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## CONTENTS

T. Gnoli, <i>The Sources on the Oriental Expeditions of Aurelian</i> .....	7
S. Ferdinandi, <i>The Archaeological Mission of Aruch/Արուճ and the Incastellamento of the Silk Road: Preliminary Remarks</i> .....	21
M.C. Trémouille, R. Dan, <i>Some Remarks on Changes in the Water Level of Lake Van, Turkey: an Evaluation of the Cartographical and Archaeological Evidence</i> .....	71
D.T. Potts, G.P. Basello, <i>The “Black Stone of Susa:” a Lost kudurru, an Unpublished Drawing and a Line of Middle Elamite Copied in the 1820s</i> .....	97
J.A. Álvarez-Pedrosa, <i>The Avroman Parchments and the Use of Greek in the Parthian Empire</i> .....	117
B. González Saavedra, <i>A Linguistic Study of the Greek Parchments of Avroman</i> .....	149
F. Pompeo, <i>The Dating Formulas of Avroman 1 and Avroman 2 in the Context of Greek Documents of the Parthian Empire: a Brief Overview</i> .....	161
A. Provenzali, <i>An Inscribed nāgadanta from Butkara I and Related Questions</i> .....	187
<i>Obituaries</i> .....	209
Antonio Invernizzi (Turin, 1 January 1941 - 2 December 2021) .....	211
<i>List of Contributors</i> .....	213

# The Sources on the Oriental Expeditions of Aurelian

by TOMMASO GNOLI

Sulla spedizione dell'imperatore Aureliano nel 272/273 per ristabilire il controllo di Roma sulle province orientali che erano state conquistate durante il breve regno di Zenobia, regina di Palmira, ci sono stati trasmessi solo due resoconti abbastanza ampi da Zosimo e la biografia contenuta nella *Historia Augusta*. Vengono qui analizzate queste due narrazioni, che mostrano affinità e divergenze; sebbene secondo l'opinione più diffusa si ritenga che queste ebbero più di una fonte, dimostrerò piuttosto che ne condividevano una sola, quasi contemporanea agli eventi. Le divergenze che sono attestate nei due testi si svilupparono solo più tardi.

In 272/273, the emperor Aurelian abruptly put an end to *l'heure de Palmyre* (Gagé 1964). The great autonomist adventure that had started after the mysterious death of Odaenathus (267/8)<sup>1</sup>—the lord of Palmyra (*rš dy tdmwr*) at the side of Gallien as a subordinate ruler in defence of the Eastern part of the Empire (*'pnrtt'* [= ἑπανορθωτής] *dy mdnḥ klh*)<sup>2</sup>—ended suddenly with a double military campaign leading to the submission of the city and deportation of Zenobia and her family to Rome, where the ex-queen and widow of Odaenathus took part in the triumph of Aurelian. Then a second conquest of the city occurred after severe repression and plunder led to a revolt that exploded a few months after the first expedition. After these events, the desert metropolis never re-acquired its central role in the Syrian steppe (*šhrā*). Nevertheless, Diocletian considered the site's strategic position useful, making it one of the strongholds of the new and complex defensive arrangement in the Fertile Crescent (*sawād*) under Roman rule.<sup>3</sup>

This double expedition of Aurelian represents a difficult historiographic puzzle. Among all the 3<sup>rd</sup>-century emperors after the Severian dynasty, Aurelian played a significant role. Notwithstanding the brevity of his reign, he succeeded in rebuilding the unity which had been lost for more than a decade, in strengthening the Danube *limes*—which more than the other borders underwent continuous pressure from the recently constituted Germanic confederations—and in enacting a vigorous operation of internal monetary, fiscal, and economic reinforcement which took shape during the building of the great city walls of Rome.

The historiographical sources available concerning the years after the capture of the emperor Valerian (260) until the ascent of Diocletian (285) are notoriously scarce

<sup>1</sup> On the death of Odaenathus see Kaizer 2005.

