A tale of two periods

Change and continuity in the Roman Empire between 249 and 324


Pictured left: a section of the Naqš-i Rustam, the victory monument of Shapur I of Persia, showing the captured Roman emperor Valerian kneeling before the victorious Sassanid monarch (source: www.bbc.co.uk). Pictured right: a group of statues found on St. Mark's Basilica in Venice, depicting the members of the first tetrarchy – Diocletian, Maximian, Constantius and Galerius – holding each other and with their hands on their swords, ready to act if necessary (source: www.wikipedia.org). The former image depicts the biggest shame suffered by the empire during the third-century 'crisis', while the latter is the most prominent surviving symbol of tetrarchic ideology.

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Introduction

> "From the great secular games celebrated by Philip to the death of the emperor Gallienus, there elapsed twenty years of shame and misfortune. During that calamitous period, every instant of time was marked, every province of the Roman world was afflicted, by barbarous invaders and military tyrants, and the ruined empire seemed to approach the last and fatal moment of its dissolution."[1]

Thus Edward Gibbon on the years between 248 and 268,[2] a period which has since antiquity itself been seen as one of the darkest times in the history of the Roman Empire. Our scant literary sources for the period speak of enormous political and military upheaval, and for a long time modern authors have followed them, adding widespread economic dislocation to the list of evils. It is common to speak of the 'third-century crisis',[3] and while the years discussed by Gibbon are often seen as its lowest point, for many the 'crisis' only ended in 284.

It was in that year that Diocletian became emperor. He reformed the empire to combat the problems of the 'crisis', most notably by appointing imperial colleagues to make governing the empire more manageable. This system, with two senior *augusti* and two junior *caesares*, is known as the tetrarchy. Most authors have recognised that this period also had its problems, particularly the various internal conflicts that started shortly after Diocletian's abdication in 305 and did not end until 324 when only one contestant, Constantine, was left standing.[4] Nevertheless, this era, often called the 'tetrarchic era', has been contrasted with the 'crisis' that preceded it as a time of imperial recovery and renewed vitality.

However, times change, and views on historical periods change with them. Just how much of a 'crisis' the third century was is currently the subject of much debate. Some argue that the traditional view needs to be heavily nuanced, sometimes even implying that there was never anything resembling a crisis at all. But others point to the basic events transmitted by the sources to show that there were in fact many things wrong back then. In recent years,

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[1] E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (J. B. Bury ed., London 1897-1900) 1: 237.
[2] All dates are AD unless listed otherwise.
[3] The term 'crisis' has become controversial recently, as will become obvious from the rest of this introduction. But whatever position one takes, there is no denying that the period was far more tumultuous than what came before, and should be described by its own term. My solution is to always put 'crisis' in parentheses and use the term only in a descriptive manner (i.e. to describe the 249-284 timeframe). It thus owes much to the approach to the even more controversial term 'Romanisation' outlined in G. Woolf, *Becoming Roman. The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge 1998), 4-7. I follow the same method with the term 'barbarians'.
[4] See e.g. Gibbon (Bury ed. 1897-1900) 1: 394.

several authors have also carefully suggested that the view of the tetrarchic period as a time of restoration perhaps puts too much faith in the propaganda of Diocletian's government, although this line of thought has yet to be pursued thoroughly.

But what is especially striking is the strict demarcation that most historians, regardless of their views on these two periods, maintain between both eras at 284, something that is especially obvious in standard reference works like the *Cambridge Ancient History* and the recent *Edinburgh History of Ancient Rome*. There are some exceptions, but they are few.[5] While the long-standing magical reputation of this date makes such a decision understandable even for historians who view its significance critically, it does have the unfortunate consequence that thorough comparisons between the 'crisis' and the tetrarchic era remain rare, despite the valuable insights that these might produce. Such a comparison is therefore exactly what I will aim to do here, in order to cast a new perspective on the debate surrounding the 'crisis' and give a push towards more discussion on the era of Diocletian and Constantine.

The main drive will thus be comparative history. The specific kind of comparison undertaken here will be a diachronic variation-finding comparison: a comparison where two successive periods within in a single overarching phenomenon (the Roman Empire) will be contrasted.[6] In addition, we will look at the way in which previous authors have written about these two eras, in order to see how their opinions have shaped the general views on these times. We will therefore also be dealing with comparative historiography.[7]

The timeframe of the second period is easily set: it will start with the accession of the tetrarchy's founder Diocletian in 284 and end with Constantine's final victory in 324 , which

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[5] A. K. Bowman, A. Cameron and P. Garnsey eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History Vol. XII: The Crisis of Empire, AD 193-337* (Cambridge 2005) (henceforth *CAH* XII) notably has a single chapter on the 'crisis'-years of 235 to 284, followed by two separate chapters for the first tetrarchy (284-305) and the rise and reign of Constantine (306-337). The Edinburgh series also chooses 284 as the point where one book in the series stops and another one begins. Thus, we have C. Ando, *Imperial Rome AD 193 to 284: the critical century* (Edinburgh 2012); and then J. Harries, *Imperial Rome AD 284-363: the new empire* (Edinburgh 2012). For exceptions, see M. Christol, *L'Empire Romain du III^e siècle. Histoire politique, 192-325 après J.-C.* (Paris 1997), who works with the idea of the 'long third century' (spanning the dates that appear in the title), and D. S. Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay, AD 180-395* (London/New York 2004), who has separate chapters for the worst of the 'crisis', 238 to 260 (p. 217-262), the period of recovery, 260 to 300 (p. 263-298), the end of the first tetrarchy and the rise of Constantine, 300 to 313 (p. 333-365), and finally Constantine's reign, 313 to 337 (p. 364-400).

[6] See S. Berger, 'Comparative history' in: S. Berger, H. Feldner and K. Passmore eds., *Writing History: Theory and Practice* (London 2003) 161-179, for a useful introduction to the various kinds of comparative history.

[7] For a clear statement regarding the importance of comparative historiography, see C. Lorenz, 'Comparative Historiography: Problems and Perspectives' *History and Theory* 38 (1999) 1, 25-39, esp. 28-29, although his emphasis is on a transnational approach rather than the diachronic one undertaken here.

left only one *augustus* standing and thus meant the final end of Diocletian's system. Where to start and end with the 'crisis', however, is more difficult to say. While many authors (including Gibbon, as we saw above) place the start of the recovery as early as Gallienus' death in 268, with the reign of Aurelian (270-275) being singled out as especially significant, in recent years there is more emphasis on the fact that although the crisis *should* have ended then, it actually went on.[8] Given this newfound interest in the period 268-284 as a time of continued crisis, I have chosen to end the first period at 284 to involve this historiographical development in the discussion. In addition, I have chosen to start in 249 with the accession of the emperor Decius rather than earlier in the third century because even those who view the period pessimistically agree that the 'crisis' did not really gather steam until that point.[9]

In terms of the structure of my account, my approach owes much to the model developed and used by esteemed authors like A. H. M. Jones, Peter Brown and most recently Stephen Mitchell in their works on late antiquity: to start with a brief narrative section in order to establish a chronological framework and introduce the key players, followed by a series of thematic chapters that offer a more in-depth analysis on their subjects. Sadly, a (comparative) discussion of the third century is lacking in these books, which is where my contribution will distinguish itself.[10]

I will investigate the three main strands of Roman imperial history in these periods: the attacks of foreign enemies, internal strife and the economy, with a particular focus on coinage. Social and demographic developments will not receive separate chapters, but as they are to a greater or lesser extent intertwined with the three main topics, they will be discussed as well. Matters such as administrative, legal, cultural, intellectual and religious history will be excluded; not because they are not important, but because there is simply not enough space to do all these complex topics justice. Throughout the three main chapters I

[8] The traditional view is visible in the increasing optimism present in Christian writings produced around 270. See G. Alföldy, 'The crisis of the third century as seen by contemporaries' *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 15 (1974) 89-111, 97-98. For matching modern views, see e.g. A. Watson, *Aurelian and the third century* (London 1999), 7; Potter (2004) 262. The most notable example of the more critical approach can be found in J. F. Drinkwater, 'Maximinus to Diocletian and the "crisis"' in: *CAH* XII (2005) 28-66, 60-62.

