Senate in regards to military and provincial administration that led to Gallienus being slandered by many ancient historians.

During Gallienus' reign, the Empire was in a state of constant war. Modern scholars are still debating whether the period between 235 and 284 was actually a 'crisis' or not, but no one can argue that Gallienus' reign came during one of the most tumultuous periods the Empire had ever seen.⁶⁰ Wars, both foreign and civil, were ever-present between 253 and 268, and therefore it is no surprise that Gallienus' reforms had mostly to deal with the army, with which he was so familiar.⁶¹ Gallienus' fiscal, social, political and military policies were all subordinated to the needs of the army.⁶²

The independent cavalry unit is amongst the most discussed topics of Gallienus' reign. It was due to this force that Gallienus was able to defeat a constant barrage of opponents throughout his reign. Some historians have questioned whether the mobile cavalry was actually a strategic reform or just an *ad hoc* response to dire situations. Though there are differing views in respect to this topic, as is the case for many events of this period, the lack of reliable sources makes a single definitive answer impossible. The earliest mentions of the mobile cavalry under Gallienus are found in Zosimus and Zonaras, but the sources do not

⁶⁰ There are contrasting views of the label 'crisis' for this period. The traditional view that it was indeed a period of crisis is held by A. Alföldi and G. Alföldy, while others such as R. MacMullen reject the label and prefer to look at the period as a transition.

⁶¹ De Blois, 26.

⁶² Southern, 84.

mention a date for the mobile unit's creation.⁶³ De Blois believes Gallienus developed his cavalry around 255, or shortly after, as Gaul at that time was under constant pressure from the Alemanni and the Franks, and the need for rapid response was paramount.⁶⁴ By 259, the mobile cavalry unit was firmly established in the Roman army and stationed at Milan, attested by coins celebrating the loyalty of the cavalry forces being minted in Milan in 260.⁶⁵ Whether the independent mobile cavalry force was intended to become a permanent part of the army or not, the effectiveness of the unit helped keep the Empire from complete collapse, and would influence Gallienus' successors.

The make-up of the mobile cavalry force is not entirely clear, but it is unlikely that Gallienus could have created an effective cavalry force from raw recruits and untrained horses. Rider and mount must undergo sufficient training to become a formidable combination. This process takes time, and time was scarcely a commodity that Gallienus could afford to waste.⁶⁶ It is probable that Gallienus selected horseman from the corps of mounted *auxilia*, consisting largely of Mauretanian and Dalmatian horseman, presumably because of their riding skill, as well as

⁶³ Zos. I.40; Zon. 12.24.

⁶⁴ De Blois, 6.

⁶⁵ Ragnar Hedlund, "*...achieved nothing worthy of memory*": *Coinage and authority in the Roman Empire c.AD 260-295* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2008), 109.

⁶⁶ Pat Southern and Karen Ramsey Dixon, *the Late Roman Army* (Yale University Press, 1996), 12.

detachments from the legionary cavalry.⁶⁷ These *equites*, as the cavalry force was designated on coins, were most likely relatively small in number, so as to keep mobility at a premium and not deplete the frontier of too many troops.⁶⁸ The mobile cavalry force proved to be a valuable asset to Gallienus; it could be deployed independently from the legions in any area that needed aid.

The mobile cavalry was created as a strike force which could swiftly move from one area under duress to another. The force's mobility was its greatest attribute, and it could compensate for inferior numbers by being able to promptly supply well-trained soldiers to the weakest points of the frontier.⁶⁹ Given the pressure from so many different enemies, external and internal, during Gallienus' reign, a force that could rapidly move from one front to another would prove invaluable. In addition, certain tribes such as the Alemanni were reputed to be great horsemen, and it was the Alemanni that Gallienus was engaged with in Upper Germany and Raetia around 255, which is another reason why the creation of a mobile cavalry was seemingly necessary at that time.⁷⁰

Because of the cavalry's growing importance to the Empire, the general who oversaw the force would have possessed great prestige.

⁶⁷ De Blois, 27.

⁶⁸ Alfoldi, 217.

⁶⁹ Zosimus.I.30

⁷⁰ Aurelius Victor. *De Caesaribus*, trans. H.W. Bird (Liverpool: Liverpool University, 1994), 21.2.

Zosimus and Zonaras tell us that Gallienus chose Aureolus as the commander, after he had proven himself as an attendant of the imperial stables, and he held the position until 267.⁷¹ The importance of the mobile cavalry would have made Aureolus at least as, if not more, powerful than the praetorian prefect.⁷²

It has been established that Gallienus was responsible for bringing the cavalry to the forefront of the Roman army. Mounted forces had already been deployed and even gained some great renown under previous emperors, in particular the horseman fighting for Maximinus Thrax, but it was not until the reign of Gallienus that they made up perhaps the most important contingent of the Roman forces.⁷³ However, Gallienus was not the first to employ a mobile field force: *vexillationes* (detachment corps) were used for Trajan's Dacian wars and Marcus Aurelius' Macromannic wars, and raised by Septimius Severus for his *II Parthica* legion. These mobile field armies seemed to serve the same function as Gallienus' cavalry force on the surface.⁷⁴ Most modern historians (De Blois and Ferrill to name a couple of prominent writers) put Gallienus' mobile cavalry in the same category with previous mobile field armies, as

⁷¹ Zosimus. I.40; Zonaras. 12.25

⁷² Arthur E.R. Boak and William G. Sinnigen, *A History of Rome to A.D. 565*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), 419.

⁷³ De Blois, 28.

⁷⁴ Southern and Dixon, 9.

essentially ad hoc emergency forces, but there are a few distinct differences between Gallienus' forces and those of his predecessors.⁷⁵

It was common practice during the wars of the earlier Empire to assemble troops from one province and temporarily shift them to another, whether for offensive or defensive purposes. These *vexillationes* were operating outside of their regular units with the intention of returning to them at some point, and therefore could not be given the title *legio*, *ala* or *cohors* (units assigned to a particular area).⁷⁶ The title given to Gallienus' body of cavalry was *equites*, and while this does not suggest the permanence of the previously listed titles, it also is different from the term *vexillatio*, a label usually given to a unit which was clearly intended to be short-term.⁷⁷ Pat Southern notes an inscription (ILS 569) dating from the reign of Claudius Gothicus (268-270), once a commander of the mobile cavalry, which makes a distinction between the temporary detachments and the independent cavalry, further indicating that the cavalry troops were not considered part of the *vexillationes*.⁷⁸

The cavalry force operated separately from the main body of the army and had an independent command structure, another departure

⁷⁵ De Blois, 29; Arther Ferrill, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: The Military Explanation*, (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc, 1986), 32; Alfoldi, 214.

⁷⁶ Southern and Dixon, 9.

⁷⁷ Southern and Dixon, 13.

⁷⁸ Southern, 90., ILS 569. The inscription *vexillationes adque equites* suggests the cavalry was not absorbed with other units or merged with the *vexillationes*.

from earlier vexillations, and it was attached to the emperor's own person when he was present, both characteristics of Diocletian's and Constantine's permanent *comitatenses*.⁷⁹ Furthermore, the sheer importance of the mobile cavalry distinguishes it from earlier vexillations; Aureolus, the first commander as mentioned above, held power second only to Gallienus at the helm of the cavalry force, and after him, Claudius Gothicus and Aurelian held the post and used it as a platform to eventually become emperors themselves.⁸⁰

It has been suggested that Gallienus had no intentions to make his independent mobile cavalry unit permanent because of a lack of evidence supporting the cavalry's presence in Milan after 283, and furthermore, that the cavalry unit had been broken up and redeployed to different locations.⁸¹ De Blois advocates that since the Gallic Empire had been recovered by that time, and was no longer a threat, the cavalry was disbanded just as any other vexillation would have been. However, the lack of evidence for the presence of the cavalry in Milan could simply have meant that the force was permanently in the field with the current emperor, as Southern suggests.⁸² The frequent campaigns of Probus (276-

⁷⁹ Potter, "Empire at Bay," 257.

⁸⁰ Zosimus, I.40; *The Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (HA), trans. David Magie (London : Heinemann, 1967), *Aurelian*, 18.1

⁸¹ Brian Campbell, "The Army", in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd ed. vol.XII (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 116; De Blois, 29; Southern and Dixon, 14.

⁸² Southern and Dixon, 14.

282), Carus, and his sons (282-285) could allow this possibility.⁸³

Furthermore, just because the independent cavalry unit may not have been stationed in Milan, does not necessarily mean it was disbanded all together.

As previously discussed, epigraphic evidence (ILS 569), and a passage in the HA verify that the cavalry was still employed under Claudius Gothicus.⁸⁴ In addition, Zosimus records the cavalry being used by Claudius as well as Aurelian (270-275).⁸⁵ The lack of evidence makes it impossible to connect Gallienus' mobile cavalry to later *comitatenses* with certainty, but it does not disprove this supposition either. With the importance placed on the cavalry unit, and the central role it played in Gallienus' army, it is improbable that the emperor did not see the value of a permanent mobile force.

Many modern scholars are too eager to dismiss the possibility of Gallienus viewing the mobile cavalry as a permanent unit. It is probable that it was initially created to deal with an emergency situation along the Rhine, but after the initial and continued success of the mobile force, why would Gallienus plan to disband it? Throughout Gallienus' reign, the Empire was in a constant state of warfare (with the exception of a relatively peaceful period in 265-266), and in many instances numerous

⁸³ Drinkwater, 57.

⁸⁴ ILS, 569; HA. *Claudius* 11.9.

⁸⁵ Zos 1.43.2 and 1.52.3

fronts were simultaneously threatened, making an independent mobile force invaluable. It is also evident that his cavalry was utilized by his immediate successors and foreshadowed later mobile field armies, whether the mobile cavalry unit remained in constant deployment after 283 or not. Regardless of Gallienus' intention, the independent mobile cavalry unit was an important strategic deployment; one that proved crucial in the survival of the Empire, and was utilized by his successors.

Situating the mobile cavalry's headquarters at Milan was another strategic move to defend multiple fronts. The base in northern Italy was in an optimal position for the cavalry force to quickly reach the Danube and Rhine provinces, as well as guard the Alpine passes against invasion. In addition, and perhaps most important to Gallienus, Milan was in a position after 259 to defend the western passes against the troops of Postumus, who had successfully created his Gallic Empire by then.⁸⁶

Gallienus' choice of Milan for the mobile cavalry's headquarters could also support the idea of long-term planning. Some modern authors refer to Milan as being little more than a frontier outpost, only relevant so long as Postumus was a threat, but if Gallienus did intend for his mobile cavalry force to be permanent, then Milan made sense for other reasons.⁸⁷ As mentioned earlier, Milan was in a strategic position in

⁸⁶ Parker, 168.

⁸⁷ De Blois, 29; Ferrill 32.

northern Italy, with relatively easy access to the Rhine, Danube, and Gaul. It was also situated in fertile territory, and (as Southern and Dixon point out) the fertile surrounding lands, coupled with the ease of obtaining and transporting goods to its central location, made Milan an optimal base for a military force dependent on horses.⁸⁸ It should be noted that this remains true whether there was a threat from Gaul or not. Milan's importance to the Empire is further supported by later emperors taking up residence there. The Tetrarchs chose Milan as one of their imperial residences, and Honorius based his court there in the 4th century.⁸⁹ Milan was arguably the power centre of Gallienus' empire, perhaps not by choice but by necessity as a strategic point in the Empire's defense.

Gallienus was also active in developing new fortifications and defense strategies, as well as alliances to help defend the numerous threatened frontiers. Along with Milan, other strategic points, well back of the frontiers, were also used as staging posts for Roman forces. Alfoldi lists Aquileia and Verona as other points in Italy where mobile units were stationed, in addition to Sirmium and Poetovio in Pannonia, which barred the major routes south of the Danube, and Lychnidus in Upper Macedonia, which guarded the Via Egnatia across the Balkan

⁸⁸ Southern and Dixon, 13.

⁸⁹ Grant, 'Roman Emperors', 209, 282.

peninsula.⁹⁰ The *vexillationes* stationed at these strategic points all put emphasis on mobility to defend against attacks to the frontier. This system of defense-in-depth was intended to check the constant waves of barbarian invaders threatening various points of the frontier, until it eventually became entrenched, and this “elastic” form of defense ultimately replaced the old rigid system of border defense as the Roman strategy.⁹¹ The new military centres usually included mints and arms factories, making them self-sufficient, and thus facilitating the desired mobility of the nearby troops.⁹² Gallienus proved skillful in reacting to the emergency situations he faced: this elastic defense was not an entirely new strategy, but again it was successful against the unrelenting succession of invasions, and it foreshadowed the definitive system organized by Constantine.⁹³

During Diocletian's reign, he was faced with different and more favorable circumstances than Gallienus, which gave him the luxury of time to plan out and reorganize most facets of the Empire, one of which was the border system of defense. This was also made possible with the enlargement of the army under the Tetrarchs.⁹⁴ Constantine, however, was faced with a more desperate situation, often dealing with multiple

⁹⁰ Alfoldi, 213-214.

⁹¹ Arther Ferrill, *Roman Imperial Grand Strategy* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991), 43.

⁹² Alfoldi, 213.

⁹³ De Blois, 33; Alfoldi, 215.

⁹⁴ Campbell, 121.

and sometimes simultaneous threats to the Empire. Constantine's situation was similar to Gallienus', and so he reverted back to an elastic defense system, a testament to not only the effectiveness of the defense-in-depth system during times of duress, but also of the influence Gallienus' reforms had on the later Empire.⁹⁵

It was becoming increasingly hard throughout his reign for Gallienus to be able to defend all frontiers under pressure, not only because of the increasing frequency with which the frontier was threatened but also because of a diminished stock of military man-power within the Empire, due to a plague that began around 251. In response, Gallienus struck alliances which delegated the defense of certain frontiers to other capable commanders.⁹⁶ This is not unlike what Valerian attempted to do by handling problems in the East while giving Gallienus the task of safeguarding the West, and this policy was also used by Marcus Aurelius when he assigned Lucius Verus (161-166) to handle a Syrian threat in 161-162.⁹⁷ This delegation of responsibility can even be viewed as a precursor to the tetrarch system, which made the separation of the Empire amongst the four emperors official. Zosimus records Gallienus making an alliance with the chief of a German tribe, around 256, to prevent other tribes from crossing the Rhine, but details of the terms of this particular alliance are

⁹⁵ Ibid, 121.