<sup>2</sup> All these titles (and some others) given to Odaenathus on the inscriptions of Palmyra are fiercely debated. I have already expressed my opinions on this in Gnoli 2000: 140 ff.; 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Among the recent works on the Syrian *limes*, with close attention to the situation there in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and the case of Palmyra, see Andrade 2018; Palermo 2019; Fisher 2020; Sommer 2020.

and quite unreliable. With Diocletian, the situation improves thanks to the presence of sources that are chronologically close to this period, even though they are not historiographically precise, such as the *Latin Panegyrics* and the polemical work by Lactantius. Except for the preceding years, a reliable contemporary source is hard to find, although there is one for the decade between Valerian's capture and the death of Claudius II Gothicus that was the work of Dexippus of Athens,<sup>4</sup> which we know to have reached the first year of Aurelian, thus ending in 270. From that time on, we do not know of any sources on contemporary events. The historians from the period after Claudius Gothicus' death whose work has been transmitted to us are the Latin Epitomators dating to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, here listed in sequence: 1) Aurelius Victor, who wrote his epitome just before 362, the year in which he dedicated his work to Julian and obtained a position as *consularis Pannoniae secundae* because of this (Amm. Marc. XII 10, 6); 2) Eutropius, *magister memoriae* of the emperor Valens, who wrote his *breviarium* in the 370s; and lastly 3) the anonymous *Epitome de Caesaribus*, written in the 380s (Festy 1999). The evident agreements found between these sources and often also with the *Historia Augusta* have long given rise to speculation about the existence of a shared source that is lost to us, which has been named *Enmann'sche Kaisergeschichte (EKG)* (Enmann 1884) after the German philologist who postulated its existence. The *EKG*, however, could not have been written early enough, since the quotations from the sources that derive from it reach the battle of Mursa (353).<sup>5</sup> Consequently, these quite brief sources are one century later than the five-year reign of Aurelian.

Notwithstanding this clear difficulty, two 5<sup>th</sup>-century sources highlight the figure and work of Aurelian: 1) the *Historia Augusta (HA)*—a famous collection of imperial biographies dated with some uncertainty to between the mid-390s (currently favoured) and some time in the 5<sup>th</sup> century (personally I would suggest 420-430)—dedicates to the emperor Aurelian the second-longest biography in the whole work. 2) Zosimus in the first book of his *Historia Nea*—a brief summary of Roman history from its origins until the reign of Constantine, the core of which (in the following books) is Late Antiquity—becomes more detailed precisely in reign of Aurelian. This emperor receives the most extensive treatment in the first book, although a lacuna prevents us from knowing anything certain about the size of the part dedicated to Diocletian. What is undeniable is that there is a substantial difference between the space that Zosimus dedicated to Aurelian compared to all the preceding rulers.

Both in the verbose, but empty, biography of Aurelian in the *HA* and even more in the surprisingly broad discussion of this emperor by Zosimus, what is striking is the great importance of the reconquest of the East. In the *HA* this narrative is found in §§ 22-31 out of the 50 paragraphs composing the whole biography; it is significant that Aurelian's biography contains one of the best and most interesting introductions

<sup>4</sup> *FGrHist* 100. On Dexippus cf. Millar 1969. Since the innovative work by Millar, two more editions of the fragments have seen the light: Martin 2006; Mecella 2013. In 2014, a two-page fragment was fortunately discovered in the manuscript *ms. Vindob. Hist. gr.* 73: Martin, Grusková 2014a; 2014b. This discovery has brought under the spotlight the relations between the missing work by this Greek historian and the *Historia Augusta*: see Martin 2017; Zecchini 2017. More in general regarding the whole problem, cf. Mitthof, Martin, Grusková 2020.

<sup>5</sup> For a selected bibliography on the dating of *EKG* see Barnes 1970; Bird 1973; Neri 1987; Zecchini 1993; 1999; Bleckmann 1997.

(§§ 1-2) in the whole collection. What follows are news and fictional documents about the emperor's childhood (§§ 3-18), his ascent to the throne and the defence of Italy (§§ 18-21), the end of his kingdom (§§ 32-37), and eventually a long appendix on various topics (§§ 37-50). The wars against Palmyra are the only events that were given very special attention by the unknown biographer.

Likewise, examination of the long report by Zosimus also reveals the absolute pre-eminence of the expedition to the East of 272/3 as compared to all other events that occurred during Aurelian's short reign. In the paragraphs dedicated by Zosimus to this emperor (I 47-62)<sup>6</sup> one might even think that the Byzantine historian actually ignored many of Aurelian's enterprises, which he did not mention, focussing almost completely on the storming of Palmyra; consequently, a comparison between these two sources on Aurelian is necessary.