[9] Christol (1997) 119-121; L. de Blois, 'Monetary policies, the soldiers pay and the onset of crisis in the first half of the third century AD' in: P. Erdkamp ed., *The Roman army and the economy* (Amsterdam 2002), 90-107; Ando (2012) 146.

[10] A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey* (London 1964); P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: From Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad* (London 1971); S. Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire, AD 284-641: The Transformation of the Ancient World* (Oxford 2007). It should, however, be noted that Jones and Brown do include the third century 'crisis' in their narrative section.

will attempt to answer my main research question: how do the third-century 'crisis' and the tetrarchic period compare? But first, it is necessary look at the ancient sources and modern studies that form the foundation of my own work.

Sources

Unfortunately, the ancient material, especially as far as the crisis is concerned, is rather scarce. There are several categories of evidence: literary, epigraphical, papyrological, numismatic and archaeological, each with their own advantages. But each category also has its own problems. We will start with the literary sources, for while it is undoubtedly true that they only represent a very limited viewpoint and that their narratives are subject to distortion in a way that the other categories usually are not, they also provide the kind of details that are rarely found in other sources.

By far the most voluminous writings from our timeframe originate from Christian bishops. For the 'crisis', the most notable author is Cyprian, bishop of Carthage between 248/249 and his death by persecution in 260, who has left a voluminous corpus of letters and treatises. For the tetrarchy, we have Eusebius of Caesarea, where he was bishop from about 314 to his death around 340. He is the author of the first universal *Historia Ecclesiastica* (church history) and he also wrote, among other things, the *Vita Constantini* (life of Constantine), a naturally very favourable biography of the first Christian emperor.[11] As both men were understandably mostly concerned with church matters, the information provided on secular history is limited, although still important. Eusebius gains some additional use by his practice of frequently inserting seemingly genuine documents into his narrative.

In terms of non-Christian sources, the number of contemporary authors from the latter half of the third century is very small. We have the *Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle*, which describes the events of 238 to 260 in the manner of a prophecy, and it is an invaluable source. But its Syrian authors were mostly interested in what was happening in their own surroundings, and did not care much for the rest of the empire. In addition, the section that covers the years 255 to 260, which appears to be a later (though still contemporary) inclusion, is

[11] All of Cyprian's letters and treatises are available in the fifth volume of A. Roberts, J. Donaldson and A. C. Coxe eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: translations of the writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325* (Buffalo 1885-1896); for Eusebius, I have used the Loeb edition of his church history (K. Lake and J. E. L. Oulton eds., *The ecclesiastical history* (London/Cambridge 1926-1932); and for his biography of Constantine I have used A. Cameron and S. G. Hall eds., *Life of Constantine* (Oxford 1999).

very brief.[12] Aside from the *Oracle*, there are only two main sources for the latter half of the third century written by contemporaries, with the 'Kaisergeschichte' primarily informing the Latin historical tradition, and Dexippus of Athens dominating the Greek tradition.

While the 'Kaisergeschichte' itself, which appears to have covered both of our periods but only presented a relatively short narrative, has not survived, it has been mostly preserved through the very similar narratives by two major civil servants from the fourth century: Sextus Aurelius Victor's *De Caesaribus* (on the Caesars, running from 27 BC to AD 361) and Eutropius' *Breviarium* (abbreviated account) of Roman history from the founding of the city to the death of the emperor Jovian in 364. Victor, who wrote on his own account, was fond of adding moralising interludes, while Eutropius, who wrote his popular history on the orders of emperor Valens (r. 364-378), tended to stay sober and brief.

A source often associated with Victor is the so-called *Epitome de Caesaribus* (abridgement of 'the Caesars'), whose unknown late fourth-century author (usually called Pseudo-Victor or the Epitomator) provides a briefer narrative of our timeframe but nonetheless has some independent information, although this must be used with caution. Finally, the last great Latin historian Ammianus Marcellinus (ca. 325-395) may also have used this source; although his *Res Gestae* (history) only survives from 353 onwards, he makes a few useful references to earlier periods.[13]

Another source that appears to have used the 'Kaisergeschichte' is the *Historia Augusta* (Augustan history, henceforth abbreviated as *HA*). It presents what is by far the fullest narrative of the third century 'crisis' (except for the years 244-258, which are missing from the manuscript), but unfortunately it is deeply problematic. While purporting to be the work of six authors writing in the tetrarchic period (on which it provides no information, as the work ends in 284), it is more likely to be the work of one person from the late fourth century. This author, who, much like us, found himself with few sources, decided to fill the gaps with additional information produced from his own considerable imagination. The result has

[12] The best edition of the *Oracle* is that of D. S. Potter, *Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire* (Oxford 1990), which also has a translation and commentary, as well as a general analysis of the third century.
[13] Victor and Eutropius are both available in translation; see H. W. Bird ed., *Aurelius Victor: De Caesaribus* (Liverpool 1994); and idem ed., *Eutropius: Breviarium* (Liverpool 1993); both books also include an introduction to the 'Kaisergeschichte'. For quotations I have used P. Dufraigne ed., *Livre des Césars* (Paris 1975) and F. L. Müller ed., *Eutropius, Kurze Geschichte Roms seit Grundung (753 v Chr-364 n Chr). Einleitung, Text und Ubersetzung* (Stuttgart 1995). For the *Epitome* I have used the translation of T. Banchich that is available online at http://www.luc.edu/roman-emperors/ (accessed on 30-05-2014). For Ammianus I have used the Loeb edition: J. C. Rolfe ed., *Ammianus Marcellinus* (London/Cambridge 1935-1939).

to be read in order to be believed. That it must nevertheless be mined for the few genuinely useful bits that it contains shows just how poor the state of our third-century source material is.[14]

The works of Dexippus, one of the foremost citizens of Athens, appear to have been more extensive than the 'Kaisergeschichte', but unfortunately only fragments survive of his *Scythica* (a work about Rome's third-century wars with the peoples from across the Danube) and *Chronike Historia* (a thousand-year history which ended at 270).[15] However, he has been the main informant of three Byzantine accounts that have come down to us. The first of these is the *Historia Nova* (new history) of Zosimus, a violently anti-Christian official.

Zosimus' history, intended to show how the adoption of Christianity led to the decay of the Roman Empire, was written around 500. His narrative of the third century up to about 270 uses Dexippus and possibly other unidentified sources, while the section of his work that runs from there to 404 preserves information from the otherwise also mostly lost history of the equally anti-Christian author Eunapius of Sardes, who wrote a continuation of Dexippus' history in the early fifth century. Zosimus' narrative is often muddled, his religious stance heavily distorts his treatment of Constantine, and his narrative of the period 282-304 is missing entirely. That his account is nonetheless our best source for the period of 'crisis' is yet another sign of just how bad things are with regard to sources.[16]

The second Byzantine author is George Syncellus, a monk who wrote his *Ekloge chronographias* (extract of chronography) in the early ninth century, but while it was intended to cover all of history he only got as far as the accession of Diocletian before he died. His sections on secular history are brief, but preserve some information from Dexippus. Our third and final author is John Zonaras, a twelfth-century politician (and later monk) who wrote the *Epitome ton Historion* (extracts of history), a universal history stretching from the Creation until his own time. Despite its late date of composition, it preserves useful data from Dexippus and other lost authors about both periods covered in this thesis.[17]

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[14] For the text and translation of the *HA*, see D. Magie ed., *The Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (London/Cambridge 1922-1932); the best introduction to the many problems posed by the text remains R. Syme, *Emperors and biography: studies in the 'Historia Augusta'* (Oxford 1971), 281-290.

[15] The surviving fragments are available with a German translation in G. Martin ed., *Dexipp von Athen* (Tübingen 2006).

[16] For Zosimus, I have used the English translation of R. T. Ridley, *Zosimus: New History* (Canberra 1982), and F. Paschoud, ed., *Zosime: Histoire Nouvelle* (Paris 1971) for quotations.