⁹⁶ Boak, 419; M Rostovzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 476.

⁹⁷ Marcus Birley, *Marcus Aurelius: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 123.

virtually non-existent.⁹⁸ However, two years later, Gallienus made a treaty with Attalus, a Marcomanni chief, ceding to him parts of Pannonia in return for his daughter, Pipa, who allegedly became Gallienus' concubine.⁹⁹ This alliance proved that Gallienus had the sense to negotiate when it served his purpose, and with the Empire under such duress, this agreement would relieve much pressure on the Roman troops of the region. Yet, it drew criticism from ancient authors such as Victor, who used the "shameful" relationship between emperor and concubine to further discredit Gallienus' rule.¹⁰⁰ In contrast, Victor often praises the emperor Constantine (306-337), who incidentally would reach a similar agreement with the Sarmatians (334), which absorbed the tribe into the Empire. This displays an evident bias Victor held against Gallienus that will be discussed in more detail in following chapters.¹⁰¹

Gallienus would forge similar alliances in other parts of the Empire as well: his agreement with Odenathus of Palmyra granted the latter nominal command over the East. While Odenathus enjoyed free reign in the East, he always stressed his allegiance to Rome.¹⁰² This particular alliance would prove very valuable for Gallienus, as Odenathus was quite a capable commander. Leading the Palmyran forces, Odenathus was able to inflict

⁹⁸ Zosimus, I.30.

⁹⁹ Parker, 168.

¹⁰⁰ Victor, 33.

¹⁰¹ Walter Pohl, *Kingdoms of the Empire: the Integration of Barbarians in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 1997), 42.

¹⁰² Hekster, 24.

overwhelming defeats on the Sassanid Empire in 260, and then launched his own offensive against Persia in 262, recovering Mesopotamia and Armenia, and forcing the Persians back to Ctesiphon before they were able to repel him.¹⁰³ Odenathus also put down revolts in the East, defeating the usurpers Callistus and Quietus in 262. Macrianus and his eldest son were in league with Callistus and Quietus when the former were cut down by Aureolus and the mobile cavalry, leaving Gallienus to invite Odenathus to finish the victory by turning on Macrianus' former associates Callistus and Quietus. Odenathus accepted the emperor's offer, successfully defeated the usurpers at Emesa, and was rewarded by Gallienus with the title *corrector totius orientis* or "Defender of the Whole East". For his victories over Sapor and the Persians, Odenathus assumed the title "King of Kings", a lofty title which Potter interprets as a direct challenge to the other holder of that title, Sapor, and therefore also proclaiming loyalty to Rome.¹⁰⁴

The agreement between Gallienus and Odenathus was a fruitful one; it secured the East in the name of the Empire without Gallienus having to withdraw any further troops from the West. When Odenathus was murdered in 268, his titles were passed to his son Vaballathus, but his wife Zenobia was effectively the new ruler, acting as her son's regent.

¹⁰³ Parker, 174.

¹⁰⁴ Potter, "Empire at Bay" 260.

Zenobia would prove to be a problem for the Empire, as she fought for independence from Rome, and would attempt to create her own empire including Asia Minor, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Arabia and Mesopotamia. Gallienus, however, would never be able to turn his attention to Zenobia, as he was dealing with an invasion of Goths in 267, so she was left to her own devices until her defeat at the hands of Aurelian.¹⁰⁵

Gallienus realized the limitations of his army and was willing to negotiate power and land, in the case of Odenathus, in order to secure the Empire's borders. His alliance with Odenathus in the East was very different from the situation in the West, however, where the usurper Postumus secured his own Gallic empire in 259. Gallienus would be in a state of war with the ex-governor of Lower Germany throughout the rest of his reign.¹⁰⁶ Postumus was able to retain his Gallic empire for so long because both he and Gallienus were often preoccupied engaging Germanic tribes in battle. When Gallienus finally did launch a campaign against Postumus in 265, he failed to eliminate the usurper despite having initial success on the battlefield, due to receiving an arrow wound while besieging Postumus at an unnamed Gallic city.¹⁰⁷ It is important to note that even though Gallienus wanted to defeat Postumus and reincorporate the fragmented Western territory, Postumus never

¹⁰⁵ Potter, "Empire at Bay" 258; De Blois, 35.

¹⁰⁶ Afoldi, 185.

¹⁰⁷ Zon. 12. 24.

threatened to invade Italy, and therefore Gallienus always treated other threats to the Empire as a priority.¹⁰⁸

Gallienus' reforms of the military command structure and the administration of the provinces would have a profound effect on the army and the relationship between various elite groups, and his decisions regarding the Senate would be reflected negatively by the ancient Latin writers, especially those writers who closely represented the traditional conservative Roman senatorial tradition.¹⁰⁹

The rise of the *equites* was initiated long before Gallienus' reign; provinces were put in equestrian hands as early as the first emperor, Augustus. Marcus Aurelius appointed equestrian officers to important posts, such as procurator of Dacia, when he was facing many of the same problems as Gallienus.¹¹⁰ Septimius Severus continued the trend by appointing an equestrian *praefectus* to govern the northern Mesopotamian province acquired during his reign in the 190s.¹¹¹ From the Severan period onward, the number of equestrians replacing senatorial governors increased, and Gallienus embraced this pattern. Aurelius Victor famously declared that the senator's right to a military career was

¹⁰⁸ Potter, "Empire at Bay", 260.

¹⁰⁹ De Blois, 78. In particular the author of the SHA. Victor and Eutropius are already mentioned as being far from favorable towards Gallienus. De Blois mentions that the further the historian was from the group of traditional conservative senators, the less negative was his judgment on Gallienus.

¹¹⁰ David Potter, "Procurators in Asia and Dacia under Marcus Aurelius: A Case Study of Imperial Initiative in Government," in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, Bd. 123, (1998): 274.

¹¹¹ Mennen, 138.

prohibited by Gallienus through an edict, claiming the emperor was afraid that the imperial power would be transferred to the best of the nobility because of his own indolence.¹¹² Victor is the only author to mention this edict, however, so it may not actually have existed; he was not entirely wrong on the exclusion of senators from the military posts they had enjoyed in the past, but the motive he gives Gallienus illustrates Victor's bias against the emperor, especially since the Senate was no longer the biggest threat to Gallienus' throne. Furthermore, this separation of civil and military command would be continued by Gallienus' successors, and fully incorporated in the policies of Diocletian.¹¹³

The high command posts that the equestrian class received from Gallienus were not a direct attack on the senators, but rather another response to the external and internal problems the Empire was facing. Many of the senators simply did not possess the relevant military experience that the chaotic period demanded. The senatorial military career had already begun to wane before Gallienus' reign. There was always a considerable number of senators who were not interested in pursuing military or even political accolades, but were rather content with senatorial rank and prestige.¹¹⁴ Those who aspired for more usually had to follow a succession of administrative posts and military offices to gain the

¹¹² Victor, 33.

¹¹³ C.J.C. Anderson, "The Genesis of Diocletian's Provincial Re-organization," in *The Journal of Roman Studies* 22, Part 1: Papers Dedicated to Sir George Macdonald K.C.B. (1932): 30.

¹¹⁴ Southern, 92.

prized position of consul, or even important provincial commands. As Southern points out, senators of the earlier Empire who strove for these goals would usually combine civilian posts with a term of service in the army as tribunes and then legionary legates, but these positions were just stepping stones to a better political career, and they did not necessarily gain much military experience.¹¹⁵

During the joint reign of Valerian and Gallienus, the title of *protector* first appears. The officers who were endowed with the title were from diverse units and career backgrounds, so it did not denote a distinct body of men.¹¹⁶ Senators were excluded from the title, but that is not surprising, as it seems purely a military honour. The *protector* title did not denote a rank either, but perhaps marked the men as loyal to the Emperor, serving as a general mark of distinction.¹¹⁷ It has been hypothesized that the title *protector* was assigned to equestrian military officers who belonged to the mobile army staff and found themselves in Gallienus' entourage.¹¹⁸ It would not be surprising that Gallienus bestowed this honorary title on select officers in hopes of bringing them closer to him. In a time of constant warfare and usurpation, the loyalty of the army and any chance to secure that loyalty would prove invaluable. The later achievements of known *protectores*, such as Petronius Taurus Volusianus, who rose through

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 92.

¹¹⁶ De Blois, 45.

¹¹⁷ Southern, 90.

¹¹⁸ Mennen, 231.

the ranks of the army, attained the title *protector* around 258, and eventually became the praetorian prefect, show that they moved on to higher office.¹¹⁹ It is clear that when Gallienus awarded this title, he was marking such men out for splendid careers.¹²⁰ This was another innovation that was imitated by the later Empire. Under Diocletian, who had been commander of the *protectores* at the time of his accession to the throne, the corps appears to have assumed a role as the emperor's bodyguard, but was made up of junior officers and other men still thought to have future potential to climb the ranks.¹²¹ The *protectores* are present under Constantine as well, attached to the emperor's person, and the title seems to still have a denotation of loyalty, and the hope of producing future officers.¹²²

Under Gallienus, the Empire was in a constant state of duress, and an emphasis on military proficiency was necessary. The exclusion of senators from military command, including the disappearance of the *legati legionis* (legion legates) and *tribuni laticlavii* (senatorial tribunes), was a decisive move to ensure that the imperial armies got the very best commanders, those of the equestrian class who had risen up through the

¹¹⁹ Mennen, 227-228; CIL 11, 1836=ILS 1332.

¹²⁰ De Blois, 46.

¹²¹ Campbell. 122.

¹²² *Ibid*, 128.

ranks and had proven themselves competent in battle.¹²³ Gallienus certainly took steps to make sure most provinces and armies were led by equestrians; however, those provinces that were not affected by any military threat or long-term problems, such as Africa and Asia, were left in the hands of senatorial governors. There were also non-military but important positions in Rome and Italy that continued to go to the traditional elite.¹²⁴ This fact shows that Gallienus was not deliberately attempting to slight the Senate, nor was he blindly trying to strip it of power, but rather the military concerns of the Empire dictated his policies.¹²⁵

There is a common theme to Gallienus' military and administration policies. Almost all of them stem from a response to emergency situations. While it is generally accepted the mobile cavalry was such a response, many modern historians discount the possibility of Gallienus realizing its value and making it part of his long-term strategies, yet given the military success Gallienus enjoyed, it seems improbable that he would have abandoned such a force. It is impossible to prove that any of the other reforms were intentionally meant to be permanent; however, they showcase Gallienus' ability to react swiftly to any number of difficult

¹²³ Elio Lo Cascio, "The Government and Administration of the Empire in the Central Decades of the Third Century" in *Cambridge Ancient History* vol.XII, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 159.

¹²⁴ Hekster, 42; Mennen, 140.

¹²⁵ Lo Cascio, 159.

situations and to do so with competence. His reforms were almost always to the benefit of the soldiers, and Gallienus greatly increased their social mobility, giving them more posts to achieve and quicker paths to get there. High ranking officers now enjoyed social status that may have been viewed as equal to that of the Senate, and at any rate, those born of humble origins did not need to be elected into the Senate to enjoy prosperous careers.¹²⁶

The anti-senatorial bias Gallienus was accused of by Latin writers is inaccurate. The Senate certainly did suffer from some of his policies, but this was neither the Senate's fault nor Gallienus'; these measures were simply necessary to ensure the armies had reliable and proven commanders to safeguard the Empire. With many military careers now blocked for the senatorial elite, and many military men able to reach lofty goals without any sort of civilian career, Gallienus' reforms inadvertently brought about the professionalism and specialization of the army.¹²⁷ Though many of Gallienus' reforms have roots in previous periods, Gallienus took many strides that, if not directly imitated by his successors, certainly represent an important preparatory period for what was to come.

¹²⁶ De Blois, 43.

¹²⁷ Southern, 95.

Chapter 2

Gallienus' conception of the emperorship can be studied through the images created, and the cultivation of philosophy and the arts he championed during his lengthy reign. In contrast to the dearth of reliable contemporary written sources for the period of 253-268, there is a wealth of numismatic evidence, in addition to some well-preserved portrait sculptures that provide an insight into Gallienus' image of his empire, or at least how he wanted it to be perceived among his people. Studying the 'propaganda' of the coins and medallions in this chapter gives us an insight to the messages Gallienus felt it necessary to propagate and why. In addition, the resurgence of philosophy and the arts fostered in Gallienus' court reflect important ideals he had of his emperorship.

The first part of the chapter takes a look at some of the broad themes found on the coins and medallions of Gallienus' reign, in particular those themes that frequently reoccur, emphasizing their importance. In addition, it is helpful to note the differences in major themes of the coinage minted during Gallienus' co-regency with Valerian as compared to that of his sole reign. From 260 onward, imperial decisions were Gallienus' exclusively, and we see a deliberate attempt on his part to disenfranchise himself from his father's administration.¹²⁸ Consequently, in

¹²⁸ Hedlund, "Coinage and authority," 73.

trying to distance himself from Valerian, Gallienus ended his father's persecution of the Christians, and coupled with the divine imagery on his coins, we get a glimpse of Gallienus' religious policies and his spiritual beliefs.

The second part of this chapter relates Gallienus' spiritual philosophy to the cultural and artistic revival of his court. Plotinus, a Greek philosopher, played a central role in Gallienus' philhellenistic views of culture. These cultural elements were fostered by Gallienus and led to what modern historians have dubbed the 'Gallienic renaissance'.¹²⁹ Whether this is rightfully termed a renaissance has been widely debated, but what is significant is the effect it had upon the art of the period, particularly the portrait sculptures made of Gallienus. During his reign, art and philosophy made a transition between the classical and post-classical world that would leave its impression on the later Empire.¹³⁰ Images, whether on coins, medallions, or sculptures, provided a means of communication from emperor to the Empire, and on the brink of collapse it was more important than ever to reassure the people of their empire's safety and their emperor's merits. Fostering a resurgence of philosophy and the arts in the imperial court was another way Gallienus displayed what he conceived as essential to an admirable administration. The

¹²⁹ Gervase Mathew, "The Character of the Gallienic Renaissance," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 33, parts 1 and 2 (1943): 65-70.

¹³⁰ Mathew, 65.

growing sense of spirituality displayed in the coins and portraits reflect Gallienus' desperation to associate himself with the gods and propagate his rule by divine right. This pattern is influential in the style of his successors and the later Empire.