The crucial role played by this military expedition in both narrations—as well as the fact that in both the *HA* and Zosimus the story seems to derive from some sort of monograph, or at least from some work especially centred on this event—led to the widespread opinion that the authors possessed one and the same source, most probably a document in Greek devoted to events in the East. Recently, François Paschoud—who has published and commented in detail on the *Life of Aurelian* in the *HA* and the *Historia Nea* by Zosimus<sup>7</sup>—has stressed that notwithstanding the apparent similarities between the reports of Aurelian's eastern campaigns in these two main sources, the differences suggest caution in concluding that the two texts are closely related (Paschoud 1995). More specifically, according to Paschoud, we should not think—as we are used to doing—that they derive from a single eastern source written in Greek, a well-informed one as it was contemporary to the events. He argues that the only source for the 1<sup>st</sup> book of the *History* of Zosimus was Eunapius of Sardis, who did not produce his work before the last decade of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and wrote the second edition of it in the initial decades of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, while it is rather difficult to trace which sources the anonymous biographer of the *HA* made use of. He certainly drew from the tradition deriving from the *EKG*, but—according to Paschoud—also from another source which contained the details of the eastern expeditions, a source evidently different from Eunapius, which Paschoud proposes to identify with the *Annales* by Virius Nicomachus Flavianus. Unfortunately, nothing is known about this historiographic work either. All we know is that the author, an important senator during the reign of Gratianus, was appointed *quaestor* and *praefectus praetorio Italiae, Illyrici et Africae* by Theodosius as an expression of the latter's gratitude for the composition of this very work, now lost.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> These paragraphs are 339 lines long in the edition by Paschoud 2000, as compared to 4§§ with 72 lines dedicated to the five years of Philip the Arab; 7§§ with 185 lines to the seven years of Valerian; and 185 lines to the eight years of Gallienus.

<sup>7</sup> Respectively Paschoud 2002; 2000.

<sup>8</sup> *CIL* VI 1783 = *ILS* 2948 = *LSA* 1247, l. 18-19. This very famous inscription laid by his grandson Appius Nicomachus Dexter in 431 maybe in the *domus* of the Nicomachi on Colle Oppio, is the only text where Virius Nicomachus Flavianus' *Annales* are mentioned. The latter, a dihard pagan who sided with the usurper Eugene, committed suicide after the Battle of the Frigidus in 394 and underwent a *damnatio memoriae* until exactly 431. Speculations on this completely lost work are countless: Ratti 2007 identified these *Annales* with the *HA*, provoking both favourable and adverse reactions. On this inscription among others cf. Baldini 2009; Ward-Perkins 2016: 34-35.



Without doubt Paschoud's proposal simplifies the problem of the *Quellenforschung* related to the two main sources on the reign of Aurelian quite a lot: according to him, the *Life of Aurelian* in the *HA* results from the fusion of two main historiographic sources in Latin—the *EKG* and the *Annales* of Nicomachus Flavianus—while the work of Zosimus reproduces in an abbreviated but extremely faithful form the longer and more prolix text by Eunapius.<sup>9</sup> This proposal is quite plausible, but does not answer the question of who transmitted the information about Aurelian's reign to the first source identified by Paschoud, i.e. the *EKG*. To try to solve this riddle it is necessary to start from the core of the tradition concerning Aurelian: the expedition against Palmyra.

### *The Expedition against Palmyra in Zosimus and in the HA*

Among the Latin Epitomators of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, who represent the sources that first took from the *EKG* tradition, Aurelius Victor is the richest in details. Unfortunately, however, his report on the expedition of Aurelian against Zenobia was contained in the lacuna in § 34, but we are certain that the narrative of this event had to be contained in his work, because the moralistic reflections at the end of § 34, 7-8 refer to a situation immediately following Aurelian's expedition to the East. On one hand, it contains considerations about the soldiers, who would have preferred something we do not know anything about instead of prizes and the chance to live outrageously due to laxity; on the other, reference is made to the subjects—citizens of the provinces in this case—for whom the recent victory won by Aurelian over Zenobia had a bitter taste, because they preferred lax regimes (*remissa imperia*) that allowed them to do whatever they liked (*studio impune peccandi*). But this is not all; at the end of the expedition in the East, news of an expedition against the Persians is given *quasi belli reliquiae superessent*. What is certain is that the superficiality and conciseness with which this event is reported in Eutropius IX 13, 2: *Zenobiam quoque, quae occiso Odenatho marito Orientem tenebat, haud longe ab Antiochia sine graui proelio cepit*,<sup>10</sup> and the fact that it is completely ignored in *Epitome de Caesaribus*, is the result of drastic selection on the part of both epitomators and cannot be traced back to some defect in the *EKG* tradition.