[17] For Syncellus, see W. Adler and P. Tuffin eds., *The Chronography of George Synkellos: a Byzantine Chronicle of Universal History from the Creation* (Oxford 2002); the relevant section of Zonaras' work is available in E. N.

The tetrarchic period is somewhat better served, as it has three literary sources of its own. First, there are the *Panegyrici Latini*, a collection of speeches delivered in praise of emperors by Gallic orators to various Roman emperors between 289 and 389 (a speech delivered by Pliny the Younger to Trajan in the early second century is also included). Several speeches are essential sources for early tetrarchic history, not just for what they say, but also for what they omit. Second is Lactantius, a Christian rhetorician who was a contemporary of the tetrarchy and wrote a treatise called *De Mortibus Persecutorum* (on the death of the persecutors), a scathing attack on all emperors who persecuted Christians, with a focus on the period 300-313. While is by far our most extensive source for that period, his reliability is highly controversial. The varying degrees of criticism applied to the *De Mortibus* have resulted in widely varying modern narratives of Diocletian's reign. Finally, we have the *Origo Constantini Imperatoris* (rise of the emperor Constantine), which, as the name implies, describes Constantine's rise to supreme power. While the work as we have it is of a fairly late date (around 400), it appears to have been informed by reliable contemporary sources.[18]

The other categories of sources can be dealt with more briefly. Inscriptions are usually short and as such tend to provide little information, but they are often our only sources for comparatively minor events that are not mentioned in the literary accounts. Unfortunately, there is a sharp decline in the number of surviving inscriptions from the mid-third century onward, which may or may not be a sign of crisis itself.[19] One inscription deserves to be singled out as a source: The *Res Gestae Divi Shaporis* (henceforth abbreviated as *RGDS*), a trilingual inscription detailing the deeds of the highly successful Sassanid monarch Shapur I (r. 240-270). It provides a rare non-Roman perspective on Imperial history.[20] A problem with the epigraphical material is that its information may only relate to a specific region rather

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Lane and T. Banchich eds., *The History of Zonaras: From Severus Alexander to the Death of Theodosius the Great* (London/New York 2008).

[18] For the Panegyrics, see C. E. V. Nixon and B. S. Rodgers eds., *In praise of later Roman emperors: the Panegyrici Latini* (Berkeley 1994). The most recent edition and translation of the De Mortibus is that of J. L. Creed, *Lactantius: De Mortibus Persecutorum* (Oxford 1984). For two widely varying assessments of Lactantius' veracity, see, on the one hand, T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge 1981) 12-14 ("He deserves to be believed"); and on the other hand, F. Kolb, *Diocletian und die Erste Tetrarchie: Improvisation oder Experiment in der Organisation monarchischer Herrschaft? (*Berlin 1987) 133 ("da kann man Lactantius nur sehr frägwurdige Qualitäten als Historiker zuschreiben"). The *Origo* is included in S. N. Lieu and D. Montserrat eds., *From Constantine to Julian: Pagan and Byzantine Views* (London 1996), with J. Stevenson providing the translation.

[19] That it is a sign of crisis has recently been argued by De Blois (2002) 105; but see C. Witschel, *Krise – Rezession – Stagnation? Der Westen des römischen Reiches im 3. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Frankfurt 1999) 65-84 for a sharply contradictory opinion.

[20] For the *RGDS*, see R. N. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran* (Munich 1983), app. 4.

than the empire as a whole.[21] This is an even more valid concern with the papyrological evidence, which survives in reasonably large quantities, but only in Egypt. Moreover, while papyri are an important source for the economic side of the story they are not that informative about the other aspects covered in this thesis.

One kind of source that has survived in abundance from this period is coinage. This numismatic evidence is an essential tool for determining the period's chronology and confirming the existence of usurpers mentioned in other sources. But most importantly, the varying degrees of purity of these coins have allowed numismatist to track the increasing debasement of the Roman coinage. Finally, the images displayed upon the coins tell us about the messages that the issuing emperor wanted his subjects to get. But using these images to reconstruct the events of the period should be attempted only if no alternative is possible; unfortunately, this is often the case.[22] Coins have frequently been found in hoards; this too may or may not be a sign of crisis.[23]

The final category is archaeology. While this has much to offer in theory, in practice the material is often difficult to interpret. For instance, the remains of a burned house would appear to be clear proof of a raid by 'barbarians', but it is just as possible that the house caught fire from an entirely unrelated cause. It many cases it is impossible to move beyond attempts at confirming information found in other sources, but archaeology can nevertheless provide an alternative perspective in some instances.[24]

All in all, it can certainly be said that our sources for this period, particularly the 'crisis', are paltry. Nevertheless, previous authors have succeeded in reconstructing much of this timeframe, and we will now turn to their views upon it.

Historiography

The lack of source material for much of the third century is naturally easily connected to the view of this period as a time of 'crisis'. This was done by A. H. M. Jones, who described the half century running from 238 to 285 as "in both senses of the word one of the darkest of the empire". But he also remarked that "defective though our information is, it is abundantly clear that the period was profoundly troubled". The empire was wracked by both foreign

[21] Witschel (1999) 60-65.
[22] A good example of this method is P. Casey, *Carausius and Allectus: The British usurpers* (London 1994).
[23] The view that they indicate a crisis has once again been argued against by Witschel (1999) 94-99.
[24] See ibidem, 100-117, for a good summary of the problems that the archaeological material poses.

invasions and internal conflicts, and the continual debasement of the coinage had disastrous consequences. While noting that things began to improve slowly in the 270's, he maintained that "the condition of the empire nevertheless remained precarious in the extreme".[25]

This was the modern orthodoxy on the 'crisis', and it remained in full force throughout the 1970's and 80's. This is obvious from three of the foremost works of the time dealing with the third century. In his monograph on the emperor Gallienus (r. 260-268) Lukas de Blois described it as "a dark century indeed, with the time of Valerian and Gallienus being an absolute low". In his *The Roman Government's Response to Crisis* Ramsay MacMullen vividly sketched the various problems of the age, and how successive emperors sought to deal with them. And Fergus Millar's monograph on the third-century Roman Empire once again singled out the reign of Valerian (254-260) as a period which "was marked by an endless series of disasters".[26] This view also remained common in the 1990's. David Potter's edition and translation of the *Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle* also includes a thorough examination of the problems that together formed the 'crisis', while Michel Christol has remarked in his reference work on the 'long third century' (192-337 that between 250 and 275 it would not have been odd to wonder whether the Roman empire would survive.[27]

But a different trend also gained force at this time. A collection of archaeological surveys of Western Europe in the third century published in 1981 already indicated that things were perhaps not quite as bad as the literary sources suggested. However, the first comprehensive attack on the idea of crisis was undertaken in 1993 by Karl Strobel, who mostly argued against the idea of a 'crisis mentality' present in the mind of contemporary authors, but also sought to nuance the view of the 'crisis' as a period of profound military and political instability. While Strobel's work did not garner much attention, the 1999 monograph of Christian Witschel on the Roman west in the third century would prove to be a key publication. After a thorough critique of all categories of source material, from which he concluded that all the evidence for any 'crisis' is highly problematic, he proceeded with a socio-economic survey of various areas of West Europe in the third century, which led to much the

[25] Jones (1964) 1: 23-36.
[26] L. de Blois, *De Politiek van Keizer Gallienus* (Amsterdam 1974), 17 (my translation); R. MacMullen, *Roman government's response to crisis, AD 235-337* (New Haven 1976); F. Millar, *The Roman Empire and its neighbours* (London 1981), 50.
[27] Potter (1990); Christol (1997) 119-120.

same results as the 1981 archaeological surveys mentioned above. Witschel therefore argued that the 'crisis'-model cannot be applied to the third century.[28]