The images that an emperor projects to his subjects reveal much about the values of his administration and the state. Hedlund argues that the communication through images used by the soldier-emperors was an attempt to legitimize their positions through a communication of shared values, such as references to the military and Rome. The "language of images" that was represented on coins was also meant to reach across the whole Empire, and subsequently, to integrate the Empire into the community that was Rome.¹³¹

In reference to Roman imperial coinage, the term 'propaganda' has frequently been a topic of debate, because it generally carries negative implications: as Meadows and Williams suggest, "... the word propaganda has far too many inappropriate and anachronistic connotations attached to it."¹³² However, the phrase is appropriate as long as it is stripped of modern connotations, and I will apply it in accord with the following definition: "The deliberate attempt to influence public

¹³¹ Hedlund, 21-22.

¹³² Andrew Meadows and Jonathan Williams, "Moneta and the Monuments: Coinage and Politics in Republican Rome", *the Journal of Roman Studies* 91(2001): 49.

opinion through the transmission of ideas and values for a specific purpose."¹³³

Hedlund also brings up the question of whether the coins speak of reality or of ideals. For instance, Gallienus was largely dependent on his cavalry forces, and issued a coin referring to the newly-formed unit (the reverse depicted Concordia holding a patera and rudder on globe with the legend CONCORD EQVIT (unity of the cavalry)).¹³⁴ It could be interpreted that this image was a reference to the fact that Gallienus based his power upon the cavalry, or to maintain the cavalry's loyalty; however, others might argue that the coin's purpose was to convince the Empire that the cavalry supported Gallienus. Whether the intention of the coin was to affect public opinion or state reality, all that is known for certain is that the cavalry played a significant role in Gallienus' empire. The exact messages of the coins might be difficult to discern, yet whatever the images are, they were intentional, and expressed the values and/or groups that were relevant to the Empire at the time they were struck.¹³⁵

One last numismatic question that should be discussed is who was actually responsible for the choice of images? It has been suggested that

¹³³ N.J. Cull, et al, *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: a Historical Encyclopedia, 1500 to the Present* (Santa Barbara, 2003), p.318.

¹³⁴ David Van Meter, "Gallienus no.34" in *The Handbook of Roman Imperial Coins: a Complete Guide to the History, Types and Values of Roman Imperial Coinage* (New York: Laurion Press, 2000), 244.

¹³⁵ Hedlund, 32.

the choices of images were made by the mint-masters, either in an effort to communicate with the emperor or an attempt to simply mint what images they thought best for their patron.¹³⁶ This view is highly unlikely, especially during a period of instability like that of Gallienus' reign. The imperial images struck on coins and medallions played an important role in how the emperor was perceived, and therefore would probably have been, at the very least, chosen in consultation with the emperor.

Herodian, for example, mentions an episode when Septimius Severus (193-211), having named Claudius Albinus Caesar (193), ordered Albinus' likeness to be struck on coins.¹³⁷ Herodian's account reveals the emperor directly dictating to the Senate the content of the next coins to be struck.

The coins themselves featured obverse and reverse images, consisting of different insignia and inscriptions. The obverse portrait acts as a sign of the issuing authority, and the most common image used was the imperial portrait. The majority of the Empire would never actually see the emperor, so his portrait on coins and sculptures would be the only way for the people to familiarize themselves with their ruler. More importantly, as the imperial age progressed, coin portraits depicting the emperor tended to focus on the role of the emperor, instead of the emperor as a

¹³⁶ Hedlund, 33.

¹³⁷ Herodian. 2.15.5

person.¹³⁸ This was accomplished through the depiction of signs of imperial authority, such as the emperor holding a scepter or globe and wearing a crown.

The reverse imagery was depicted with a little more artistic license, and its goal was to deliver the message of the emperor. Wallace-Hadrill uses three broad themes to classify reverse images: personal badges, honours, and deities and personifications of virtues. The image was used in conjunction with the obverse portrait to represent the authority of the emperor: if the emperor's bust is a symbol of the central power of the state, then the reverse image serves to show why he is in that position and deserves respect, by highlighting virtues or tributes of the emperor or a special connection with the gods.¹³⁹

The obverse and reverse legends add clarity, and at times depth, to the portrait. The legends are a written text of imperial titles that represent developments, usually political, throughout the Empire.¹⁴⁰ Often these legends are in abbreviated form to fit the coin or medallions. All of these varying features make for an extremely diverse amount of combinations with which the emperor could communicate his message. The ideological importance of coins as a communication medium is made

¹³⁸ Hedlund, 35.

¹³⁹ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "Image and Authority in the Coinage of Augustus," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 76, (1986): 69.

¹⁴⁰ Hedlund, 36.

clear by the repeated and continuous introduction of new types throughout an emperor's reign, no matter how long they held power. The significance of coins is also apparent as they were issued immediately following any claim to power, whether that claim was from an emperor, usurper or vassal ruler, it was a priority to display their authority on coins as soon as possible.¹⁴¹

In a recent study, Erika Manders has divided the coin types found in the *Royal Imperial Coinage* (RIC) into fourteen 'categories of representation'.¹⁴² While acknowledging that the obverse and reverse of the same coin exhibit a reciprocal relationship, Manders' study focuses on the reverses, which she states "...are less static and more susceptible to changes than the obverse. Because of this variation, the messages on the types' reverses are less subtle and therefore provide more distinct images of particular emperors and their reigns."¹⁴³ This approach is useful in distinguishing not only between the vast array of Gallienus' coins, but also the differences in coin types issued from his joint reign with his father as compared to those of his sole reign.

¹⁴¹ Erika Manders, *Coining images of Power: Patterns in the Representation of Roman Emperors on Imperial Coinage, A.D. 193-284*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 29; Parts IV and V of the *Royal Imperial Coinage (RIC)*, though dated, still provide the best overview of coin types minted in the third-century.

¹⁴² Manders, 41-48. The 14 categories of representation are: Dynastic Representation, Military Representation, Divine Association, *Saeculum Aureum*, Virtues, *Euergesia*, *Paradeigmata*, *Restitutor* Messages, Geographical Messages, Elevation, Non-specific Representation, *Aeternitas* Messages, Unica, and a Representation Uncertain category.

¹⁴³ Manders, 39.

Throughout the third-century the soldier-emperors all minted coins and medallions within the fourteen coin type categories, but what is abundantly clear is that there are four major categories that contain the vast majority of coins and medallions minted: Of the 8000 coins in the RIC database from the third century, 22.5% are 'military representation', 19.2% promote '*saeculum aureum*' (golden age), 17.4% glorify 'virtues', and 21.8% represent 'divine association'.¹⁴⁴

The largest category is 'military representation', which comes as no surprise when considering the chaotic conditions the Empire often faced under constant threat of war. Consequently, as Gallienus ruled through arguably the height of the 'crisis', it should seem only natural that military matters dominated the majority of his coins as well.¹⁴⁵ Throughout his entire reign, 253-268, coins that fall under the 'military representation' category make up 26.5% of his total coinage (approximately 1154 coins), an increase over the norm when considering the third-century as a whole.¹⁴⁶

Gallienus' coins give us one of the best sources to analyze the nature of his policies, which, as previously discussed, revolve around an emphasis on the army. The coins minted for the military served various functions; first and foremost, coins were payment, and above all, the

¹⁴⁴ Manders, 40-49.

¹⁴⁵ De Blois, 100.

¹⁴⁶ Manders, 271.

emperor had to keep his forces regularly compensated. The need to keep the soldiers content during economic turmoil led to the continuous debasement of the coinage, a practice initiated during the Severan dynasty.¹⁴⁷ De Blois notes that this was a problem for all third-century emperors, who had continued currency debasement and other manipulations to keep the army payments up, but he blames Gallienus for giving the failing monetary system the extra push which “plunged the entire system into chaos once and for all.”¹⁴⁸ Gallienus certainly did nothing to curtail the economic hardships he inherited, but at the height of third-century chaos, when the Empire depended upon the army the most, he was left with little alternative.

To further ensure his troops would receive their due compensation, Gallienus established mints in areas where his armed forces were situated, Milan and Lugdunum (Lyon) being two examples. This contributed to the decentralization of the imperial mint but serves as another example of Gallienus' dedication to his troops, or at least their rapid payment.¹⁴⁹ Detrimental as Gallienus' financial policies might have been, he was only continuing the trend set before him, which was immortalized by Cassius Dio when he recorded the famous advice spoken by Septimius Severus

¹⁴⁷ Mireille Corbier, “Coinage and Taxation: the State’s Point of View, A.D. 193-337,” in *Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 334.

¹⁴⁸ De Blois, 100.

¹⁴⁹ H. Mattingly, “The Mints of the Empire: Vespasian to Diocletian,” in the *Journal of Roman Studies* 11 (1921): 260.

(193-211) to his sons, “be harmonious, enrich the soldiers, and scorn all other men.”¹⁵⁰

The numerous coins and medallions of Gallienus' reign referring to the military spoke of the overall importance of the military, the loyalty and connection the army had with Gallienus, and the claimed or promised victories in the name of the Empire. Within the military category, three types of coins are used most frequently, *FIDES MILITUM* (loyalty of the army), *VICTORIA (E) AUG.* (victory of the emperor), and *VIRTUS* (military valour and capacity). These are the common legends of the most important military coins, but all three types come with additional variants to the titles listed.¹⁵¹

The loyalty of the army was paramount, as it increasingly gained the power of king-maker as the third-century progressed. The relevant numismatic images portrayed a respect between Gallienus and his army, while at the same time informing the rest of the Empire that Gallienus had the support of his troops, further legitimizing his rule. The most common image adorning coins with the *Fides Militum* legend featured Fides (goddess of trust), either standing between two standards, or holding a standard and scepter or trophies.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Cassius Dio 77.15.2

¹⁵¹ De Blois, 101: Manders, 277-283.

¹⁵² *RIC*, V.1, Gallienus joint reign, no. 570.

Coins and medallions featuring the *VICTORIA (E) AUG.* legends commonly present an image of Victoria (goddess of victory) with a palm or laurel bough, and at times with captives at her feet.¹⁵³ The message could be received a few different ways: either as notice of a successful campaign launched by Gallienus, a successful campaign handed to Gallienus by Victoria (meaning Gallienus was in her good graces), or as the promise of a successful campaign to come. An advertisement of victories over an enemy force sent a message of the military competence of the emperor, as well as the favour of the gods. Some modern historians have insinuated that Gallienus fabricated some victories that he claimed on coins for propaganda purposes, or so he could receive the *aurum coronarium* (gold crown), which was a prize entitled to him upon winning a military victory, and so provided another way to levy taxes. If these victories were contrived, however, it cannot be proven, and the fact that he actually led numerous successful campaigns has been well documented.¹⁵⁴ The message to the Empire through these coins is meant to give confidence to the soldiers and the people. Reassurance of the Empire's well-being and success during such a chaotic time was important to the continued support of Gallienus.

¹⁵³ De Blois, 104; *RIC*, V.1, Gallienus joint reign, no.586-588.

¹⁵⁴ Manders, 278; De Blois, 91.

Virtus was an essential virtue for any Roman emperor to possess, and an emperor reigning in the third-century could not be successful without it. Along with its connection to war, *virtus* could also signify action or exploits on behalf of the state.¹⁵⁵ Further, without *virtus* an emperor could not attain victory, and was not worthy of it. To have the respect and loyalty of the military and subjects alike, an emperor had to display *virtus*. The *VIRTUS* legend was usually accompanied by campaign-portraits, such as the emperor armed on horseback, or Hercules dressed as a soldier.¹⁵⁶ A fragment from the *Continuator* Dionis tells of an instance when Gallienus proved his *virtus* and personal valour by challenging Postumus to single combat, to settle their war and avoid the unnecessary bloodshed of their soldiers.¹⁵⁷ Such anecdotes and images showed that the emperor possessed the traits that entitled him to the throne. These *virtus* messages displayed a competent leader, which was of utmost importance in the mid third-century.

Besides the three major military coin types, Gallienus was noted for minting a large number of coins honoring particular legions. The legionary coin series, which featured sixty coin types, was minted between 257 and 259.¹⁵⁸ One hypothesis for this series is that it commemorated actual victories; De Blois, however, offers an opinion that it was just a further

¹⁵⁵ Hedlund, 57.

¹⁵⁶ De Blois, 104; *RIC*, vol.1 Gallienus joint reign, 667-676.

¹⁵⁷ Hedlund, 57.

¹⁵⁸ Manders, 278.

attempt by Gallienus to advertise his connection with the soldiers, binding them to himself to ensure their continued loyalty and support.¹⁵⁹ This was a necessary maneuver, especially after Valerian was captured in the East, when the soldier's loyalty was vital to Gallienus' power. Naming particular legions represents a connection between emperor and soldiers on a more personal level and, presumably tightens the bond between them. There are many examples of the legionary series, including a particular coin minted in Milan featuring a flying Pegasus, which further advertises Gallienus' close connection with the mobile cavalry (figure 2).¹⁶⁰

The '*saeculum aureum*' coin category provided an important message to the Empire. The notion of what, exactly, characterized the Golden Age differed between authors who wrote about it before or during Augustus' time, such as Vergil, as well as those who wrote much later, such as Corippus (sixth century).¹⁶¹ It was viewed on a whole, however, as a time of peace and prosperity for the Empire. A *saeculum* is also interpreted in various ways: often considered "a generation", from thirty to one hundred years, as well as a definitive one hundred and ten years. By the third-century, however, it most often coincided with an era or dynasty. This would explain why almost every single emperor during the third-century claimed a *saeculum aureum* on their coins. Though

¹⁵⁹ Manders, 279; De Blois, 109.

¹⁶⁰ *RIC*, vol.1 Gallienus joint reign, no.545 and 414; De Blois, 108.