The two long narrations in the *HA* and Zosimus consequently play a crucial role in both the transmission of knowledge about these events and the evaluation of the sources from which Eunapius—the author to whom Zosimus referred for his first book—and the anonymous biographer derived their information. By comparing the accounts of the oriental campaigns contained in the *Vita divi Aureliani* and Zosimus, Paschoud has challenged the prevailing assumption that they both had a single Greek source at their disposal.<sup>11</sup> Even though the two stories show a parallel development, according to Paschoud there are such significant differences that the presupposition

<sup>9</sup> On Eunapius see: Blockley 1981; Baldini 1984; Baldini, Paschoud 2014.

<sup>10</sup> This epitomator is very much concerned with the role of the princess and Tetricus – both set beside the winner's chariot—and with the information that she had left her offspring in Rome. About the latter subject cf. Baldini 1978; Hartmann 2001: 413-424.

<sup>11</sup> Paschoud 1995 and in the commentaries to Zosimus and the *HA*: Paschoud 2000; 2002. The prevailing position is well represented in Fisher 1929; Barnes 1970; 1978.

of a shared source is unjustified. The main differences are the following: the storming of Tyana is briefly mentioned in Zosimus (I 50, 1), while in *HA* it represents the main core of the long march of Aurelian's army which also includes the well-known episode when Aurelian promised that after the conquest he would even kill all the dogs in the town. This episode later became a humorous anecdote thanks to the intervention of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ Apollonius (*HA, Aur.* 22-24): Aurelian actually only let all the dogs in the conquered town be killed. Besides this episode, one of the fake documents recorded in this biography also refers to the siege of Tyana. The most meaningful differences between the two narratives concern the events of Antiochia: *HA* (*Aur.* 25, 1) mentions neither the battle of Immae, which on the contrary is recorded in detail by Zosimus (I 50, 2-52, 2), nor Zenobia's general Zabba in relation to this event—although in fact he is attested in epigraphic documents. It does not even mention the strange episode of the fake Aurelian primed by Zabba to appease the population of Antiochia, completely unaware of the defeat of Zenobia at Immae—which, on the contrary, is recounted in detail by Zosimus. Lastly, *HA* does not report the evacuation of Antiochia by the Palmyrene troops and chronologically places the battle of Daphne before that of Antiochia—not after it, as instead Zosimus does. The battle of Emesa is also reported in quite different ways in the two sources (*HA, Aur.* 25, 2-6; Zos. I 52, 3-54, 1): both highlight the cavalry's crucial role, but they describe in completely different ways how the Romans succeeded in defeating their enemies. Zosimus writes about an action decided by the infantry, and in particular by the troops from Palestine armed with maces and clubs, while *HA*, which mentions Zenobia's general Zabba only on this occasion, claims that the only reason for the final Roman victory was the miraculous intervention of a divinity, the Sun god (whom Elagabalus worshipped too). The siege and fall of the city of Palmyra is also told in different ways in these two sources (*HA, Aur.* 26-28,3 e Zos. I 54, 2-56, 1). Zosimus writes about the arrogance of the besieged population and above all of one person who, because of it, was killed by a Persian archer at the service of Aurelian. According to his narrative, Zenobia fled and tried to obtain the Persian king's help while the city suffered under the siege until the inhabitants surrendered. In the *HA*, on the other hand, Aurelian withstood the attacks of Syrian ravagers and was hit with a harrow. The topic of the war against the woman highlights fake documents and two letters that tell of the Romans' capitulation demand and the insolent refusal of Zenobia. Aurelian intercepted a Persian military unit bringing aid to Palmyra, conquered the city, and captured Zenobia while she was trying to flee. With regard to the events that followed the victory (*HA, Aur.* 28, 4-30; Zos. 56, 2-59) the narratives diverge even more: according to Zosimus, Aurelian was gentle and Zenobia was captured and judged, whereas the philosopher Longinus was executed, facing his destiny as a true philosopher. There follows a long digression on the ominous signs about the fall of Palmyra. The explicit recollection of Polybius at this point establishes an implicit analogy between Palmyra and Carthage: the fall of the great enemy leads to reflections on the imminent end of the Roman Empire. In Zosimus, what follows is Aurelian's path back to Europe and two possible alternatives regarding Zenobia's destiny. On the contrary in the *HA* there are details on the richness of the pray and then the punishment of Zenobia's associates, Longinus among others. Later, Aurelian is found among the Carpians and is called Carpiscolus. The following revolt of Palmyra's population and the campaign in Egypt—maybe connected—are dealt with in *HA, Aur.* 31-32, 3 and Zos. I 60-61, 1. Zosimus mentions