The response to Witschel's monograph has been variable. Some authors have gone on to re-evaluate other aspects of the crisis, with Thomas Burns' book on Rome's dealings with the 'barbarians' being a particularly notable example.[29] Others, such as De Blois and Wolf Liebeschuetz, have stressed that the many problems mentioned by our sources show that there actually must have been something like a 'crisis', and argue that attempting to deny this is unwise.[30] But it seems as if most authors are now unsure what to do with the 'crisis', and are content to state that there was a 'crisis' in terms of military and political events, but that things are more complex on the socio-economic level.[31]

Tetrarchic historiography is less complex. Jones' viewpoint was clear: "By his administrative, military and fiscal reforms Diocletian gave security and order to the empire." The general tendency is exemplified by the biography of Diocletian written by Stephen Williams, which has as its general tenor that the reforms of the tetrarchs were a success and managed to end the 'crisis'.[32] Williams is not a professional historian, but three of the foremost books written on the subject in the last thirty-five years, those of Timothy Barnes, Frank Kolb and William Leadbetter, also seem to accept the general success of the tetrarchy.[33] And while these authors are at least well aware of the fact that the tetrarchy had its own share of issues and deal with these issues in their books, works that focus on specific aspects of the era often only pay cursory attention to them. The most notable example is Simon Corcoran, who blithely states in his *The Empire of the Tetrarchs* that the years after 293 were filled with military success, passing over the fact that Britain would be outside of Imperial authority until 296 and a war with Persia was won only after an initial severe defeat.[34] Corcoran's book

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[28] K. Strobel, *Das Imperium Romanum im „3. Jahrhundert": Modell einer historischen Krise? Zur Frage mentaler Strukturen breiterer Bevölkerungsschichten in der Zeit von Marc Aurel bis zum Ausgang des 3. Jh. n. Chr.* (Stuttgart 1993); Witschel (1999). The surveys appeared in A. King and M. Henig eds., *The Roman West in the third century: contributions from archaeology and history* (Oxford 1981).

[29] T. S. Burns, *Rome and the barbarians, 100 B.C.-A.D. 400* (Baltimore 2003).

[30] De Blois (2002); W. Liebeschuetz, 'Was there a crisis of the third century?' in: O. Hekster, G. de Klein and D. Slootjes eds., *Crises and the Roman Empire* (Nijmegen 2007) 11-20.

[31] E.g. Hekster (2008) 82-86; Ando (2012) 13-15, 224-229.

[32] Jones (1964) 1: 67; S. Williams, *Diocletian and the Roman recovery* (London 1985); the title itself is, of course, also telling.

[33] Barnes (1981), which had the same author's *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge 1982) as a companion piece; Kolb (1987); W. L. Leadbetter, *Galerius and the will of Diocletian* (London 2009).

[34] S. Corcoran, *The Empire of the Tetrarchs: Imperial Pronouncements and Government, AD 284-324* (Oxford 1996), 5-6.

is about tetrarchic law and government rather than the events of the time, so it is understandable that he has provided only a superficial narrative, but it is just such statements that keep the idea of the tetrarchy as mostly a success alive. I feel that this is unfortunate, for while it would be difficult to argue that the tetrarchic period was in no way an improvement compared to the 'crisis' that preceded it, I do think that the common overly optimistic stance towards the era needs adjusting.

There have, however, been some dissenting voices. As early as 1997 Christol already argued against placing too much trust in the restoration ideology of the tetrarchs. More recently, Roger Rees has also pushed for a re-evaluation of the tetrarchic period, and Adrian Goldsworthy has stressed that the establishment of the tetrarchy by no means meant the end of internal conflict. But none of these authors provide a thorough critique: Christol leaves it at his cautionary remarks, Rees states that a re-evaluation of the tetrarchy is underway without providing any further information (or, indeed, sources), and Goldsworthy does not move beyond his point about internal warfare.[35] Accordingly, in general the optimistic view of the tetrarchy remains very much alive, and the recent focus on the negative aspects of the period 270-284 has only done more to make the tetrarchy seem better.[36]

To sum up, it would appear that for both periods the traditional views, which hold that they are respectively a time of crisis and a time of restoration, have for a long time dominated and shaped the opinions of authors working on them. How much of a crisis the 'crisis' really was is currently being debated, while a reconsideration of the restorative character of the tetrarchy has not really gotten underway yet. It is now time to move to my own analysis, with the establishment of a more detailed chronological framework being the first step.

[35] Christol (1997) 206, 245-246; R. Rees, *Diocletian and the Tetrarchy* (Edinburgh 2004), 87-89; A. K. Goldsworthy, *How Rome Fell. Death of a Superpower* (London/New Haven 2009), 158-159.
[36] See e.g. A. Demandt, 'Diokletian als Reformer' in: idem, A. Goltz and H. Schlange-Schöningen eds., *Diokletian und die Tetrarchie. Aspekte einer Zeitenwende* (Berlin 2004), 1-9, 1-2.

1. Narrative

From Decius to Diocletian

Our story begins with the death of a man named Marinus Pacatianus. He had set himself up as usurper in Moesia in late 248, but within a few months he had shared the fate of most who strove for absolute power in this period: he was murdered by his own soldiers. Philip, the reigning emperor, sent the distinguished senator Decius to Moesia with the assignment to punish Pacatianus' supporters. But on arrival Decius found himself acclaimed as emperor by the soldiers, and near Verona his forces defeated the army of Philip, who perished in the battle.[37]

Decius would mostly be remembered for his edict in which he ordered all the inhabitants of the empire to sacrifice to the gods, which, whether this was Decius' intention or not, would cause great harm to the Christian communities.[38] But for our purposes the manner in which he died is more important. Decius soon found himself having to take on invaders, consistently called 'Scythians' by our sources, in the Danube provinces. A usurpation in Rome by a certain Julius Valens seems to have died down by itself, but things did not go as smoothly on the Danube. An initial defeat, in combination with the aid provided by the official Lucius Priscus who made a failed bid to become emperor himself, allowed the 'Scythians' to take the city Philippolis. Decius engaged the retreating invaders near a place called Abrittus in 251. The result was a crushing Roman defeat, with Decius himself falling in the fight.[39]

Decius was succeeded by his second-in-command Trebonianus Gallus, who found himself having to buy off the Goths. His biggest immediate problem was caused by an Antiochene nobleman called Mariades,[40] who had rebelled against Roman authority and was ravaging Syria. He soon joined forces with the Sassanid king Shapur, the result being a suc-

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[37] *Orac. Sib.* XIII.79-80; Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 28.10-11; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.3; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 28.2; Zos. 1.20.2-22; Zon. 12.19.

[38] *Orac. Sib.* XIII.87-88; Lact., *DMP* 4; Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* 6.39-42; cf. George 445-452, mostly copying Eusebius but providing a far less favourable assessment of the Alexandrian theologian Origen, as does Zon. 12.20.

[39] *Orac. Sib.* XIII.100-105; Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 29.2-5; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.4; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 29.1-3; Zos. 1.23-24.1; George 459; Zon. 12.20. The *Oracle*, Zosimus and Zonaras claim that Decius was betrayed by his successor Gallus, but cf. Potter (1990) 45: "it is inconceivable that Roman soldiers would have supported a man who had sent their comrades to their deaths or that the surviving marshals could have supported him."

[40] He is the subject of *Orac. Sib.* XIII.89-100; *HA*, *Tyr. Trig.* 2 (where he is called Cyriades), Mal. 12.26 and *frag.* 1 of the anonymous Continuator of Dio (= M. H. Dodgeon and S. N. Lieu eds., *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian wars: a documentary history* (London 1991), 51-53 no. 3.1.5) give additional information, but this should be used with caution.

cessful surprise attack on a Roman force concentrated at a place called Barbalissos. This was followed by a devastating Persian incursion into Roman territory, while the 'Scythians' plundered the Danube provinces and Asia Minor in large numbers. The *Oracle*, Zosimus and Zonaras describe these events, concluding that Gallus' reign was a period of massive catastrophes across the entire empire, with his indolence being to blame. But Aurelius Victor and Eutropius state that, other than a plague epidemic that is discussed more thoroughly by Cyprian, nothing noteworthy happened at this time.[41] We might therefore conclude that the military situation was grave in many of the eastern provinces, but that other parts of the empire only had the plague to worry about.