¹⁶¹ Karl Galinsky, *Augustan Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 91.

obviously the conditions of the Empire were far from ideal, this propaganda was meant to reflect "...promises, wishes, or efforts to obscure a reality that was characterized by [grave problems]."¹⁶² Augustus held Secular Games in 17 BCE to commemorate his Golden Age, a tradition that was also kept up by Philip the Arab in 247, when he combined the Secular Games with a celebration of a millennium since Rome's foundation.¹⁶³ There was a coin struck in Antioch with the legend *Saeculares Aug.* which may have meant Gallienus planned to hold his own Secular Games, although there is no further evidence that he actually got around to it.¹⁶⁴

Gallienus had to keep reassuring his people that he would eventually bring about *pax* (peace). By proclaiming the coming of a 'golden age', Gallienus was not only sending out a message that his military campaigns would be successful, but also intentionally alluding to a connection with the past glory years of Augustus, Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius. The peace and prosperity Rome enjoyed during the 'golden age' of Augustus was always the bench mark for emperors that followed it during the imperial age, and Gallienus was no different in trying to attain the same level of achievement for his own reign. Gallienus may have been desperate to remind his people of what he fought for in the name

¹⁶² Manders, 187.

¹⁶³ Drinkwater, 37.

¹⁶⁴ De Blois, 128

of the state: a prosperous and peaceful time in stark contrast with Rome's current situation.

Gallienus attempted to advertise his personal merits through the 'virtues' coins. Again, this is a practice he shared with his predecessors, though Gallienus may have had a more pressing reason to glorify the qualities that made him fit to be emperor. Attaining his position through dynastic inheritance, Gallienus needed to show the people he deserved the throne through his own merits, which would help him distance himself from the embarrassing capture of his father.¹⁶⁵ Virtues were a constant fixture on imperial coinage and medallions, and though some believe their depiction may have originally stemmed from the shield presented by the Senate to Augustus, proclaiming courage, clemency, justice and piety, there seems to be no defined canon of virtues, but there are several which are traditionally glorified by emperors.¹⁶⁶ Among the virtues Gallienus propagated was the aforementioned *virtus*, as well as *pietas* (duty), *clementia* (mercy), *iustitia* (justice), *aequitas* (fairness), *liberalitas* (generosity), *providentia* (foresight) and *indulgentia* (tolerance).¹⁶⁷ By claiming mostly traditional virtues, Gallienus was trying to attest to his legitimate rule, as well as liken himself to earlier emperors, namely Augustus. These coins can also be seen as another way to reassure his

¹⁶⁵ Hedlund, 73.

¹⁶⁶ Manders, 157.

¹⁶⁷ De Blois, 138-143; Manders, 292-293.

subjects that he was capable of their protection; a competent emperor not only displayed military prowess, but all virtues the title demanded.

After 'Military Representation', the second largest category of coins throughout Gallienus' reign was 'Divine Association'. Presenting yourself as a god, hero, saviour, or the medium through which divine power brought peace and prosperity, was a standard part of propaganda amongst emperors. Hercules is one god to whom Gallienus takes a special liking, and numerous times he is depicted in the guise of Hercules, wearing the mane of the Nemean lion in one instance.¹⁶⁸ Hercules had been the model of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, as well as being popular amongst the Severi, and Gallienus revived this tradition in 261-262 and again in 265.¹⁶⁹ It seems Hercules had fallen out of favour with emperors since 235, and this intentional revival by Gallienus was not only another attempt to connect to past emperors, but probably propaganda directed towards the soldiers of Gaul, where Hercules was particularly popular because of his legendary ability as a courageous warrior, the chief attribute sought amongst the Gauls.¹⁷⁰ It may also have been a ploy to reach out to the soldiers under Postumus' command in the 'Gallic Empire.' Hercules was a hero who performed courageous tasks for the

¹⁶⁸ *RIC*, vol.1, sole reign, no.596.

¹⁶⁹ De Blois, 150.

¹⁷⁰ Tacitus, *Germania* 9.1, Clarendon Ancient History Series, trans. J.B Rives (Oxford University Press, 1999).

good of others, and so by depicting himself as the demi-god, Gallienus presented himself as the redeemer of the Roman world.

Besides traditional gods, Gallienus identified himself with the *Genius populi Romani*, the ancient patron god of Rome who stood by the Romans in time of danger.¹⁷¹ One relevant coin was struck in 265/6, and could represent an attempt of Gallienus to reestablish himself with the city and further legitimize his rule, portraying that he was to protect his people in the face of any danger. Even more unique was Gallienus' *Gallienae-Augustae* series minted in Rome during his sole reign. This series was a drastic exception to the norm by an emperor, as the portrait was of Gallienus with a woman's features on the obverse.¹⁷² This bizarre coin was an attempt by Gallienus to appeal to his Eastern provinces. The female goddess he is portraying is Allat, who was regarded as a giver of peace and protector of the rights of asylum and vengeance for her worshipers in the Palmyrene region. This was propaganda directed at the Syrian world, where Gallienus was most likely symbolizing Allat, manifested as Gallienus, giving victory to Odenathus. As Odenathus was a vassal king of the Roman Empire, by extension, the coin is also a symbol of Allat giving victory to Gallienus.¹⁷³ This coin may have also been an attempt by Gallienus to proclaim his special relationship with the gods, showing that

¹⁷¹ De Blois, 149-150

¹⁷² L.S.B MacCoull, "Gallienus the Genderbender" in *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 40, (1999), 233.

¹⁷³ MacCoull, 237.

he transcended gender, and either sex of the deities could manifest in him.¹⁷⁴

A look at the differences between the coins minted during Gallienus' joint reign with his father and those of his sole reign can give us insight into Gallienus' personal ideologies, as we cannot be sure how much influence Valerian had during the joint reign. The 'military representation' category decreases after 260, and becomes the second most numerous category next to 'divine association'. The victory type was still the most predominant of the military coins, but a shift occurs from specific victories and specific military units during the joint reign to victory in general and the overall loyalty of the troops during Gallienus' sole reign.¹⁷⁵ This is probably because Gallienus enjoyed more victories during his first seven years, though he still had some during his sole reign. More importantly, after the catastrophe of his father's capture in 260 and the chaos that ensued, it became paramount to restore the loyalty of his army. It was important to proclaim victory as a general concept, which gained the confidence of the Empire, and also reflected the effectiveness of Gallienus' leadership, which in turn could also strengthen the legions' loyalty.

¹⁷⁴ De Blois, 154.

¹⁷⁵ Manders, 302.

The *saeculum aureum* types continued to be one of the four major categories after 260, and the reference to *pax* was still dominant; during his sole reign, however, Gallienus issued a much wider variety of coins alluding to a Golden Age. In addition, more references to Gallienus' *libertas* were issued, including a series in which *OB* preceded the legends, such as *OB REDDIT LIBERT* (concerning the return of liberty). This ob-formula is thought to be an intentional reference to Augustus, who was the first to use such a legend.¹⁷⁶ After Valerian's capture, the number of threats to the Empire, external and internal, escalated quickly, making the promise of the peace and tranquility of a Golden Age all the more important to relay to the Empire.

The 'virtues' category also remained important through Gallienus' transition to sole emperor. *Virtus* was still the dominant virtue, as expected of a soldier-emperor, but after Gallienus became sole emperor, he added three more virtue types to his coinage: *indulgentia*, *clementia* and *pudicitia* (modesty), going from five to eight.¹⁷⁷ Again, as Gallienus was facing potentially disastrous consequences from his father's capture, he desperately needed to remind the people of his qualifications as a righteous ruler, and he attempted to do this by attaching even more merits to his person.

¹⁷⁶ Manders, 294.

¹⁷⁷ Manders, 294.

Finally, the 'divine association' category shifted in importance from joint to sole rule. It includes the largest number of coins from Gallienus' sole rule, at 24.1% of the total minted. These 'religious' coin types also welcome ten more Roman deities to the fold: Neptune, Minerva, Liber, Aesculapius, Serapis, Hercules, Mercury, Janus and Vulcan join the deities depicted in coins during the joint reign, more than doubling the number.¹⁷⁸ While Gallienus was trying to cope with a series of troubles during his sole reign, he evidently tried to appeal to the entire Roman pantheon on his coins. Eleven of the deities now appeared as *conservatores* (protectors of the emperor), as opposed to just two before 260. Many of these *conservatores* belong to the 'animal-series' struck in 267/8.¹⁷⁹ These coins feature every sort of god, accompanied by the deities' symbolic animal, and the time of their minting coincided with yet another period of multiple threats to Gallienus' throne from barbarian invasions in Greece and the Balkans, Zenobia seizing control of Palmyra, and Aureolus' usurpation. The 'animal series' and the proclamation of so many gods protecting Gallienus was probably an effort to simultaneously impress and reassure all of his troops, who chose individual deities to pray and sacrifice to.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Manders, 275.

¹⁷⁹ De Blois, 160.

¹⁸⁰ De Blois, 161.

Along with expanding the coinage to include more of the Roman pantheon, Gallienus made an attempt to communicate with his armies in the East and along the Danube frontier, by identifying himself with Sol, a popular sun-god in the eastern armies, as well as through the transgender portrait of himself in the guise of the goddess Allat. This transition shows us much about Gallienus and his religious views; he was certainly aware of other gods worshipped throughout the Empire, and openly attempted to associate with them as well as traditional Roman gods. He was trying to connect himself, through these coins, with every possible deity he could, and by doing so, attempt to relate to every person within the Empire as well.

The changes in the major coin categories may have resulted from the altered imperial landscape Gallienus now faced as sole ruler, but more importantly, they symbolized a desperate need for Gallienus to distance himself from his father's legacy. Communicating through coins that he had the support of the gods may have been Gallienus' way to step away from a title merely handed to him from his father, and make it one invested in him divinely, which foreshadows the practices of later emperors, particularly Constantine. By trying to find a religious basis for his emperorship through coinage, Gallienus was seeking recognition of his

emperorship achieved by the grace of the gods, just as Constantine was given his throne through the help of Christ.¹⁸¹

It is evident from the coins minted during his reign that Gallienus attempted to give his rule a religious foundation, appealing to a wide range of deities that were worshipped throughout the Empire. Though his worship was rooted in the traditional Greco-Roman pantheon, Gallienus did not shy away from associating himself with any gods or goddesses that were popular within any region of his Empire, such as in the case of previously discussed coins depicting Allat and Sol, and his involvement in mystery religions. In addition, Gallienus took measures that aided the growth of Christianity throughout the Empire by revoking an edict of persecution issued by his father, Valerian. This reversal of fortunes for the Christians coincides with a new emerging spirituality in the Empire, one seen not only in the coinage of Gallienus' sole reign, but also in the art and culture he fostered in his court.

Early in his reign, Valerian was seemingly too preoccupied with uprisings in the East and on the Danube to pay much attention to the Christians. In 257, however, he issued his first edict that introduced a policy of persecution.¹⁸² This first edict, as we know from the writings of the

¹⁸¹ De Blois, 148; Noel Lensky, "The Reign of Constantine," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 71.

¹⁸² Bernard Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome: the First Three Centuries* (New York: T&T Clark), 16.

Christian authors Cyprian and Eusebius, was directed at the clergy and ordered them to participate in a sacrifice to the Roman gods. Failure to do so would result in exile, as reportedly was the case for Cyprian of Carthage and Dionysius of Alexandria.¹⁸³ The edict of 257 also banned Christians from holding meetings and entering their cemeteries. The second edict, better described as a rescript of the first, followed a year later and was far more severe: it called for the confiscation of property and even execution of all those who disobeyed, as well as those who had previously confessed, but had relapsed.¹⁸⁴ Previous edicts, such as the one issued by Decius in 249, negatively affected Christian followers, but did not mention Christians specifically. Valerian's was the first initiated by imperial authority to directly attack the Christian church since Nero.¹⁸⁵

The reason for Valerian's Christian persecution is unclear; Alfoldi believes it was undertaken in an effort to divert attention away from the emperor's troubles and onto the Christians.¹⁸⁶ It has also been suggested, because the edict took aim at the higher ranking Christians' property, that Valerian was after badly needed money to fund his ongoing wars, and chose the confiscation of Christian wealth as a remedy for his financial

¹⁸³ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Kirsopp Lake (London: W. Heinemann, 1926-32), 7.11; Green, "Christianity," 162.

¹⁸⁴ Graeme Clark, "Third-century Christianity," in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. XII, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 643.

¹⁸⁵ Green, 162.

¹⁸⁶ Alfoldi, 205.

problems.¹⁸⁷ If the Christian persecution was profitable to the Empire, however, it would be reasonable to believe that Gallienus, who was not Christian, would also see the benefit of continuing his father's religious policy, instead of reversing it. A third explanation of Valerian's motives is that his persecution was simply policy intended to stop the Christians within his Empire from upsetting the traditional gods.¹⁸⁸ This strictly religious interpretation is acceptable, considering the dire situation the Roman Empire was in during the last half of the 250s. In addition, it would make sense of the first edict, which, according to Eusebius' letters, was officially concerned with Christians publicly worshipping traditional gods, with the mild punishment for disobedience being exile.¹⁸⁹ Only after the first edict was largely neglected and Valerian received complaints from the Senate, who may have seen the Christian defiance as failure of civic duty, did he issue the following rescript which bore much more severe penalties.¹⁹⁰ Whatever Valerian's motives were, the persecution ended with his capture in the East.

Gallienus' actions towards the Christian Church did much to aid the growth of the religion throughout the Empire, but he was by no means a Christian himself. In addition, Gallienus certainly could have used another

¹⁸⁷ W.H.C Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 326; De Blois, 176.

¹⁸⁸ Christopher J Haas, "Imperial Religious Policy and Valerians Persecution of the Church, AD 257-260," *Church History* 52, no. 2 (June 1983): 140.

¹⁸⁹ Eusebius 7.11

¹⁹⁰ Clarke, 642-643.

source of revenue to fund the ongoing wars being waged during his sole reign. If Gallienus needed additional financial aid just as urgently as his father, and he was not a Christian, then why did he revoke his father's edict?

As previously mentioned, the embarrassment of his father's capture by the Sassanid Persians made it a priority for Gallienus to distance himself from Valerian's reign, and a break with some of the policies established by his father could help in this regard. It is believed that Gallienus ended the Christian persecution about 260, which means he wasted no time in taking this measure after gaining sole rule of the Empire.¹⁹¹ This coincides with the sudden change of coinage starting with his sole reign; Gallienus was emphasizing his individuality, and making an obvious effort to separate himself from the memory of his father. Furthermore, as Gallienus' sole rule continued, he did not hesitate to include gods from other religions within the Empire, especially provinces where fighting was frequent.¹⁹² He may not have worshipped the Christian god, but he still thought it safer to avoid risking the wrath of the Christian god, while gaining the favour of the Christian population within the Empire, and at

¹⁹¹ Clarke, 646; De Blois, 177.