a Palmyrene man, Apsaeus, who urged the Roman governor of Mesopotamia, Marcellinus, to take over the emperor's role; the latter informed Aurelian, and while the Palmyrene people offered him the post, the emperor hurried back to the East, stormed and destroyed Palmyra, but did not punish Antiochus, the leader of the revolt. Then he went to Alexandria in Egypt where another revolt had broken out. The *HA* reports the massacre by Palmyrene soldiers of 600 archers slaughtered together with their chief Sandarius. It also tells of their project to give power to Achillaeus, a relative of Zenobia. The harshness of Aurelian's repression is described in a letter about the restoration of the temple of Sol in Palmyra. An expedition against the Egyptian Firmus (not mentioned in Zosimus) is set after another trip back to Europe by Aurelian. Given all these differences, Paschoud proposes the identification of two different sources, a Greek one for Zosimus corresponding to Eunapius of Sardis—and a Latin one for the *HA*, which represents the core of a Middle-Byzantine tradition known as *Leoquelle* (Patzig 1896; 1897; Bleckmann 1992), as it was found in the excerpts of Leo Grammaticus; it is also the basis for the late history by Zonaras. The old theory of Patzig recovered by Bleckmann has been adopted by Paschoud: the source of the *Leoquelle* was the *Annales* of Virius Nicomachus Flavianus.

Of course, Paschoud realized that the sequence of events is almost identical in the two sources and that their affinities are almost as many as their divergences. According to him the similarities are due to a common source which later gave birth to the two versions by Eunapius and the *Annales* that are more or less contemporary, as both date to the 390s. However, this source is very hard to identify, and if we are supposed to discard the *EKG*—which would not help to solve the problem, because (as we have seen) it was written after the 350s—we cannot even determine whether it was written in Greek or Latin. Since the Latin historians active in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century are unknown, it is natural to search for this source in Greek historiography, which on the contrary has left some names behind. Zecchini (1995) was the first to try this strategy and was followed by Janiszewski (2006) and Migliorati (2012; 2017; 2019). However, it is a difficult and dangerous path, because the names we know—a certain Eusebius (but not that of Cesarea), Callinicus of Petra, Onasimos of Cyprus, Soterikos, Prassagoras of Athens—are no more than names, mainly transmitted through brief mentions in the Byzantine lexicon of the *Suda*. Jacques Schwartz (1987) thought he could identify Callinicus of Petra with the fake Callicrates of Tyrus mentioned in the *Vita Aureliani*, and make him into the phantom contemporary Greek source that transmitted the data on Aurelian to the *EKG*, the *Annales* of Virius Nicomachus Flavianus, and the *Leoquelle*; but this was a desperate attempt based on a number of highly improbable conjectures.<sup>12</sup>

Paschoud postulates five points to explain the need to take two different sources into consideration, because according to him there is no way to explain the differences as a varied selection of themes taken from only one source. His points are the following:

1. The different attitude of Bithynia towards Zenobia.
2. The relative chronology of the battle of Daphne with respect to the fall of Antiochia.
3. The reason for the Roman victory in the battle of Emesa.

<sup>12</sup> Rightly rejected by Hartmann 2018: 80 no. 78 among others.

4. The relative chronology concerning Zenobia's escape in relation to the fall of Palmyra and the entire narrative about the storming of the city, the existence or lack of negotiations, etc.
5. The mention of Antiochia on the occasion of the revolt in Palmyra—Apsaeus and Achillaeus might be considered to be the same person.