During the course of 253, the invaders were driven back. The Persians were repulsed by a militia originating from the Syrian city Emesa, with a local priest being declared emperor under the name Uranius Antoninus, while Aemilian, the governor of Moesia, managed to score a victory over the Goths. Aemilian was immediately declared emperor by his men, and as his forces prepared to do battle with those of Gallus the latter was slain together with his son and co-ruler Volusianus. Aemilian only ruled for a few months before suffering the same fate as Gallus when he had to go up against the army of the general Valerian, who had been collecting reinforcements from Gaul under orders from Gallus.[42]

Valerian, who now became emperor, made a firm attempt to restore order. He appointed his son Gallienus as colleague and gave him control over the west, while he set about to reassert Roman authority over the east – apparently not without success, as Uranius Antoninus disappears from the historical record at this point. Valerian's attempt to force compliance with the rites of state from the Christians, whose refusal led to a direct persecution, should also be seen in this context. While Gallienus seems to have succeeded in keep-

[41] See, on the one hand, *Orac. Sib.* XIII.106-141; Zos. 1.24-27; Zon. 12.21; with *RGDS* l. 4-9 for Shapur's account of the Sassanid attack; and on the other hand, Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 30; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.5; Pseudo-Victor (30) does not even bother to record the epidemic; in fact, the chapter on Gallus is shorter than that on Aemillian, despite the fact that the former ruled for two years as opposed to a few months. George presents an oddity: he also claims (459) that there is nothing significant to say about Gallus, citing Dexippus, who would surely have recorded the 'Scythian' invasions, as a source. Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* 6.1), claims that things were going well for Gallus until he began persecuting the Christians (there is no explicit proof that this ever happened, but Cyp., *Ep.* 53 does express fear of the possibility). This provides the interesting suggestion that the aforementioned troubles only began later in his reign, but the connection with his alleged persecution attempt means that this evidence must be used cautiously. For the plague epidemic, see Cyp., *De Mortalitate*.

[42] *Orac. Sib.* XIII.142-146; Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 31.1-2; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.6; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 31.1-2; Zos. 1.28-29.1; George 465; Zon. 12.21-22. Uranius Antoninus is mostly known from his coins. He is also alluded to in *Orac. Sib.* XIII.147-154 and is the subject of the fantasy reported in Mal. 12.26; the inscriptions published in Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 56 no. 3.2.3 may also refer to his victories. The essential study is H. R. Baldus, *Uranius Antoninus: Münzprägung und Geschichte* (Bonn 1971).

ing the western provinces reasonably tranquil throughout most of the 250's, Valerian found himself unable to cope with more 'Scythian' raids across the Balkans and Asia Minor, as well as a concurrent Persian raid. The worst would come in 259 and 260. Although the precise chronology is deeply controversial, it is certain that throughout these two years the Rhine frontier was penetrated by large groups of 'barbarian' invaders (with one group even reaching Italy), two of Gallienus' generals, Ingenuus and Regalianus, successively rose against him in Pannonia, and Valerian's plague-stricken army was mauled when the Sassanids began a new full-scale attack on the eastern provinces, with Valerian himself being taken prisoner. Finally, Postumus, the governor of Lower Germany, after a quarrel about the distribution of booty, formed his own separatist empire (killing Gallienus' son Saloninus as he did so) that comprised Gaul, the German provinces, Britain and Spain.[43]

But things soon began to look up. Gallienus repulsed the 'barbarians' from Italy, his subordinate Aureolus restored order on the Balkans and the Persian advance was checked by the officials Macrianus and Callistus in conjunction with the local potentate Odaenathus of Palmyra. Macrianus and Callistus then made a bid for the empire through the two sons of the former, but Macrianus, who was marching west, was defeated and killed by Aureolus, while Gallienus convinced Odaenathus to take out Callistus. In return, Gallienus had to acknowledge Odaenathus as de facto ruler of the eastern provinces, but the latter always remained at least nominally loyal to the emperor and would score considerable successes against the Persians in the following years, supposedly even reaching their capital of Ctesiphon at one point. Relations were less cordial with Postumus, who managed to hold on to his power as two attempts by Gallienus to unseat him met with failure after initial success. The two emperors would remain in a permanent status of hostility, but Postumus never attempted to take Rome, instead devoting his attention on keeping the peace within his own provinces. Indeed, between 262 and 265 the empire was peaceful enough for Gallienus to be able to devote himself to philosophy in Rome, something that would give rise to undeserved charges of laziness in the vehemently hostile Latin sources.[44]

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[43] *Orac. Sib.* XIII.155-161; Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 32.3-33.8; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.7-9.9.1; Festus, *Brev.* 23.1; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 32; Zos. 1.29.2-38.2; George 466; Zon. 12.23; with *RGDS* l. 9-16 for Shapur's perspective on the Sassanid incursion; the 'barbarian' attack described by *AE* (1993) 1231 belongs to 260. For the persecution, rescinded by Gallienus shortly after becoming sole *augustus*, see Lact., *DMP* 5; Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* 7.10-13;

[44] *Orac. Sib.* XIII.162-171; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.9, 9.11.1; Festus, *Brev.* 23.2; Zos. 1.39; George 466-467; Zon. 12.23-24. For Gallienus' supposed indolence, see especially Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 33.15-16, as well as most of the *Vitae* of Gallienus and the 'thirty pretenders' in the *HA*.

But this respite could not last. While a 'Scythian' raid in 266 in Asia Minor was still halted by Odaenathus, a massive attack that started in 267 and went on for several years caused widespread devastation in Greece. Gallienus arrived there in early 268 and scored some successes, but he was soon compelled to return to Italy after learning of the revolt of Aureolus. Gallienus managed to pin down his erstwhile general in Milan, but fell victim to a conspiracy that appears to have involved all his senior officers, with one of them, Claudius II, succeeding him. Aureolus either died during a sally or was killed by his own men.[45]

Initially, Claudius scored some significant successes: he defeated a 'barbarian' inroad over the Rhine and, in 269, took on the still marauding 'Scythians' near Naissus in modern-day Serbia, scoring a crushing victory. More good news came from the Gallic Empire, where Postumus had been murdered by his own men, with his successor Marius soon being bested by a man named Victorinus. As a result of these internal troubles parts of Gaul were reconquered by the central government, Spain defected back of its own accord and the city of Autun declared itself for Claudius. But Claudius could or would not help Autun, and Victorinus succeeded in asserting his control, having Autun ravaged when he retook it. Moreover, relations with Palmyra, where the murdered Odaenathus had been replaced by his wife Zenobia as ruler, worsened at this time, leading to successful Palmyrene attacks on Arabia and Egypt. Claudius scored no further successes against the 'Scythians' before he died of the plague in 270. His brother Quintillus initially assumed the purple, but he soon killed himself (or was killed) at the approach of the preferred candidate of the army: Aurelian.[46]

Aurelian had to tackle a number of issues during his first year in power. While the chronology is once again controversial, it is certain that he had to take on three separate 'barbarian' incursions, one of which reached quite far into Italy, while there was also at least one pretender that rose against him, although order was quickly restored. There was also a revolt in Rome, which was probably related to the fear caused by the latest 'barbarian' inroad, so Aurelian took several measures to appease the city's population, most notably the start of the construction of the 'Aurelian Wall' around Rome.[47]

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[45] Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 33.17-28; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.11.1; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 33.2; Zos. 1.40; George 466-467; Zon. 12.25.

[46] Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 33.9-16, 34.1-5; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.9, 9.11-12; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 34; Zos. 1.41-47; George 469; Zon. 12.26. For the siege of Autun, see *Pan. Lat.* IX 4.1, V 4.2-3.

[47] Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 35.2, 6-7; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.13.1, 9.14-9.15.1; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 35.2-4; Zos. 1.48-49; Zon. 12.27.