¹⁹² De Blois, 115.

the same time ridding himself of the unnecessary effort and cost of enforcing his father's edict.¹⁹³

Another theory about Gallienus' leniency towards the Christians ties into his own spiritual views; Gallienus and his wife Salonina were known supporters of Neo-Platonic philosophy, and were patrons of the Neo-Platonic philosopher, Plotinus.¹⁹⁴ Plotinus' life was recorded and his ideas edited by his disciple Porphyry in *The Enneads*, which Porphyry wrote around 301, more than thirty years after Plotinus' death.¹⁹⁵ Little is known about Plotinus' early life but it is certain that his education and intellectual thought were thoroughly founded in the Greek tradition, which would have attracted Gallienus' like-minded appreciation for Hellenic culture, art and philosophy.¹⁹⁶ Some modern scholars have argued that Plotinus was combating Christianity on paper, wishing to spread Platonism as an alternative to Christianity.¹⁹⁷ There is no record, however, of any such plan by Plotinus, nor is there any written work by the philosopher that directly attacks orthodox Christianity.¹⁹⁸ The perceived notion of Plotinus' hatred for Christianity probably came from Porphyry's personal views; his *Against*

¹⁹³ Haas, 139; Eusebius mentions riots and an uprising of Christians in Egypt when Dionysius was taken prisoner. *Eus. H.E.* 7.11

¹⁹⁴ Thomas Whittaker, *The Neo-Platonists: a Study in the History of Hellenism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), 29.

¹⁹⁵ A.H. Armstrong, "Plotinus," in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 195.

¹⁹⁶ A.D. Nock, "The Development of Paganism in the Roman Empire," in *Cambridge Ancient History* vol.XII (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 442.

¹⁹⁷ Alfoldi, 207.

¹⁹⁸ De Blois, 188.

the Christians attacked the Christian faith at length, and because he was Plotinus' pupil, it is probable that a shared view between teacher and student has been assumed.¹⁹⁹

On the contrary, it seems that Plotinus was largely indifferent to Christianity, and only held disdain for organized worship or sacrifices, as he explained to one of his followers, Amelius: "It is for those Beings [Gods] to come to me, not for me to go to them."²⁰⁰ In addition, it seems that many of Plotinus' views were similar to Christianity: "they have the same metaphysic-idealism; the same psychology-spiritualism; the same attitude toward life- a sober mysticism."²⁰¹ Plotinus' philosophy was based on the connection of everything in existence, and the search to find a unity within ourselves. His metaphysical doctrine was based on a three-fold hierarchy: the One (or Good), The Intellect, and the Soul. Plotinus believed that if we live a moral life free from the distraction of the body's daily needs, and free of a need for explanation or reasoning, then we can look within ourselves and unify with the One.²⁰² Within the complicated framework, later Christian concepts were influenced, especially the works of St. Augustine. In his *Confessions*, Augustine wrote about the influence

¹⁹⁹ J. Bidez, "literature and Philosophy in the Eastern Half of the Empire," in *Cambridge Ancient History* vol.XII (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 630.

²⁰⁰ Porphyry "Life," from *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London : Faber & Faber, Ltd., 1956), 10.

²⁰¹ W.R. Inge, "The Permanent Influence of Neoplatonism upon Christianity," in *The American Journal of Theology* 4, no. 2 (April 1900): 330.

²⁰² Carlos Steele, "Neoplatonism." *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. Donald M. Borchert. 2nd ed. Vol. 6. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2006) 547-548.

Plotinus had on him and described Neo-Platonism as embodying Christian doctrine about God and his word, the creation of the world, and the presence of divine light.²⁰³

If Gallienus was a supporter of Plotinus' teaching, then it is conceivable that he adopted the same indifference to Christian practices that Plotinus seems to have held. Furthermore, Plotinus' influence may also have directly led to the end of the Christian persecution through his disdain for organized worship, which contradicted Valerian's edict, as it had ordered the Christians to partake in the organized worship of the traditional gods.

Plotinus and his Neo-Platonic philosophy encompassed more than just religious views, and his influence may have played a role in guiding the Empire into a new era of spiritual art and culture, a period which has been coined as the "Gallienic Renaissance."²⁰⁴ Whether this period could be accurately described as a true renaissance has been argued, but it remains an extremely important era, not only in the shaping of Gallienus' reign, but also because of the implications and influence this period

²⁰³ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. E.B. Pusey (London : J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1907), 7.9.13-14.; Robert Russell, "The Role of Neoplatonism in St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*," in *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought*, ed. H.J. Blumenthal and R.A. Markus (London: Variorum Publications, 1981), 161; A.H. Armstrong, "Plotinus", 210; A.D. Nock, 442.

²⁰⁴ G. Rodenwaldt, "The Transition to Late-Classical Art" in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol.XII, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965): 556-557.

would have for art history.²⁰⁵ This period should be remembered as a transitional phase in art, "... the bridge between the classic and post-classic worlds."²⁰⁶ Roman art history rarely ever follows a straight line from one specific point to another, especially in the case of imperial portraiture, but a striking change occurs in the portraits of Gallienus as his reign progresses, and an emphasis on spirituality takes over the classical form that had emerged in the art of the period, coinciding with the emergence of Neo-Platonism.²⁰⁷

Gallienus had always shown an affinity for Greek culture and the arts. This may have been because, unlike other soldier-emperors of the third-century, he was of senatorial birth and well educated. Along with being a patron of art, Gallienus was recognized as being a skilled poet and orator, even by the Latin authors who discredited his rule.²⁰⁸ In addition, his efforts to be linked with great emperors from the past led him to appreciate and possibly attempt to replicate the art and culture of Augustus' and Hadrian's rule.²⁰⁹ It is not surprising then, that the art, and in particular the portraits of Gallienus during the early years of his coregency with his father, are decidedly early imperial in style. A sculpture in Berlin (fig.3) is a perfect example of Gallienus taking up the tradition of the

²⁰⁵ De Blois, 194.

²⁰⁶ Mathew, 65.

²⁰⁷ Janet Huskinson, "Art and Architecture, A.D. 193-337" in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. XII, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 2005); 674.

²⁰⁸ H.A. *Gallieni*. 6.

²⁰⁹ Mathew, 65.

portraits of Augustus and Hadrian; it features a smooth oval face tapered at the chin (based on the Augustan model, figure 4), and a fuller, plastic beard unlike those favored in the third-century, but reminiscent of the Hadrianic model.²¹⁰ At the start of Gallienus' sole reign a slight shift is noticeable in his portraiture, such as an example found in the Roman forum (figure 5): the head shape is still Augustan, and Gallienus still maintains the Hadrianic beard, but now he is featured with long serpentine locks, a more philosophical look favored by Marcus Aurelius (figure 6).²¹¹ Even though this portrait is derived from classical influences, already there is a predominance of a flatter abstract form, and the plastic naturalism is giving way to a spiritual style, exemplified by Gallienus' upwards gazing eyes, perhaps communicating with the heavens.²¹² Finally, we see the transition from classical to late-classical style in the colossal portrait sculpture in Copenhagen from the end of Gallienus' reign (figure 7), a new style that stresses inner beauty instead of outer beauty, not coincidentally the same philosophy preached by Plotinus. The plastic realism is gone, replaced by an abstract work, perhaps less a portrait of a man than a portrait of an idea. The face is a perfect oval, with large eyes staring off into the distance, a window into the soul.²¹³ This style of portrait

²¹⁰ Diana E.E. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture* (Yale: Yale university Press, 1992), 373.

²¹¹ Cornelius Vermeule, "A Graeco-Roman Portrait of the Third Century A. D. and the Graeco-Asiatic Tradition in Imperial Portraiture from Gallienus to Diocletian" in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 15 (1961): 7.

²¹² De Blois, 172.

²¹³ Kleiner, 374;

is replicated in the colossal statue of Constantine, produced around 315-330 (figure 8).

The transition to the art forms that would become prominent in the fourth century could also be seen in contemporary sarcophagus reliefs, which took on a change in subject as well as a change in style. Subjects like battle (figure 9) and hunting give way to more peaceful or tranquil images, as can be seen in a "philosopher sarcophagus" (fig.10) from Gallienus' sole reign.²¹⁴ Even in these reliefs a transition from classical, Augustan traits to the abstract, frontal and spiritual characteristics of his later rule is evident.

Gallienus' support of the arts, and the artistic transition that took place during his reign, coincided with Plotinus' arrival at his court and his influential philosophy. Both philosophy and art had deliberate roots in the past; Gallienus wanted to link himself with great emperors of old through any means possible, even going so far as to be initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries and be elected archon of Athens, as Augustus and Hadrian had been before him.²¹⁵ Plotinus too strived to honour past greatness, by continuing Plato's teaching, but his own ideologies merged with Plato's teaching to give birth to Neo-Platonism, and it was this new spiritual view that elevated both thought and art to a different level. In Gallienus'

²¹⁴ De Blois, 199

²¹⁵ H.A. Gallieni 6

court, Neo-Platonism blossomed and would influence philosophy and Christianity in the next century, just as the new styles of art were the bridge between classical and post-classical movements, and the precursor to the abstract linear style of the Tetrarchs (figure 11) and the Constantinian dynasty.²¹⁶

As far as building projects are concerned, there are no major monuments that are known to have been constructed during Gallienus' rule, which probably had something to do with the constant state of war the Empire was in, and the need for funds to support his loyal soldiers. An arch was rededicated to Gallienus between 260-268, known from the double inscription to Gallienus and his wife Salonina. The arch in question was previously dedicated to Augustus, one more sign of Gallienus' attempt to be linked with the beloved rule of Augustus.

Images were a way for Gallienus to communicate his conception of the emperorship throughout the entire Empire; these images acted as the newspapers of the day. Upon coins, medallions, portrait sculptures and reliefs, Gallienus could proclaim military victories, reciprocal loyalty to his army, his virtues, support of the gods, and his spiritual ideologies. The numismatic and sculptural remains are the most telling pieces of evidence

²¹⁶ Mathew, 63; Huskinson, 681.

as to what Gallienus perceived as of the utmost importance at any given time during his reign.

The coins minted during his rule reflect the chaotic situation the Empire was in. As to be expected, an emphasis was put on military themes, as well as the *saeculum aureum*, virtues, and divine association themes. Gallienus was desperate to hold on to the Empire amidst numerous threats to his throne, which increased after the calamity of his father's capture. Beginning with the start of his sole reign, there is a shift amongst the four major themes of Gallienus' coins and medallions. They still remain the four most prominent themes; however, there are important changes now that Gallienus was making the decisions without his father. The 'military theme' is as important as ever, but now emphasis is on the loyalty of the armed forces as a whole--an attempt by Gallienus to reinforce a close connection with his entire force, instead of individual units as had previously been the emphasis during his joint reign.²¹⁷ The '*saeculum aureum*' theme would be present in wider variety, as Gallienus would herald the coming of a new Golden Age and his role as a bringer of peace, while connecting himself to Augustus. The 'divine association' and 'virtues' themes would expand, as Gallienus tried to give his rule a religious foundation. This was an important step by Gallienus as he tried to distance himself from the disgrace of his father. By claiming the support of

²¹⁷ Manders, 217.

almost the whole Roman pantheon and attaching even more virtues to his person, Gallienus was claiming his rule by divine right, and legitimizing his position with his own qualifications, which anticipates fourth-century practice, when emperors increasingly claimed their throne by the grace of God.²¹⁸

His attempt to distance himself from Valerian also led to a change in fortune for the Christian community within the Empire. While Gallienus probably did not have the Christians' best interests in mind, his desire to disassociate himself with his father, perhaps coupled with Plotinus' influence, led to an end of the Christian persecution started by Valerian. Gallienus' tolerance really only put the Christians back to where they were before Valerian's edicts, but it reversed the direction Christianity was heading in within the Empire, and started a period of about forty years of relative peace for the Christians, which significantly aided in the religion's growth.²¹⁹

Gallienus' own spiritual and cultural views have a strong connection with the Neo-Platonist, Plotinus. Gallienus enjoyed a learned upbringing, being born into the senatorial class, and his appreciation of Augustus, Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius aided in his philhellenic disposition, which he shared with Plotinus. Gallienus and Plotinus shared a love of Plato's

²¹⁸ De Blois, 19.

²¹⁹ Graeme Clarke, 646.

teaching as well as the classic forms of art celebrated in the courts of the 'good emperors', Gallienus even being a renowned poet and orator himself.²²⁰ Just as Plotinus' philosophy was a tribute to Plato's teaching, the portrait sculpture and reliefs of Gallienus early reign were tributes to the plastic, naturalistic style of the early imperial period, leading this period to be called the "Gallienic Renaissance". Plotinus, however, did not simply repeat Plato's teaching, but included his own views and ideologies to produce a new philosophy, now referred to as Neo-Platonism. Among Plotinus' views was a stress on inner qualities and concepts, a sense of spirituality which began a transitional phase in the art produced as Gallienus' reign progressed. The artist played an important role in Plotinus' philosophy: an artist's vision was more beautiful than nature, his art an elevation rather than an imitation of the spirit.²²¹ In contrast with the early Imperial style of realism, reliefs and portrait sculptures now attempted to capture the spirit within the figure with flatter forms, leading to an un-naturalistic, almost iconic look. This phase is an important transition in the history of Western art, and its influence can be seen in the later Tetrarchy, as well as being a precursor to medieval Christian art (figure 12).²²²

²²⁰ H.A. VG 11.7

²²¹ John P. Anton, "Plotinus' conception of the Functions of the Artist," in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 26, vol.1 (Autumn, 1967): 97.

²²² Janet Huskinson, 681.

The middle of the third-century was defined by emergencies that threatened the undoing of the Roman Empire, and Gallienus' reign was arguably the most tumultuous period of all. Yet, throughout the challenges his administration faced, he held onto his conception of his emperorship. The Roman people needed reassurance of the security of their Empire, and hope for prosperity to come. Gallienus knew the importance of declaring the victories and military prowess of his armies, the support of the gods, and his personal merits. He needed to inspire confidence in his leadership to ensure the continued loyalty of the people. He was also aware that, despite the growing threats to his throne, bringing back culture to his court was also the signature of a good emperor, and it seems he was insistent that his reign be more than just one continuous war effort. He was a champion of Plotinus and his Neo-Platonism, and the spirituality the philosophy conveyed was evident in the coins, reliefs and sculptures of Gallienus' reign. The presence of Hellenic culture and Neo-Platonist philosophy produced a transitional phase in art history that would be embraced by the later Empire and influence Christian art into the medieval period.²²³ Gallienus was ever trying to connect back to the past, to the glory years of the Empire's golden age, and in doing so, he also left his own mark, one which proved to be

²²³ P. A. Michaels, "Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Byzantine Art," in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 11, no.1 (September, 1952): 29-30.

influential to his successors who continually built off the foundation
Gallienus set down.