This is an opinion I cannot agree with. The mention of Bithynia in both narratives—a region that did not play any role in the emperor's expedition—is far more relevant than its supposed attitude towards Zenobia: there is no inconsistency between Zosimus' statement that the Bithynian people had been freed from Palmyrene rule, and the assertion that Aurelian occupied the region *nullo certamine* (as *HA* reports). Also, the relative chronology between the battle of Daphne and the fall of Antiochia can be explained by the evident need of both sources for conciseness. Zosimus is more accurate in this than *HA*, and in my opinion, the succession of events recounted in the Greek historian's work is better by far. The moving forward of Daphne in the text with respect to the fall of Antiochia might be explained by a certain lack of interest on the part of the anonymous biographer of the *HA* in the events related to the war, e.g. the removal of the battle of Immae<sup>13</sup> and its substitution—maybe done by heart?—with the conflict in the outskirts of Daphne. Although the latter is attested in both the *HA* and Zosimus, I think that at the basis of this narrative there is a shared mistake. According to Zosimus the Palmyrene army had left a garrison to block the Roman one on its way southbound in pursuit of Zenobia and her supporters; but Daphne was not on the road that runs along the Orontes back to Emesa and goes through the cities mentioned by Zosimus such as Apamea, Larissa, and Arethusa. It does not make any sense to suppose that an army that wished to prevent the Romans' gaining control over Antiochia or to block its path southwards should have left a garrison in the site of Daphne, which was not fortified, but was just a holiday destination for the rich citizens of Antiochia.<sup>14</sup> It was located in the hills facing the valley of the River Orontes towards the sea, and thus towards Seleucia, not Apamea. Neither does it make sense to imagine that the Roman army, while busy chasing Zenobia southwards, should have left one garrison behind in a position that was evidently irrelevant, thus wasting precious time. It seems more reasonable to postulate that the Palmyra garrison had been left in a more strategic location, from where it could keep the Roman army in an uncomfortable position which would prevent it from gaining control over Antiochia. This site must have been located on Mount Silpius, overlooking the town. From there a group of Persian archers succeeded in terrifying the citizens who were attending the circus by hitting them with a cloud of arrows. The name of Mount Silpius was less

<sup>13</sup> There is no possible way to doubt the true site where the conflict between Romans and Palmyrenes took place before the fall of Antiochia: about this the same expression was adopted by Eutr. IX 13, 2: *haud longe ab Antiochia* and Fest. 24: *apud Immas haut procul ab Antiochia*; Jeron. (*chron. a.* 2289, p. 222) adds to it (*apud Immas haut longe ab Antiochia*) news about the participation in that battle of a *dux* Pompeianus, whose family was still in Antiochia and counted among its offspring *Euagrius presbyterus carissimus nobis*. Finally, Iord. *Rom.* 291; Synk. p. 470, 4-5 Mosshammer mentions the battle of Immae. Mal. XII, p. 231, 48 Thurn, on the contrary, does not mention this site ("next to the river Orontes").

<sup>14</sup> The spatial relation between Antiochia and Daphne is well described by Lib., *Or.* 11, 196, 230-248 (I 517, 9-525, 3 Förster); cfr. Festugière 1959: 29-33 and 52-56 (by R. Martin); Downey 1964; Fatouros, Krischer 1992; Gros 2002.

known among the Late Antique readers of these events, so its name was substituted with Daphne, which is of significance in this reconstruction, as I will explain later.

The battle of Emesa is attested in a very similar way in both Zosimus and the *HA*. The conflict was centred on an attack by the Palmyrene cavalry that initially prevailed over that of the Romans, until Aurelian's army recovered thanks to the intervention of either the Palestinian mace-bearers or the gods. In this case too I cannot see any evident contradictions that justify the postulation of two different original sources. The anonymous biographer of *HA* simply preferred to favour his personal enthusiasm for the supernatural, which is shown quite often in this biography, even though he does so in a joking and playful way. He was not interested in the stratagems that led to Aurelian's victory, i.e. hitting the armour of the Palmyrene cataphracts with maces. Moreover, as far as the episode of Zenobia's escape is concerned, this—together with Bythynia—is one of the strongest arguments in support of the existence of one single source for all this documentation. Regardless of exactly when she escapes, before or after the fall of the city, she does it on a camel. This very fact attracted the attention of the lost original source: Zos. I 55, 2: Ταῦτα βουλευσάμενοι <...><sup>15</sup> τὴν Ζηνοβίαν ἀναβιβάσαντες, αἱ δὴ καμήλων εἰσὶν τάχιστα καὶ ἵππους ὑπεραίρουσι τάχει; *HA, Aur.* 28, 3: *Victa igitur Zenobia cum fugeret camellis, quos dromedas uocitant.* The detail about the female camel is also found in another late source full of peculiarities: Malal. XII, p. 231, 52 and 54, εἰς δρομωναρίαν κάμηλον. Nobody doubts that the Zenobia-female camel connection is a reliable indication of a single original source, yet strictly speaking we might object that in Malalas Zenobia did not flee on a female camel, but was put on it by Aurelian after he had captured the queen in Antiochia (*sic*), to parade her in triumph around the city of Antiochia itself (*sic*). The differences are more or less the same as those found in the narrative about the battle of Immae and Daphne. The same is true for the last point proposed by Paschoud in his effort to find two sources for the reports about Aurelian's campaigns. The fact that in the very brief account by Zosimus of the second fall of Palmyra and its destruction a character—Antiochos—is added who is not attested in the *HA* does not prove anything. The same happens *viceversa* in the narrative of Aurelian's death: in Zosimus a killer is found, while the *HA* distinguishes between a creator of the *fraus* meant to kill the emperor, and the perpetrator of the murder. I have already shown in another paper that the tradition behind this episode is certainly only one (Gnoli 2019: 44-48).