He then set about reuniting the empire, a difficult task that he nonetheless achieved within a few years. First, he went to the east, where he re-established Roman control through a combination of military might against the Palmyrene forces and pragmatic mildness towards captured cities. Even Palmyra itself was initially treated with mildness, but when the city chose to revolt again Aurelian ordered it destroyed. After dealing with a new 'Scythian' raid, which seems to have made him decide to give up the province Dacia for good, he turned his attention towards the Gallic Empire. There, Tetricus had replaced Victorinus as emperor after the latter's murder. Tetricus supposedly felt so threatened in his new job that he secretly arranged his surrender with Aurelian, whose army then slaughtered the Gallic forces. The empire was once again reunited, but Aurelian would have little time to enjoy his achievement. While marching towards Persia for a campaign in 275, he was assassinated in a plot of some of his subordinates who had reason to fear his wrath.[48]

Because Aurelian's death had come so unexpectedly, no one of the members of his staff was prepared to put himself forward as emperor. This led to a brief period without an emperor, something that the Latin tradition (barring Eutropius) eagerly inflated into a six-month senate-run interregnum. Eventually, the aged general Tacitus became emperor. He took on a new 'Scythian' invasion, seemingly not without success, but he died shortly after his accession, either by illness or by the hand of a group of soldiers who feared punishment because they had killed his kinsman, the governor of Syria. Tacitus was succeeded by his praetorian prefect (and possibly half-brother) Florian, but he soon had to contend with a rival candidate, Probus. While Florian seemed to have the upper hand at first, his army was struck by illness, and he was killed by his own men before it could come to a battle.[49]

Probus' reign, which lasted from 276 to 282, was dominated by various campaigns. He first went to Gaul, defeating some leftover Scythian raiders on the way. In the wake of the disappearance of the Gallic Empire various groups of 'barbarians' made attacks on the province, but Probus seems to have been successful in driving them back. He then went back to the east (possibly after a campaign around the Danube), where he had to put down bands of Isaurian raiders in Asia Minor, while one of his lieutenants put down a revolt in Egypt. Probus then began preparations for Aurelian's stalled invasion of Persia, but the news of a

[48] Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 35.3-5, 7-9; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.13, 9.15.2; Festus, *Brev.* 24.1; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 35.2, 8, 10; Zos. 1.50-62; George 470; Zon. 12.28.

[49] Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 39.5-37.2; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.16; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 36; Zos. 1.63-64; George 471; Zon. 12.29. For the most fanciful description of the 'interregnum', see (naturally) *HA*, *Vit. Tac.* 1-2.

new revolt, that of Proculus and Bonosus in Germany, forced him to return west. Saturninus, the governor of Syria, then put himself forward as a usurper, but he was soon killed by his own men. Probus defeated Proculus and Bonosus, while one of his subordinates quelled unrest in Britain. He then went to the Balkans, where he was killed by his own men. He had made himself unpopular by his stern enforcement of discipline and the forced employment of soldiers in agricultural projects, and the revolt of his praetorian prefect Carus may well have given the soldiers all the incentive they needed, leaving Carus free to assume power.[50]

For the first time since Valerian and Gallienus, the new emperor had sons, and he immediately appointed them as *caesares*. The older son, Carinus, was left behind in Italy, while the younger son, Numerian, went along with his father as he set about on the long-delayed expedition against the Persian Empire. The campaign went well, which undoubtedly owed much to the internal strife that the Sassanids had found themselves in since Shapur II's death around 270. In 283 Carus reached Ctesiphon, and he may have even taken the city. But shortly afterwards he died, struck, as our sources would have it, by a divine thunderbolt; it is perhaps more reasonable to assume that he died either of illness or assassination. Carinus and Numerian automatically succeeded their father, with the latter initiating the retreat from Persian territory. But at some point during the march he was murdered. The culprit was supposedly the praetorian prefect Aper, who tried to have himself elected as emperor. He failed, and was murdered in November 284 by the man who did become emperor, and who may have been the actual ringleader in the plot to assassinate Numerian: the guard tribune Diocles, who assumed the purple under the name Diocletian.[51]

The rise and fall of the tetrarchy

His first task was to take on Carinus. The two armies met at the river Margus (Great Morava) in modern-day Serbia in 285, Carinus having dispatched a pretender called Julianus along the way. Carinus seemed to have the upper hand, but in the midst of battle he was slain by his own prefect, supposedly for seducing the prefect's wife. Diocletian almost immediately appointed his associate Maximian as *caesar*, and promoted him to full *augustus* within the next few years (when exactly this happened is deeply controversial and now impossible to deter-

[50] Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 37.2-4; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.17; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 37; Zos. 1.65-71; George 471-472; Zon. 12.30.

[51] Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 38.1-39.1, 39.13; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.18.1-20.1; Festus, *Brev.* 24.2; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 38.1-5, 39.1; George 472; Zon. 12.30.

mine). While Diocletian went off to campaign on the Danube, Maximian was sent to Gaul to deal with the 'Bagaudae', a group of marauding peasants. Maximian subdued the Bagaudae with ease and also repulsed a 'barbarian' raid across the Rhine. But these early successes where soon overshadowed by the revolt of Carausius.[52]

Carausius was a naval officer in command of a fleet charged with protecting the Gallic and British coasts from sea-borne 'barbarian' raiders. He appears to have had some kind of quarrel with Maximian about the distribution of booty (which seems rather similar to what happened with Postumus), and when he heard that Maximian planned to have him executed he declared himself emperor in mid-286, winning the loyalty of Britain and parts of Gaul. Maximian was initially too occupied to deal with him, as there was a new raid across the Rhine in early 287. Maximian defeated the invaders, even organising a brief expedition across the Rhine, and then set about constructing a fleet to take on Carausius, with a Panegyric delivered to him in 289 expressing great confidence in Maximian's upcoming defeat of "that pirate" (*ille pirata*). The complete silence on this matter in the next Panegyric, delivered in 291, gives a pretty clear indication of how well the naval expedition went.[53]

Diocletian, who had spent the last few years campaigning in Arabia and on the Danube, realised the regime was in crisis, and summoned Maximian to Italy for a conference, which was held in late 290. While we cannot know what exactly was decided, it probably had much to do with the radical restructuring of government that was openly announced in early 293. It was then that Diocletian and Maximian both invested one of their subordinates, Galerius in the east and Constantius in the west, with the purple as *caesares*. There were now four emperors, two *augusti* assisted by two *caesares*. The tetrarchy had been established.[54]

While Diocletian went on yet another Danubian campaign and Galerius suppressed a revolt in Egypt, Constantius succeeded in recapturing the parts of Gaul held by Carausius, who was around this time slain and replaced by his subordinate Allectus. After a few years of preparation, during which Constantius also found himself having to fight 'barbarians', a new expedition against Britain led by Constantius and his praetorian prefect Asclepiodotus succeeded in defeating Allectus in 296. Maximian had moved to the south, where, in the period

[52] *Pan. Lat.* X 4-9; Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 39.9-12, 14-19; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.19.2-9.20; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 38.6-8; Zon. 12.31.
[53] *Pan. Lat.* X 4.3-4 (cf. *Pan. Lat.* XI); Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 39.20-21; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.21.
[54] *Pan. Lat.* X 5-9, 12-13; Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 39.24-30; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.22.1.

following the recapture of Britain, he occupied himself with campaigns in Spain and Africa.[55] War also loomed in the east, where the Sassanids had once again been united under a strong monarch, Narseh. The inevitable conflict started in 296, with Galerius taking charge on the Roman side. After suffering an initial defeat against Narseh, Galerius received reinforcements from Diocletian, and a second campaign in late 297 and 298 resulted in a resounding Roman victory, with the resulting peace treaty being highly advantageous. While this war went on, there had been another revolt in Egypt, probably related to Diocletian's taxation measures, which was crushed by the senior *augustus* in person.[56]

The following few years appear to have been relatively tranquil, with the emperors mostly being occupied with economic reforms. The next significant event would occur in 303, when Diocletian, allegedly under strong encouragement from Galerius, issued a series of edicts that proclaimed a number of repressive measures against the Christians. This was to be the most vehement of the attempts of the Roman government to stamp out the increasingly popular religion, but the edicts were enforced far less enthusiastically in the western half of the empire; Constantius in particular only took minimal measures against the Christians living in his territory. The persecution would spasmodically continue across the empire until 313, but it would achieve little.[57]

It was during his twentieth year as emperor, 304, that Diocletian caught a serious illness, which continued until early 305. He survived, but was apparently very much weakened by his ordeal, and he decided, again allegedly due to intimidation by Galerius, to abdicate. Whether it was indeed a sudden decision or part of a plan conceived long before Diocletian's illness, he and a reluctant Maximian both stepped down as *augustus* on the 1st of May 305, with Constantius and Galerius succeeding them. While Maximian and Constantius both had adult sons, Maxentius and Constantine respectively, who would have been obvious candidates for the position of *caesar*, those jobs were taken by two close associates of Galerius

[55] *Pan. Lat.* VIII 6-7, 12; Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 39.39-43; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.22.2-9.23; Zon. 12.31.