Chapter 3

The third-century, including the period of Gallienus' reign, has traditionally been described in overly general terms by modern historians. The period from the fall of the Severan dynasty (235) to the reign of Diocletian (284) has been repeatedly referred to as a "crisis", "collapse and recovery," and the "age of the soldier-emperors."²²⁴ The constantly changing landscape of the Empire and the emperors that held power in this period make it difficult for any label to be completely accurate, yet these labels are still frequently used to group together general tendencies, which can be misleading when discussing individual emperors and their reigns. As far as the whole period being one of "crisis", scholars are still debating whether that term is accurate, as it encompasses a substantial amount of time, and different regions were affected by the ongoing problems to varying degrees. Some did not suffer appreciable problems at all during this period: for example, rural sites in North Africa increased during the third century, and living standards remained high, indicating that economic life in that region continued to prosper.²²⁵ The consensus among scholars, however, is that Gallienus ruled during the worst years of the period between Severus Alexander and Diocletian; economically, politically, socially and especially militarily, Gallienus' reign can be

²²⁴ Michael Grant, *The Collapse and Recovery of the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 1999), passim; George C. Brauer, *The Age of the Soldier Emperors: A.D. 244-284* (New Jersey: Noyes, 1975), passim.

²²⁵ Hekster, 34-35.

considered one in the midst of crisis.²²⁶ In this chapter, which in part represents a summing up of my previous discussion, all of these labels will be discussed, and whether or not Gallienus' reign is accurately defined by them.

The first part of the chapter will attempt to briefly define what makes a typical "soldier-emperor," and discuss whether or not this label is appropriate for Gallienus. There is no doubt that he was an emperor that spent most of his career on the battlefield, but what, if anything, separates Gallienus from the other emperors of the so-called soldier-emperor period?

The second part of this chapter will examine Gallienus' accomplishments as an emperor. Gallienus is almost always noted for ruling during the nadir of the third-century "collapse," and therefore looked upon as being a poor emperor, and responsible for the Empire's precarious situation. This holds especially true in the works of contemporary Latin authors who, embittered at Gallienus' treatment of the Senate, purposefully distorted the features of his reign, and consequently led the significance of Gallienus' reign to be undervalued. While some modern authors have worked to rehabilitate Gallienus' name, his role in saving the Empire, as well as his influence on the "recovery"

²²⁶ Drinkwater, 64

period and the fourth-century has not been heralded to the extent it deserves. The bias shown against Gallienus in some texts has already been discussed, but by comparing him to other 'good' Roman emperors, both before and after his reign, I hope to show why Gallienus should have been looked upon more favorably in those same texts that blackened his image. In addition, I hope to demonstrate that, even now, the significance of Gallienus' reign is underappreciated.

Attempting to find all the similarities between the individuals who claimed the throne during the soldier-emperor period is unrealistic. More than sixty men claimed the throne, both the "legitimate" (recognized by the Senate), and the "pretenders".²²⁷ Even differentiating between usurpers and pretenders is difficult enough: when a general was proclaimed by his army it did not necessarily mean the Senate supported him, but if he emerged out of the inevitable civil war victorious, the Senate would have little choice to but to recognize him after that. In the case of Maximinus Thrax, the first of the soldier-emperors, the Senate encouraged a rebellion against him even after legitimizing his reign, and then proceeded to call him an enemy of the state and legitimize two other candidates while Maximinus was still in power.²²⁸ There are, however,

²²⁷ Hans A. Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 4.

²²⁸ Potter, "Empire at Bay," 169.

several key characteristics of a typical soldier-emperor that are shared by the majority during this period.

The first common trait of almost all the emperors and usurpers is that they were prompted to claim the throne by the army. This was a central element, as previously discussed. The army in large part dictated affairs during the third-century: it was the emperor-maker. Usurpation could happen under several different scenarios: if the emperor lost a battle; if he died and his successor was unnamed or deemed weak; or if troops on a particular frontier felt neglected by the emperor's prolonged absence and trusted one of their own generals to be more capable. Sometimes a general led his army to a great victory, and with this display of military competence his troops encouraged him to challenge for the throne, which also, through familiarity, might increase their chance for favour and financial gain. Even just an assassination conspiracy by a few ambitious soldiers was all it took to overthrow the emperor and continue the vicious circle the Roman administration found itself in during the third century.

Gallienus' path to the throne was different; he received his power from the Senate, at his father's request, before he gained the trust of the soldiers. Gallienus was raised to Augustus in 253 and immediately given the task of defending the western half of the Empire. Dynastic succession was attempted a few times during the soldier-emperor period, but never

successfully until Valerian. Maximinus Thrax, Gordian I (238), Phillip the Arab (244-249), Decius (249-251), Trebonianus Gallus (251-253), and Carus (282-283) all attempted to set up dynasties by having their sons named Augustus or Caesar to succeed them, but none of their sons lived past a year after their father's death, outside of Carus' son Carinus.²²⁹ Valerian's attempt at a dynasty can be deemed a comparative success, as Gallienus not only reigned after him for many years, but his reign was longer than Valerian's, whose own, around seven years, was much longer than the average reign for the period. Gallienus set up two of his sons as Caesar in an attempt to stabilize the dynastic succession, but both died at the hands of usurpers during Gallienus' reign.

When generals were encouraged to claim the throne by their own soldiers, it was clear that they had shown military prowess. It would not do to elect an unworthy leader knowing that war, either civil or against foreign forces, was a certainty. The emperor was expected to personally lead the army during a campaign, which was a new aspect of the third-century: some emperors of the previous two centuries had been present during battles, but it was not entirely common, nor expected of them. Even if they traveled with the army, they would usually yield control to an able general. Antonius Pius (138-161), for instance, is recognized as a great emperor, but he held the throne for over twenty years without ever

²²⁹ Drinkwater, 28-57.

leaving Italy, and was therefore never forced to lead the army at any time of unrest.²³⁰ That was no longer a luxury for the soldier-emperors, as they were not only expected to fight, but to be successful. Gallienus did not gain his throne from the soldier's declaration, but he certainly proved his mettle leading the army throughout his reign.

The second common characteristic of typical soldier-emperors was that they usually came from humble upbringings in the provinces. As the third century wore on, men from senatorial families took the throne less and less. This was a product of the legions holding most of the power in the Empire, and it was a process also accelerated by Gallienus' own reforms. When he started giving all military commands to equestrians instead of senators, it marked the separation of military and civil responsibilities among provincial governors. He also made it easier for men of humble origins to reach the upper echelons of the army, which is why we see a string of Illyrian (one of the more 'rustic' frontier regions of the Empire) emperors succeed to the throne after Gallienus' death.²³¹ Gallienus needed capable men at the head of his forces in the midst of the chronic calamities he faced. It is ironic, then, that Gallienus himself came from a distinguished senatorial family, seeing that his reforms eventually phased senators out of, what used to be, important military

²³⁰ Simon Corcoran, "Before Constantine," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, ed. Noel Lenski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 38.

²³¹ Hekster, 5.

commands for the advancement of their careers. This perceived affront on senatorial dignity is also the main reason for the hatred the Latin writers expressed towards Gallienus' career.²³²

By being born to a senatorial family, Gallienus also had the advantage of a good education. A typical education of a Roman aristocrat would include lessons in Latin grammar, Greek language and literature, law, rhetoric and philosophy.²³³ It was his education that probably first exposed Gallienus to the Greek culture and philosophy of which he would later be a champion, as he tried to fashion his rule in the likeness of those of Marcus Aurelius and Hadrian before him.

The third characteristic of a typical soldier-emperor is a by-product of the first two: the emperors and pretenders were almost always generals. Constant war and the importance of the army to the position of the emperor and the safety of the Empire meant the soldier-emperors needed to be excellent generals, and most of them were little else. Perhaps it is because of the constant warfare that no emperor made any significant changes to the army, administration or economy of the Empire until Gallienus, but it can be argued that Gallienus was busier than all of them, facing more opponents than any emperor of the period before him, and often simultaneously. Gallienus' quick reorganization of the

²³² Alfoldi, 183.

²³³ Michael Sommer, *The Complete Roman Emperor: Imperial Life at Court and on Campaign* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010), 48.

army facilitated a mobile defense system that could combat the repeated attacks and uprisings that took place across the vast Empire. Coupled with his keen eye for able generals and a realization that alliances were a necessity, he did not let the Roman Empire collapse, a feat considered "...one of the miracles of history."²³⁴ His efforts to improve his court extended to the cultural sphere as well (discussed above and in chapter three), as he fostered the arts and allowed Neo-Platonism a central stage upon which to expand. Aurelian (270-275) is also noted for his reforms, especially regarding the economy and administration, which makes these two emperors, out of the entire period, exceptional in that regard.²³⁵

The fourth characteristic of a soldier-emperor was a typically short reign. The constant turnover of emperors led to a very unstable administration, and a vicious cycle the Empire would not emerge from until the reign of Diocletian, when his organization of the tetrarch system lent some stability to the succession process. Out of all the claimants to the throne from 235-284, modern scholars recognize a little more than twenty that were "legitimate" emperors, and the average span of their reigns was approximately 2.3 years, the lowest average length of rule of

²³⁴ Grant, "Collapse and Recovery," xvii.

²³⁵ Alaric Watson, *Aurelian and the Third Century*, (London: Routledge, 1999), 125-158.

any period since Augustus.²³⁶ This might be one of the most remarkable distinctions of Gallienus' reign. Not only was it an impressive fifteen years, eight as sole emperor, but it came at the height of the 'crisis', a testament to his abilities and his resiliency as emperor.

The last shared trait of typical soldier-emperors was the means of their death. As they were promptly raised by the sword, they all died by the sword, and the quick turnover of emperors was the hallmark of the soldier-emperor period. Of all the emperors and pretenders, only three died of natural causes. Hostilian (251) and Claudius Gothicus (270) both perished from the plague while in power, and the official report on Carus' death (283) was that he was struck by lightning: however, that might have been a cover up fabricated by one of the beneficiaries from his death.²³⁷ The rest of the soldier-emperors either died in battle, were killed by their own troops before a battle even began, or in the case of Valerian, while in captivity.

Gallienus did not escape this same fate; he was killed by his trusted officers while besieging the usurper Aureolus at Milan.²³⁸ Gallienus' case, however, is exceptional compared to what we know about the other emperors that were killed by their own troops from the ancient sources. Trebonianus Gallus (251-253), Aemilian (253), Quintillus (270), Tacitus (275-

²³⁶ Sommer, 21.

²³⁷ Drinkwater, 40, 50, 57.

²³⁸ De Blois, 7.

276), Florian (276), and Probus (276-282) were seemingly killed by their own men who were unhappy with their leadership, or simply thought it was a better option to join the opposing general than fight for their emperor. Gallienus was murdered when a few individuals carried out a conspiracy against him, but the whole of the army was outraged at the news of their beloved emperor's demise. Victor records that Claudius forced the Senate to deify Gallienus, but that is probably a false report made in an effort to show Claudius in a favorable light, something Victor and the HA does repeatedly.²³⁹ It is conceivable that Gallienus was deified in order to pacify the enraged army, in addition to Claudius' continuation of Gallienus' attack on Aureolus, as a signal that he aimed to continue Gallienus' policies.²⁴⁰ The anger displayed by the army after hearing of their emperor's demise, and the subsequent actions taken to appease them, show that Gallienus was much beloved amongst his troops, even after a reign filled with an unprecedented amount of uprisings and military challenges--surely the mark of an admired military leader.

Gallienus was emperor in the middle of the soldier-emperor period, and he certainly possessed military skill, but he was not 'one-dimensional', unlike most other rulers during this period. He was of senatorial stock, raised to power by his father and the Senate, and was well educated. It

²³⁹ H.W. Bird, "Aurelius Victor and the accession of Claudius II," in *The Classical Journal* 66, no.3 (Feb.-Mar., 1971): 254; HA. Galli. 15.2.

²⁴⁰ Alfoldi, 190; Bird, 253.

was this background that exposed him to the Hellenic culture of the past and fed a desire to replicate the glorified reigns of past emperors from the first and second-centuries, so he championed culture and philosophy in his court. The length of his reign alone is extraordinary compared to the other emperors within this period, and speaks to his abilities as emperor. Gallienus is remembered for being part of this 'military anarchy' of the third-century, when being an emperor required that one also had to be a soldier, and in this capacity, given the amount of military challenges he faced, he proved more capable than many of the other "soldier-emperors". Furthermore, he championed an artistic and cultural revival in the midst of his reign, making him anything but typical for this period.

What Gallienus was able to accomplish during his reign and how his emperorship as a whole is viewed is still a controversial subject. The unreliability of the ancient sources for this period has been a recurring theme in this work, and it will be addressed here again. The material for the whole of the mid-third century is questionable, and the biographies of the emperors are often colored either favorably or unfavorably, according to the author's preference, but for Gallienus in particular, they are excessively negative. The Latin authors distort his effectiveness as emperor and deliberately work to find fault in his character through misrepresentations and fabrications throughout their histories. Some modern scholars have made strides in reevaluating the importance of

Gallienus' role in the third-century but still fall short in recognizing the significance of what he was able to accomplish.

Three main Latin sources for the third-century are particularly hostile towards Gallienus: Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, and especially the author of the HA. Dissecting the negative hyperbole concerning Gallienus in their works reveals that Gallienus was not only a much better emperor than they suggest, but that he had characteristics which the authors themselves deemed were necessary to be a "good" emperor.

It is commonly accepted that all three of the above Latin sources, amongst others, copied a single source from the first half of the fourth century, the so called *Kaisergeschichte* (KG).²⁴¹ The KG is a lost work, but it is believed to have been a set of short imperial biographies styled in the same way as Eutropius' work. In addition, the KG was almost certainly written by someone from within the senatorial aristocracy, so it comes as no surprise that an unjust view of Gallienus was propagated within the text, which only became more exaggerated by the Latin authors that used the KG as a basis for their own histories.²⁴²

The HA repeatedly states that Gallienus used excessive and extreme cruelty when dealing with usurpers and the legions that followed

²⁴¹ R.W. Burgess, 127.