In fact, the exact connections between the two narratives are far more meaningful than their supposed divergences:

1. The mention of Bithynia, notwithstanding the fact that it was not a setting for relevant events.
2. The fall of Tyana, anything but predictable given its distance from the site where the events took place.
3. The battle around Antiochia, with mention of Daphne in both texts and Aurelian's particular attention to the city's inhabitants.
4. The battle of Emesa and reference to the temple of Sol.
5. The determined siege of the city of Palmyra, which was defended by impregnable walls. This is what philologists call a 'meaningful mistake': the city had no walls

<sup>15</sup> Most probably in this lacuna the species of the particular female camel used by Zenobia was specified, as hypothesized by Mendelssohn: maybe δρομάδι?

before the building of the Camp of Diocletian. In both sources, what is striking is the presence of a *topos* bound to another desert town which really was impregnable: Hatra.

6. The female camel of Zenobia, in connection with the Persians' role in the story.
7. The execution of Longinus.
8. The city's revolt and its destruction that happened later, so much so that the emperor had left the area of the military operations.

This was the structure of the source shared by the two authors, and it must have been concise, taken up in many points by Aurelius Victor. This part of his work is lost in the lacuna, the size of which cannot be less than one page or two. This damage to the text deprives us of the only testimony that probably contained the great majority of the details of the original source, also with regard to Aurelian's oriental wars. We may imagine that it did not contain as many spurious elements as *HA* and Zosimus.

The *HA* has its own interests and develops its narrative in a peculiar way. Fake documents have been inserted into this biography, as well as into all the other biographies in the work. In the *Vita* of Aurelian these are centred on two subjects: 1) the *crudelitas* of Aurelian (Mouchová 1972; Szelest 1984; Viljamaa, Timonen, Krötzl 1992; Allard 2006; Molin 2006), a characteristic of this emperor which is not found in Zosimus; 2) embarrassment due to the fact that the episode involved a woman, which should have made the event less important. Both subjects were contained in the original source: the *crudelitas* is absolutely evident in Eutropius and in the *Epitome de Caesaribus*. Even though it is absent in what remains of Aurelius Victor, it is however clear that this is due to a voluntary removal. The *HA* has it as one of the *filis rouges* in the long biography of this emperor, while Zosimus too deliberately removed this subject from his work: Aurelian's action in Antiochia was characterized by a 'good mood' (φιλοφροσύνη, I 52, 1) and he was enthusiastically welcomed by the inhabitants of Emesa (προθύμως I 54, 2), but it is also true that in other passages of this work he is described as 'ambitious by nature' (φιλότιμος ... φύσει, I 55, 3).<sup>16</sup>

In a detailed analysis of the paragraphs that Zosimus dedicates to Aurelian's expedition, I have shown that the idea that he might have employed a well-informed contemporary source is misleading.<sup>17</sup> On the contrary, all the details present in Zosimus are actually of questionable quality. The topographic data seem to be taken from some sort of Late-Antique Syrian touristic guide rather than from the true report of Aurelian's military enterprises. All other additions are related to war episodes with descriptions of the military formations and the development of battles which have been taken seriously by modern scholars. Nevertheless, all those details do not stand up to close examination: the structure of the Roman army just before the battle of Emesa shows irreconcilable aporias such as the allusion to the mysterious 'Celtic

<sup>16</sup> Mouchová 1972 and Allard 2006 underestimate the presence of the *topos* of the *crudelitas* of Aurelian in Zosimus—wrongly, in my opinion.