[56] Lact., *DMP* 9.5-7; Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 39.23, 39.35-38 Eutr., *Brev.* 9.24-9.25.1; Festus, *Brev.* 25; Zon. 12.31-32; most of our information regarding the internal problems of the Sassanids and Narseh's rise to power comes fron the fragmentary inscription that he had erected at Paikuli (= Frye (1983) app. 5); see also Potter (2004) 290-292; *frag.* 13 and 14 of the sixth-century historian Petrus Patricius (= Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 131-133 nos. 5.4.2-3) describe the negotiations and the treaty that concluded the Persian war.

[57] Lact., *DMP* 9-16; Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* 8.1.1-16.2; Zon. 12.32.

called Severus and Maximinus Daja; this, too, Galerius had supposedly forced upon the ailing Diocletian.[58]

The 'second tetrarchy' would have stability only briefly. In 306 Constantius died of illness while campaigning in Britain, and his army proclaimed Constantine, who had escaped from Galerius' court a few months earlier to be with his father, *augustus* on the spot. This could still be solved with negotiation: Galerius accepted him into the college of emperors, but only as *caesar*, with Severus becoming the *augustus* of the west. Far graver, however, was the revolt of Maxentius, who declared himself emperor in Rome with support from the Praetorian Guard and easily persuaded his father to return from retirement at his side. Severus marched against him, but his soldiers proved unwilling to fight against their old commander, and the abandoned Severus was forced to surrender himself. To follow up on this success, Maximian travelled to the court of Constantine and succeeded in arranging a marriage between the *caesar* and his daughter in 307, thus ensuring that Constantine would not attack him. An attack by Galerius that same year proved ineffective, and as Galerius found himself losing control over his army he was forced to retreat. The stakes were raised even higher when Maxentius had Severus murdered shortly afterwards.[59]

However, in 308 Galerius ingeniously managed to turn the tables on his opponents. He assumed the consulship with as his colleague no one less that Diocletian, against whom the soldiers would have been even less willing to fight than against Maximian. Galerius' master stroke resulted in major problems for Maximian and Maxentius, and it was at this point that father and son fell out with each other. This culminated in an attempt by Maximian to strip his son of his power that failed miserably, forcing him to flee to Constantine. All aside from Maxentius now realised that only negotiation could resolve the crisis, resulting in a conference in Carnuntum. Constantine and Maximinus Daja, who had as of yet played no part in the power struggles, remained *caesares*, but were permitted to call themselves 'Sons of the *augusti*'. Maximian was once again forced into retirement, with Licinius, an associate of Galerius, being declared *augustus* of the west, even though Maxentius remained in con-

[58] Lact., *DMP* 17-20; Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 39.48-40.1; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.27; Zos. 2.8.1; Zon. 12.32.
[59] Lact., *DMP* 24-27; *Origo* 4, 6-7, 9-10; Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 40.2-9; Eutr., *Brev.* 10.1-2; Zos. 2.8.2-10.3; Zon. 12.33-34; the union between Maximian and Constantine is the subject of *Pan Lat.* VII.

trol of Italy. The authority of Diocletian ensured everyone's acceptance, but he would make no further impact upon the historical record after this.[60]

All non-retired emperors, legitimate or otherwise, spent the next few years campaigning against external enemies, with Maxentius also being forced to tackle the usurpation of a certain Alexander in Africa. In 310 Maximian made one last attempt to seize power, but it failed and Constantine forced him to commit suicide.[61] It was shortly after Galerius' death after a painful illness in 311 that open conflict would finally break out. After Constantine and Licinius had agreed upon an alliance against Maxentius and Maximinus Daja, who had previously joined forces, Constantine invaded Italy in 312 and scored a number of spectacular successes against the strongholds of Maxentius. He finally defeated him in the famous battle of the Milvian Bridge and thus became emperor over the west, while Maxentius drowned in the Tiber. It was also at this time that Constantine declared himself a Christian. Licinius, in turn, managed to take control of the east by defeating Maximinus Daja in several battles. Daja was eventually driven to suicide.[62]

Only Constantine and Licinius now remained, and they too would soon come into conflict with each other. The first war would break out in 316, allegedly due to religious differences but more probably due to incompatible dynastic ambitions. Constantine won, which allowed him to add large parts of Licinius' territory to his own. A second final war would erupt in 324 due to disagreement on how to deal with a 'barbarian' incursion over the Danube, and Constantine was again the victor. Licinius was stripped of his power but spared, only to be executed shortly afterwards on charges of conspiracy. Constantine was now sole ruler over the Roman Empire.[63]

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[60] Lact., *DMP* 28-29.2; *Origo* 8; Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 40.21; Eutr., *Brev.* 10.3.1, 10.4.1; Zos. 2.10.4-7. There are conflicting traditions about Diocletian's death (which was somewhere between 311 and 313): he either committed suicide out of fear for the remaining emperors (Lact., *DMP* 42; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 39.7) or died peacefully of old age (Eutr., *Brev.* 9.28); Zonaras (12.33) reports a story in which Diocletian and Maximian are executed by decree of the senate, but as the manner of Maximian's death is well attested (even if what precisely happened is obscure), this story is probably best left ignored.

[61] For Maximian's plot, see *Pan. Lat.* VI 15-20; Lact., *DMP* 29.3-30.6; Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 40.22; Eutr., *Brev.* 10.3.2; Zos. 2.11; Zon. 12.33; most of our information about Alexander and his revolt comes from Zos. 2.12.

[62] *Pan. Lat.* XII 2-17; *Pan. Lat.* IV 21-30.2; Lact., *DMP* 43-47, 49; Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* 9.9.1-10.6; idem, *Vit. Cons.* 1.37.1-38.4; *Origo* 12-13 Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 40.23-41.1; Eutr., *Brev.* 10.4.2-4; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 40.7-8; Zos. 2.14-17; Zon. 13.1.

[63] Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* 10.8.2-7, 9.1-5; idem, *Vit. Cons.* 2.6-10, 16-18; *Origo* 14-29; Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 41.2-9; Eutr., *Brev.* 10.5-10.6.1; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 41.5-7; Zos. 2.18-28; Zon. 13.1.

2. Foreign warfare

The Roman empire as an island surrounded by a seas of 'barbarians' eager to strip it bare has long been a popular view of late antiquity in particular, but also of the third-century 'crisis'. On its two major frontiers, the empire had to contend with powerful new enemies: 'barbarian' groupings like the Goths, Alemanni and Franks in the north, and the aggressive Sassanid dynasty of Persians in the east. They would invade the empire time and time again, and successive emperors would prove powerless to stop them. "In short, enemies along two fronts penetrated the frontiers at will, sacking cities in the very heart of the empire and pillaging to the gates of Rome."[64] It was the achievement of the tetrarchs that they restored Rome's dominance, "culminating in victories on all frontiers and all enemies, and most important, the consolidation of these gains in a far more formidable scheme of defences, and the return of real military and civil security for the first time in over half a century".[65]

Of course, this image owes much to the restorative propaganda of the tetrarchs, who had a penchant for rewriting history in order to aggrandize themselves at the expense of emperors who reigned during the 'crisis'.[66] In addition, later sources would often inflate defeats to denigrate the suffering emperor, and, inversely, exaggerate victories to exalt historiographical heroes.[67] Nevertheless, not all propaganda has to be untrue – if the tetrarchic era actually was an improvement with regard to external warfare, Diocletian and his colleagues would have had good reason to boast of their success. Throughout this chapter we will put this idea to the test. There will be separate sections for the northern 'barbarians' and the Persians, while the southern and Arabian frontiers, on which our sources have little to say, will all the same receive attention in their own separate area.