²⁴² Alfoldi, 224.

them.²⁴³ Cruelty is an attribute of a bad emperor, according to the ancient sources, so it is easy to see why the HA would accuse Gallienus of it. Other sources, however, do not record these acts of cruelty, and Zonaras and Ammianus Marcellinus record the contrary, that Gallienus showed clemency, even to those not deserving it: “[Gallienus] was the object of many genuine plots by rebels...yet on some occasions he punished capital crimes more mildly than they deserved.”²⁴⁴

All three Latin authors accuse Gallienus of involving himself in shameful indulgences and being too inactive. This must have stemmed from the KG, but what the indulgences were are not clear. Eutropius says Gallienus “abandoned himself to all manner of licentiousness,” which Victor took further by claiming Gallienus kept the company of pimps and drunkards, as well as spent too much time with both his wife and Pipa, the daughter he received as part of his deal with the Marcomanni in 258.²⁴⁵ These accusations do not show up in other works such as Zosimus and Zonaras, and Pipa (chapter two) was more than likely a hostage, to keep the Marcomanni at their word, rather than a concubine.²⁴⁶ The description of Gallienus’ vices follows the same tradition that describes other “bad” emperors like Verus (161-169) and Nero (54-68), another

²⁴³ HA Gall 6.8, 7.4; TT 9.5, 10.1.

²⁴⁴ Ammianus. Marcellinus, trans. John C. Rolfe (London: W. Heinemann, 1935-1939), XXI 16.10; Zon. XII.25

²⁴⁵ Eutropius, *Breviarium*, trans. H.W. Bird (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), 9.8; Vic. 33.

²⁴⁶ H.W. Bird, *Aurelius Victor: De Caesaribus*, 138.

attempt to sully Gallienus.²⁴⁷ The author of the HA takes exception to Gallienus' oratorical skills ("But it is one thing that is desired in an emperor, and another that is demanded of an orator or poet"), yet according to the same author, such learned culture was one of the things which made Marcus Aurelius great. In addition, when Victor speaks of the merits of Septimius Severus, he mentions his devotion to oratory and all the liberal arts.²⁴⁸ The bias of the authors is apparent, as oratorical skills are a virtue for a favored emperor, while being a stain against Gallienus.

All three Latin authors mention his laziness or inactivity, and considering Gallienus was constantly fighting wars on the frontier for the first ten years of his reign, it can be assumed they were referring to the only three years of relative peace that Gallienus was afforded (262-265). Their scorn might come from the emperor staying in Rome during this period while Odenathus held the East and Postumus held the West. It should be noted, however, that Postumus made no effort to invade Italy at any point while he held the West, a reason why Gallienus always made other uprisings throughout the Empire a priority over dealing with Postumus. Even though Gallienus did not want a divided Empire, Postumus was still defending the northern frontier in the name of Rome, and in so doing gave Gallienus one less area to worry about. Odenathus,

²⁴⁷ HA Ver. 4.4; Tac. *Ann.* 12.25.

²⁴⁸ HA Gall 11.9; HA *Mar. Ant.* 2; Vic 20.

on the other hand, was working in the name of Gallienus, even if in practice he held an autocracy, and showed unwavering loyalty to the Roman emperor. Odenathus was extremely useful to Gallienus at the height of the military crisis, fighting not only usurpers, but having success against the Sassanids as well. Palmyra was never a threat to the Roman Empire until Odenathus' death, at which point Gallienus was preoccupied with other wars and never got around to dealing with Odenathus' successor before his assassination in the same year.²⁴⁹ Furthermore, while Gallienus was in Rome during these few peaceful years, it is plausible that he was letting his men rest after ten years of continuous fighting, and perhaps he was trying to replenish the army's depleted manpower. This military inactivity did not last long, however, as Gallienus marched on Postumus again in 265.²⁵⁰

For the author of the HA, the accusation of laziness may have concerned Gallienus' inability to save or avenge his father. As is a common method used with other emperors in the HA, the author attempts to make Gallienus look unworthy to rule by stressing the worthiness of those around him, including Valerian, Postumus, Odenathus, Zenobia, and even some of the pretenders.²⁵¹ The HA is the only source to make continual and complimentary references about Valerian, and goes

²⁴⁹ Potter, "Empire at Bay," 260.

²⁵⁰ De Blois, 7.

²⁵¹ Cam Grey, "Civil War? What Civil War? Usurpers in the *Historia Augusta*," in *Citizens of Discord* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 94.

further by projecting the disgrace of the father onto the son for not rescuing him. The calamities of 260, however, would not have allowed Gallienus to go running off to save his father or avenge his death without putting the rest of the Empire at risk, and after the fighting had temporarily subsided in 262, it was too late.

Making Gallienus' successor look better through the former's alleged shortcomings may have been another driving force behind Victor's biased portrayal of Gallienus as well. Victor was writing in the time of Constantius II, and flattering the current emperor, who might have been Victor's patron or even promoted Victor during his reign, is a telling motive. Making Gallienus' successor Claudius II look more competent would reflect well on Constantius II who, through the earlier claims of Constantine, counted Claudius II as an ancestor. Victor even went so far as to leave Claudius out of the conspiracy to assassinate Gallienus, though both Zosimus and Zonaras count Claudius as a key member of the plot.²⁵²

Many of the weaknesses attributed to Gallienus by the three Latin writers seem unfounded, and can be counted as greatly exaggerated or purely fabricated. It is impossible to say definitively whether any of these author's claims are true, but the portrait of Gallienus they project

²⁵² H.W. Bird, "Aurelius", 252-253. Zon 7.25. Zos 1.40.2.

contradicts all that we know of the majority of his reign.²⁵³ The facts of Gallienus' reign suggest that he displayed many of the virtues that a "good" emperor was supposed to have. For a close comparison, we turn back to Marcus Aurelius, universally accepted by ancient authors as one of, if not the best of emperors. Among the qualities that made Marcus Aurelius great were his nobility, his love and practice of philosophy, his military mind, his extensive learning, his shared rule with his brother, and the flourishing of fine arts during his reign.²⁵⁴ Similarly, Eutropius notes Marcus' noble birth, sharing power with his brother, his devotion to philosophy, his education, and his clemency.²⁵⁵ The HA has many accolades to bestow on Marcus Aurelius: among them are his devotion to philosophy and culture, his noble lineage, his good education, and his kindness.²⁵⁶

If the negative hyperbole that these Latin authors use in discussing Gallienus and his reign is stripped away, one is left with most of the same virtues that made Marcus Aurelius a "good" emperor. Gallienus came from a noble family, he was well educated, more than capable in war, and a champion of philosophy and culture. Ammianus Marcellinus, who was no advocate of Gallienus, even attested to his clemency and kindness, as noted above. The two emperors' reigns share more

²⁵³ Brauer, 148.

²⁵⁴ Vic 16.

²⁵⁵ Eutropius 7. 11-13.

²⁵⁶ HA Marc. Aur. I-15.

similarities: they both dealt with 'barbarian' tribes that proved much more capable than the ones their predecessors had faced, they both shared power with a colleague that they outlasted, and continued to reign successfully on their own, and they both had to deal with the outbreak of the plague, further complicating the problem of military manpower.²⁵⁷

The Latin authors, writing in the latter half of the fourth century, could look back at the poor condition the Empire was in during Gallienus' reign, and all too easily attach blame to the emperor that "held the rudder of the state", but it is conceivable their portrayal of Gallienus would have been vastly improved if they had been impartial in their writing.²⁵⁸ The major difference between Marcus Aurelius and Gallienus was in their handling of the Senate; Marcus appeared to show respect to and work with the Senate, while Gallienus appeared to insult the senators by stripping them of ancient rights. This, however, was because of the desperation of Gallienus' time; Marcus had the good fortune to come into power during the height of the Roman Empire, while Gallienus held the throne during its darkest hour. With their preexisting bias, however, it was not difficult for the Latin writers to scapegoat Gallienus in response to his treatment of the Senate. Upon comparison, and by examining their own definitions of a "good" emperor, it is evident that Gallienus should have

²⁵⁷ Birley, "Marcus", 155.

²⁵⁸ Alfoldi, A. 223.

earned his place amongst the other capable emperors, such as the great Marcus Aurelius.

Modern historians have done much to right the distorted conception of Gallienus and his reign that the Latin authors, and those who accepted their views, left behind. Andreas Alföldi, in particular, has striven to redefine the importance of Gallienus' reign. His views on the role that Plotinus and Neo-Platonism had during this period and the period to come, however, are not sufficient. Alföldi argues that Gallienus and Plotinus attempted to fight Christianity, but there is no mention of this plan in the extant sources, and no evidence that Plotinus disliked or wished to fight Christianity at all.²⁵⁹ While Alföldi notes the connection between Plotinus' philosophy and the art of the time, he concentrates on the revival of Classicism and the "Gallienic Renaissance" of Hellenic culture.²⁶⁰ While this is certainly important, he neglects to fully appreciate the influence that Neo-Platonism would have on Christianity and Byzantine art in the coming ages. Under the patronage of Gallienus, Neo-Platonic philosophy had an integral role shaping the future of Christianity and the expression of spirituality in Christian art. Instead of openly combating Christianity, Gallienus' policies would give the Christian community a kind of legal status it previously lacked; the forty years of peace that the

²⁵⁹ De Blois, 188-189.

²⁶⁰ Alföldi, 188.

Church enjoyed after Valerian's capture, which was initiated by Gallienus' measures, let Christianity flourish. Plotinus' philosophy helped define the Christian doctrine, as discussed in the previous chapter. Plotinus' teaching influenced and was frequently borrowed in the works of St. Augustine, who in turn was one of the "chief 'Doctors' of the Latin Church."²⁶¹ In addition, Plotinus' view of art and the artist would be fully embraced by Christian and Byzantine artists.²⁶²

Other authors have given attention to Gallienus in the last fifty years. Lukas De Blois' extensive study, *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus*, thoroughly summarizes the relevance of Gallienus' reign, but also works to undermine the accolades that scholars such as Alföldi have bestowed upon the emperor, claiming that some of his accomplishments are overstated.²⁶³ De Blois, while noting the impact Gallienus' reorganization of the army had on keeping the Empire from collapsing, takes exception to the application of the term 'reform' for his strategy.²⁶⁴ In his opinion, a reform had to be an intentional and thought-out process, and what Gallienus did by creating his mobile cavalry unit, his defense-in-depth strategy, and his militarization of the government was just a pragmatic reaction to trouble, and a mere step forward in the defense of the

²⁶¹ Henri Marrou, *St. Augustine and his Influences through the Ages*, trans, Patrick Hepburne-Scott (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), 9.

²⁶² Inge, 330.

²⁶³ De Blois, 214.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 83.

hinterland.²⁶⁵ The idea that the reforms were a reactionary measure is acceptable, but should hardly detract from what Gallienus accomplished; on the contrary, the fact that Gallienus was able to come up with such an effective way to combat the chronic uprisings of his reign without the luxury of time to thoroughly plan is even more impressive. The reorganization of the military and its command structure was the saving grace of an Empire on the brink of destruction. The fact that Gallienus' successors, who are considered as part of the 'recovery' phase of the period, used and expanded his blueprint speaks to the effectiveness of his strategy, and the debt his successors owed him.

Claudius II and Aurelian both maintained Gallienus' separate cavalry force, based on a nucleus of Dalmatian and Mauretian troops, which, according to Zosimus, played a major role in helping Aurelian finally defeat Zenobia.²⁶⁶ The use of equestrian-rank provincial governors continued under Diocletian, as well as an attempt to preserve the role of an independent field force featuring a large body of cavalry. Constantine also continued the deployment of a field army which was distinguished from frontier troops, and reestablished Gallienus' policy of an elastic defense-in-depth system, where troops were stationed in the interior of the

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 85-86.

²⁶⁶ Zosimus I.50.3-4.

Empire to stop waves of invasions and allow quick movement to problem areas on the frontier.²⁶⁷

De Blois describes Gallienus' financial administration as the darkest aspect of his reign, and Gallienus certainly did not help the downward spiral the economy was in, but he inherited an Empire that had already been surviving off coin debasement, and he had little opportunity to improve the situation. His reign saw an unprecedented rise in military conflict, both internally and externally, and the only way to ensure he had the soldier's support was to pay them by any means possible, and that meant an acceleration of coin debasement. It would be left to Aurelian to attempt to reform the financial policy of the Empire, but it was not until the Tetrarchy that some stabilization was achieved.

De Blois also concludes that a weakness of Gallienus was his inability to see the potential danger of betrayal in giving his Illyrian generals so much power. He also believes that part of Gallienus' policy to separate civil and military command and remove the Senate from military posts arose from his desire to check the Senate's power, and lessen the chance that they could organize against him.²⁶⁸ It is improbable that Gallienus, who had grown up in the third-century and had previously been forced to deal with usurpers during his joint reign with his father, would not realize

²⁶⁷ Brain Campbell, "The Army," 119-129.

²⁶⁸ De Blois, 214.

the potential risk of further treachery at the hands of his own men. Alternatively, well aware of the risk, an emperor would have to make a choice; either risk the safety of the Empire by empowering lesser men to lead the soldiers, or risk your own personal security by trusting men capable enough to defend the Empire, and therefore capable of revolting against the throne. Gallienus chose the latter by promoting generals that had proved themselves capable. It could be no secret that revolt at their hands was a possibility, which proved to be the case in some instances, but it should also be noted that these men won numerous victories in the name of Gallienus and the Empire, and Gallienus was able to defeat even those that did revolt until he fell to an assassination plot. The notion of trying to keep the Senate from gaining power doesn't seem plausible either, as the Senate had long before lost the power to raise emperors, and was now just a formality in the legitimizing process: some emperors didn't even bother asking for their acclamation in the Roman Senate.²⁶⁹ Gallienus held no ill-will toward the Senate, and he was simply doing what was necessary for the survival of the Empire. During his reign, capable men were needed to lead the army and protect the provinces, and that meant men with a substantial military background, not senators.