<sup>17</sup> Gnoli 2017, where I stress the evident differences between the three passages that Zosimus dedicates to the events in Palmyra: two are derived from Dexippus and are well informed and reliable in their details, while the long report dedicated to the decisive expeditions of Aurelian is much more a literary narrative built upon a series of *topoi* of little informative value. Opposite conclusions are reached by Müller 2020, who ignores the existence of my work completely and recklessly reads Zosimus programmatically, disregarding the *Quellengforschung* with unexpected results.

troops,<sup>18</sup> referring to military units most probably from the Danube. These are most likely re-elaborations derived from various works by the emperor Julian, where the often mentioned ‘Celts’ are the troops who had followed him from Gaul, where they had served under his command as a Caesar. Moreover, the development narratives of the two battles of Immae and Emesa are awkward re-elaborations of the battle of Turin fought by Constantine against the cataphracts of Magnentius, as recounted in the Panegyric written by Nazarius in 313.<sup>19</sup> Episodes such as that of the fake Aurelian have the same reliability as the pretend siege of the undefended Palmyra. In conclusion, Zosimus employed the same source as *HA*, but filtered through the distorting lens of Eunapius. Most probably it was the latter who added material to the structure he had at his disposal. Those additions were above all supposed tactical explanations and literary devices derived from completely different sources that had nothing to do with the *Realien* of the Aurelian’s expedition, but were taken e.g. from the much better documented expedition of Constantine in Italy.

Beyond the structure represented by the *EKG* tradition, no eastern source in Greek left a detailed report, a monograph of Aurelian’s expedition. All the documentation we possess could be traced back to one single Latin source, the language of which is certain because of certain word-for-word quotations shared between the Epitomators and the *HA* that are too precise to be fortuitous. The Greek tradition of Eunapius also took from this bulk of documentation, enriching it as shown above. The *HA*, which in my opinion was written in the form in which it has been transmitted to us *after*, not *before*, the second edition of the *Histories* of Eunapius, and in the 420s and '30s also had available the latest biographies (i.e. those signed by Flavius Vopiscus) and the second edition of Eunapius. It is for this reason that the *HA* was able to distort very oddly the name of the killer of Aurelian into *Mnestheus*: in Zosimus/Eunapius the main creator of the conspiracy, Eros, is defined as τῶν ἔξοθεν φερομένων ἀποκρίσεων μνηστῆς τεταγμένος. Groag (1905: 1402, ll. 58–60) hypothesized that the name *Mnestheus* was a distortion of μνηστῆς as found in Zosimus. In fact Paschoud liked this philologically perfectly correct explanation, which he however rejected for the reason that, in his opinion, the *HA* had been written before and not after the *Histories* of Eunapius/Zosimus.

Actually, the great eastern expedition of Aurelian in 272/3, and more in general all of his short but important story is the best benchmark to show that writers in the 270s were particularly badly informed by contemporary sources, which, whenever they existed—and some certainly existed—were not capable of leaving any traces in subsequent authors. Of these sources only one survives; it is not always of good quality, as it was aware of some things, but ignored many others. And it is the starting

<sup>18</sup> Zos. I 45, 3: ἀντεστρατοπεδεύετο τῇ τε Δαλματῶν ἵππῳ καὶ Μυσοῖς καὶ Παίοσιν καὶ ἔτι γε Νορικοῖς καὶ Ῥαιτοῖς, ἅπερ ἐστὶ Κελτικὰ τάγματα. Although this passage has resisted all attempts at rational explanation, this ballpark list of military units is still considered worth believing by some scholars of the Roman army in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. I have proposed that the absurd declaration by Zosimus should be considered in the same way as the substitution of Silpius with Daphne: Eunapius/Zosimus knew the works of the celebrated Julian very well. The only literary work in which Roman soldiers as ‘Celts’ and Daphne are mentioned not far away from each other is the *Misopogon* by Julian, and it seems to me that this text represents the ‘source,’ as it were, of Eunapius/Zosimus, who had no chance to get to know in any way the true deployment of the Roman army on occasion of the battle of Emesa.

<sup>19</sup> *Pan. Lat.* 10(4) Galletier.

point of all the later documentation. Much of what we believe we know about Aurelian has been devised *a posteriori*, above all during the 4<sup>th</sup> century on the basis of controversies that had nothing to do with the emperor, but rather with ideological disputes of a different origin: how Valens had retrieved the state brought down by the disastrous Julian, just like Aurelian had done after Gallienus. Thus, the images of the emperor Aurelian and the defeated Zenobia were created well into the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

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