The dearth of sources at our disposal for Gallienus' reign make piecing the entire picture together a near impossible task, even more so

²⁶⁹ Hekster, 57.

when those sources are anything but objective. The biased views of the Latin authors have been much discussed by modern historians, and we are now able to better decipher what is most probably fact from fiction. In comparing the reign of Gallienus to an emperor who, in the sources, is a universally acknowledged “good” emperor (Marcus Aurelius), we find too many similarities in their character and reigns to ignore the fact that Gallienus should be included amongst the ranks of the “good” emperors. Even modern authors, who have done much to build a more accurate depiction of Gallienus’ reign, are still too modest in their assessment of his feats. Gallienus is entrenched as a figure in the “collapse” of the Roman Empire, but without his reforms his successors may not have ever reached the “recovery” period.

Conclusion

Gallienus' achievements are easily overlooked when looking back at the state of the Empire during his reign; as Michael Grant noted, "the fact that the Roman Empire did not collapse in the 260s or 270s AD is one of the miracles of history."²⁷⁰ The Empire had been in a state of decline for some time before Gallienus gained the purple, and it was under his rule that the culmination of catastrophes reached its zenith. The Empire did not collapse however, due to capable leadership and the ingenuity of Gallienus' policies.

No emperor before Gallienus had to deal with the imposing number or strength of the threats to the Empire that relentlessly arose from 253-268. The Germanic tribes had formed into formidable coalitions (Alamanni, Goths, Franks) who had learned from Roman weaponry and techniques to offer a better-equipped enemy than ever before.²⁷¹ The Sassanid Empire in the East was far more aggressive than the Parthians they conquered in 224, and eagerly wanted to reclaim Roman lands they felt were rightfully theirs.²⁷² The number of internal threats alone were alarming, as usurpers continually tried to take advantage of the calamities Gallienus was faced with. Resources were scarce and the

²⁷⁰ Grant, "Collapse and Recovery", xvii.

²⁷¹ Malcolm Todd, "The Germanic Peoples and Germanic Society," in *The Cambridge Ancient History* vol.XII, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 451.

²⁷² Potter, "Empire at Bay", 218.

troops, the most important entity to an emperor in the third century, were only loyal if they were regularly compensated for their services. In addition to this dire situation, Gallienus' father, Valerian, who was joint emperor and in charge of the East, was captured by the enemy, an unprecedented disgrace to the Roman Empire, and one hindrance that Gallienus would have to overcome.

The Empire, against all odds, did not collapse; instead, it weathered the storm, and ultimately began recovering some of its power and stability, and that was due to the capability of Gallienus. First and foremost Gallienus was a successful military leader. The precise number of battles, along with which specific enemies he personally commanded against is unknown for certain because of the unreliability of the sources, but enough campaigns are recorded to know he was almost always victorious. His biggest failure was not a defeat in battle, but rather not being able to finish off Postumus and reunite the Western Empire. In 265, Gallienus had gained an advantage over Postumus during a campaign and was besieging the usurper in Gaul (the city in question is unknown for certain), when an arrow wounded him as he rode too close to the walls, and so he was forced to abandon the siege.²⁷³

²⁷³ Alfoldi, 186.

What made Gallienus such an effective emperor when it came to defending the Empire was an eye for talented generals, a sense of the weaknesses of the imperial defense system, and an ability to choose negotiation and delegate command when it suited his purpose. The continual and simultaneous threats across the Empire made it impossible for Gallienus to be present at every conflict, so being able to choose men who were talented and experienced enough to lead the legions to victory was a crucial skill. These men were trusted to defend the Empire in the emperor's stead, and did so admirably, even if their success would later lead to revolt against him. Gallienus made proper choices for the sake of the Empire, not his personal safety.

The creation of the independent cavalry contingent was a key to the successful defense of the borders. Gallienus realized that a rapidly moving separate force was the only way to combat invasions spread out along the frontier. The effectiveness of the mobile cavalry unit was noted by Gallienus' immediate successors, and even if it was dispersed sometime after Gallienus' death, it nonetheless served as the precursor to Diocletian and Constantine's *comitatenses* of the late Empire.

Gallienus also reorganized the border system of the Empire. Realizing he did not have enough troops to defend the static border of old, he integrated a defense-in-depth system, an elastic defense strategy

that would allow strategic points within the hinterland to stop the waves of barbarian invasions. This system would be abandoned by Diocletian, but again, the elastic system Gallienus employed heralded the defense strategy Constantine would use when faced with similar threats.

With the lack of resources and manpower to sufficiently counter multiple invasions or uprisings, making alliances was, at times, the best option for the defense of the Empire, and one that Gallienus used to his advantage. His agreement with the Marcomanni in 258 allowed Gallienus to take his troops elsewhere while the Germanic tribe defended Pannonia from further invasions, and his alliance with Odenathus was especially fruitful. Odenathus accepted Gallienus' invitation of an alliance around 261, and won important victories in the East in the name of Rome against usurpers and the Sassanids. These allies relieved pressure on the overstretched Roman legions, and were instrumental in preserving the Empire.

Military needs dictated the administrative changes Gallienus enforced as well. Senators were no longer exclusively chosen for high commands of the army. These posts were transferred to men of the equestrian class, men who were trusted by Gallienus and had risen up through the ranks, proving themselves to be capable to command legions and defend the Empire. In doing so, Gallienus accelerated the

professionalization of the army and the social mobility of soldiers. This was also a forerunner to the rank system of the late Imperial period, wherein it was possible to start off in the lower ranks of the army and eventually achieve senatorial status.

This perceived slight to ambitious senators, who traditionally used high military and provincial command posts to further their careers, was the basis of the bias shown by Latin historians towards Gallienus. It was from within this group that the tradition developed from which the Latin authors drew. Gallienus did not adopt his administrative measures to directly attack the senatorial class, from which he came, but rather as a necessary measure to ensure the Empire's safety. It was a time of desperate need for military competence, and only those who had sufficient experience and skill were fit to lead.

The numismatic evidence from Gallienus' reign reflects the importance placed on the military between 253 and 268, as the majority of the coins and medallions produced within the period are militaristic in theme. These coins speak, not only of the constant warfare afflicting the Empire, but of the need for Gallienus to bind the army to himself. The loyalty of the army was paramount to Gallienus' throne, and he made

concerted efforts to appease individual units (the cavalry in particular) by honoring them on coins to ensure their allegiance.²⁷⁴

The coins minted during Gallienus' reign also revealed his conception of the emperorship. Gallienus portrayed himself as a bringer of peace, much in the style of Augustus and Hadrian, to bring a confidence in his rule to the citizens and soldiers of Rome. The subjects of the Empire needed to believe that Gallienus was fit to rule, and he tried to accomplish this through the coinage minted during his reign, which is evident in two of the other major coin themes minted during his reign, the *saeculum aureum* types, and virtues types.

The last major coinage theme was divine association. These coins served to exhibit Gallienus' religious views. He minted coins that included almost the whole spectrum of the traditional Greco-Roman pantheon as well as non-traditional gods such as Allat and Sol, a development that again reflected the desperate times Rome was facing, but also served to separate Gallienus from his father's embarrassing capture. By showing he had the support of all the gods, Gallienus was revealing that his rule was by divine right, not as a result of his father's graces. The religious basis of his emperorship, and more specifically the god-emperorship, was another

²⁷⁴ De Blois, 116-117.

important foreshadowing of religious policy used by his successors, in this case Aurelian and Constantine.²⁷⁵

Though Gallienus appeared to be indifferent toward Christians, he did end the persecution initiated by his father, as he did not see the advantages of continuing the persecution. In fact, ending the Christian persecution was another way for Gallienus to distance himself from Valerian. Nonetheless, the Christian faith was now recognized, and was allowed to prosper without harassment under Gallienus' reign, a peace which lasted until 303, and a period during which Christian numbers increased greatly and the religion as a whole prospered.

Gallienus sought to bring culture back into the imperial court; he was a learned emperor, and one who enjoyed philosophy and the arts. His philhellenic view was shared by Plotinus, a Neo-platonic philosopher who enjoyed the support and admiration of Gallienus and his wife, Salonina. Gallienus' attempt to recreate the cultured courts of the golden years of Rome led to a brief resurgence in the arts. The early sculptures of the emperor are in the mold of Augustus, Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius, bringing back an early imperial style that had been fading away in the third century. As his reign progressed, a transition in art became evident, and it is very likely Plotinus' philosophical views played a

²⁷⁵ De Blois, 212.

role. Plotinus preached of the inner qualities and concepts of the soul, and his philosophy extended to art, which in the later years of Gallienus' reign became pronounced by focusing less on realism and more on the spiritualism of the subject. The sculpture portraits of Gallienus shifted from plastic, classical naturalism to a flatter, more linear form, meant to emphasize the inner soul. Once again, this important transitional phase in art would influence the coming late Empire; the linear form dominated art during Constantine's reign, and continued into the mediaeval period. Plotinus' teaching would also have a hand in developing the Christian canon, as attested by some of Christianity's most important figures, such as St. Augustine, who credited the philosopher with providing some of the bases of their work.

The Latin authors' work blackened Gallienus' name in history. A senatorial bias against him, which came about because of a perceived slight to their rank, worked to gloss over his remarkable reign and place the blame for a struggling Empire at his feet. A closer look at his merits and accomplishments, especially in comparing him to other "good" emperors, should erase the negativity that was wrongly attached to his name. It is not sufficient to simply label Gallienus as a 'soldier-emperor' either; he differed greatly from what one might call a typical emperor of the mid-third century, and he was more successful in defending the

Roman Empire than his predecessors, and under conditions that can be confidently called the worst Rome had ever seen.

His achievement was not just keeping the Empire from collapse, but laying the foundations for his successors to build upon, and reclaim some of Rome's past stability. His military strategies and administration were his best contributions to the recovery of the Empire, as was necessary in a period hallmarked by endless war, both internal and external. Culture was also important to Gallienus, and somewhere amidst the turmoil, he was able to champion a reinvigoration of the arts and philosophy in his court that would also be influential to his successors. Gallienus was ever an admirer of the past golden age of the Empire and he did his best to emulate the past glories of Rome, but his was a drastically different time, a desperate time, and Gallienus had to assess and adapt to the constant turmoil that his Empire faced.

Gallienus' skill and effectiveness as an emperor may have been denied by the Latin authors, but it was not lost on his successors. They utilized his techniques and policies and with the foundation Gallienus laid, were able to bring the Empire back to glory. Gallienus remains a controversial emperor amongst historians, and even though his reign has regained some of the significance that was negated by the Latin historians, he still is not granted the full respect he deserves. Gallienus was

a remarkable emperor, his achievements were instrumental in the state's very survival, and his influence on the recovery and success of the later Empire was considerable.

Figures

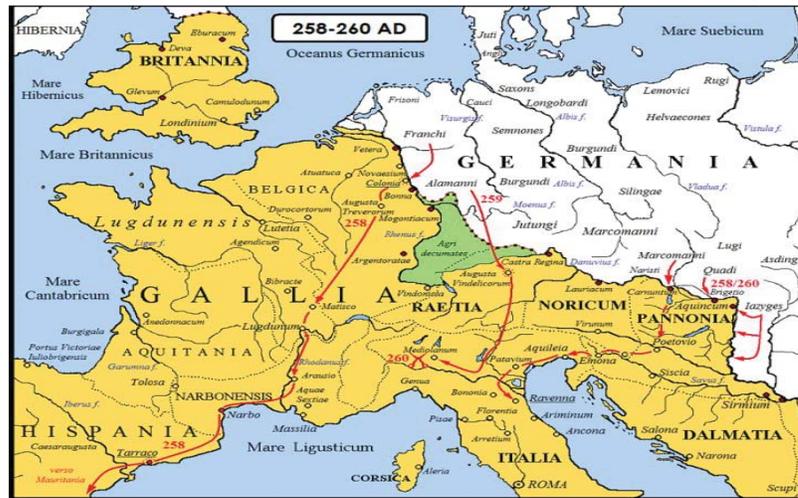


Figure 1. Invasions of Germanic Tribes 258-260 (released as open source, 2008, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Invasioni_occidente_258-260_png)



Figure 2. (Coin on Right) A coin depicting Pegasus. Common on coins honoring the accomplishments and loyalty of individual legions, in particular, the independent cavalry (courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum)



Figure 3. Portrait of Gallienus ca. 250s (released as open source, 2012, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Altes_Museum_-_Kaiser_Gallienus.jpg)

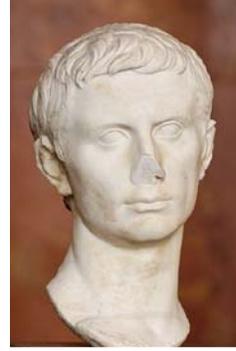


Figure 4. Portrait of Augustus (released as open source, 2007, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Emperor_August_Louvre_Ma1280.jpg)



Figure 5. Portrait of Gallienus ca. 260, from the Roman Forum (courtesy of Musee du Louvre. Photo by Thierry Ollivier)



Figure 6. Portrait of Marcus Aurelius ca. 147, from Roman Forum (released as open source, 2006, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marcus_Aurelius_Palatino_Inv3683.jpg)

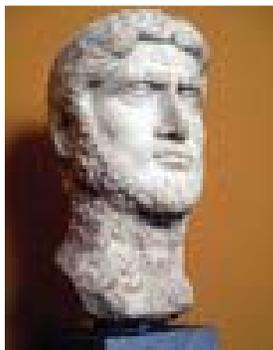


Figure 7. Portrait of Gallienus ca. 267, from Greece or Asia Minor (courtesy of <http://www.romehistory.co.uk/5-crisisyears>)



Figure 8. Portrait of Constantine the Great ca. 336-337, from the Basilica Nova (photo courtesy of Jean-Christophe Benoist, 2007)



Figure 9. "Ludovisi Sarcophagus." A complicated battle scene ca. 250-260 (photo released as open source, 2006, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grande_Ludovisi_Altemps_Inv8574.jpg)



Figure 10. The so-called "Philosopher Sarcophagus", ca. 260s (released as open source, 2008, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Plotinus_and_disciples.jpg)



Figure 11. A porphyry group portrait of the four Tetrarchs, from Constantinople, ca. 300 (photo courtesy of Nino Barbieri, 2004)



Figure 12. "Interrogation of Christ," medieval christian art ca. 12th century (courtesy of The Walters Art Museum)

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