'Barbarians' at the gates

If there is one word that the average person will associate with the fall of Rome, it is undoubtedly 'barbarian'. The idea of massive tidal waves of invaders continually smashing into the empire is powerful, and it seems doubtful that it will ever disappear from the public con-

[64] Ando (2012) 146; the recentness of this work shows just how persistent this viewpoint is.
[65] Williams (1985) 61.
[66] Something that Potter (2004) 294-298 lays particular emphasis on, citing *Pan. Lat.* VIII 10.1-4 as a notable example.
[67] J. Wilkes, 'Provinces and frontiers' in: *CAH* XII (2005), 212-268, 222, 224.

sciousness completely. Among historians, however, this traditional view has been subject to considerable revision. That the numbers of invaders reported in the sources are undoubtedly vastly exaggerated was realised already by Gibbon.[68]

But their characterisation has also changed completely. While Gibbon still saw them as bloodthirsty savages, throughout the last few decades an alternative picture has been proposed by authors like Thomas Burns, John Drinkwater and Michael Kulikowski: the relationship between the 'barbarians' and Rome was generally characterised by peaceful coexistence with only occasional violence. That they became a problem during the crisis was the result of a more violent ethos provoked by Rome itself, and even then their incursions never came close to threatening the empire's survival. Nevertheless, emperors eager for glory would describe the 'barbarians' as a clear and present danger to Roman security (Drinkwater's 'bogeymen'), allowing them to take much credit for victories over comparatively easy targets.[69] So while a good number of incursions during the 'crisis' have been outlined in the previous chapter, it is worth wondering how damaging these were in terms of military casualties, effectiveness of sieges and long-term damage.

If we start with 'barbarian' effectiveness in the field, there is at least one notable example where the 'barbarians' living across the Danube, indiscriminately called 'Scythians' by our sources, showed themselves highly effective: Decius' campaigns against them in 250-251, leading to his defeat and death at Abrittus. And even if we accept that Decius had scored some successes against the invaders prior to his final defeat, then it is still remarkable to see that the 'Scythians' did not immediately give up as would have been the case in previous times, but continued their raiding activities.[70]

An attempt to deflate the consequences of Abrittus has been made by Strobel, who notes that the *Oracle*, our only contemporary source, barely mentions it, that Gallus succeeded in restoring peace by bribing off the 'Scythians' and that later authors who describe Abrittus and its aftermath in bleak terms may well have been influenced by the catastrophic

[68] Gibbon (Bury ed. 1897-1900) 1: 236.

[69] Burns (2003) 248-308; J. F. Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome 213-496: Caracalla to Clovis* (Oxford 2007); M. Kulikowski, *Rome's Gothic Wars: From the Third Century to Alaric* (Cambridge 2007), 34-41.

[70] A Roman defeat at Beroea is only mentioned in the *Getica* (102) of the sixth-century historian Jordanes and George 459 (citing Dexippus); the defeat at Beroea is accepted by Potter (2004) 246 and Drinkwater (2005) 39, however, it seems odd that Zosimus (1.23) and Zonaras (12.20) do not mention it and actually state that Decius scored some initial successes against the 'Scythians', although it is possible that they have suppressed the defeat. A second defeat, during which Decius' elder son was killed (rather than dying at Abrittus, as George 459 and Zon. 12.20 have it), is recorded by Aurelius Victor (*De Caes.* 29.5) and copied into Jordanes (*Getica* 103), but this story is problematic (so Potter (1990) 283). See also Wilkes (2005) 225.

Roman defeat against the Goths at Adrianople in 378.[71] But this is unconvincing. First, as Potter has pointed out, this section of the *Oracle* exemplifies the fact that its authors did not care much for non-eastern events: "the scope of this narration is one of the most striking illustrations of the author's lack of interest in and ignorance of western affairs." Second, our one contemporary source for Adrianople, Ammianus Marcellinus, does indeed, as Strobel notes, describe Decius' defeat as a similar catastrophe, but this is intended to put Adrianople into perspective rather than to overdramatize Abrittus.[72]

Finally, that Gallus bought off the 'Scythians' rather than trying to avenge the loss at Abrittus is itself telling of the weak Roman position at that point. The fact that the raiders would soon be back for more (which would lead directly to Gallus' downfall) also indicates that Gallus' arrangement was rather unsatisfactory. An alternative theory proposed by Potter, that the Scythian raids were a minor irritant made bigger by Decius' personal mistakes, is more plausible, but depends on acceptance of Potter's view of Decius as a complete incompetent: "The evidence of his actions suggests that he was deeply conservative, that he was deeply pious, that he possessed a ferocious temper, and that he was quite stupid."[73] Overall, it remains reasonable to see Abrittus and the surrounding campaign as an important indication of the fact that the 'Scythians' had become stronger.

If we turn to the 'barbarians' on the Rhine, then there is also one case were they are said to have caused major problems to the Roman army: the raids into Italy in the early part of Aurelian's reign. While Aurelian eventually managed to repulse the invaders, he is said to have suffered an initial severe defeat by at least one source, which also directly connects this defeat with the revolt in Rome. Unfortunately this source is the always-problematic *HA*, but as the uprising in Rome and the construction of the Aurelian wall shortly afterwards are well attested, it would seem that the author has something useful to offer in this case.[74]

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[71] Strobel (1993) 231-231; with *Orac. Sib.* XIII. 100-102.

[72] Potter (1990) 148; Amm. Marc. 31.5.10-17; due to the absence of a comprehensive third-century narrative that predates Adrianople it cannot be said how Abrittus was viewed before then.

[73] Potter (2004) 244-245; with Potter (1990) 241 for the quote; for a reaction against Potter's generally rather negative view of third-century emperors, see K. E. T. Butcher, 'Imagined emperors: personalities and failures in the third century' *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 9 (1996), 516-527.

[74] *HA*, *V. Aurel.* 18.3, 21.1-4; *V. Aurel.* 18.4-20.20.8 deals with the ensuing revolt at Rome. The tale of the defeat is believed by Watson (1999) 50-51 and Potter (2004) 269; it is denied by Drinkwater (2007) 76-78, who, I think, places insufficient weight on the disturbances in Rome caused by the defeat and the fact that Aurelian felt the need to initiate construction on the Aurelian Wall afterwards. Drinkwater's view of the wall a symbol with little practical use is controversial (cf. H. W. Dey, *the Aurelian Wall and the Fashioning of Imperial Rome, A.D. 271-855* (Cambridge 2011), 83-84); the flaws in its construction (on which see Watson (1999) 150-151) can be the

Admittedly, these defeats were still rare occurrences, and if the Romans could muster enough forces they still seem to have been able to repulse the 'barbarians' without too much trouble. But we should not forget that, as the large number of raids listed in the first chapter shows, the 'barbarians' had also become more skilled at evading the Roman forces.[75] It therefore seems fair to conclude that the military effectiveness of 'barbarians increased considerably during the 'crisis', and that this made them a greater danger than they had previously been. But what of their skill at sieges? That is what we will look at now, although the complete lack of information of 'barbarian' sieges in the western part of the empire means that we have to focus on the east.

We know that various cities fell to the 'barbarians'. Two fragments of Dexippus (a portion found in Syncellus and his own speech to the Athenians) tell us that the Macedonian city of Philippopolis fell, and that Athens was also sacked.[76] The descriptions of the 'Scythian' wars found in Zosimus confirm these captures and add several others, and in general lay much emphasis on the devastation caused by 'Scythian' attacks; Syncellus also list a number of Greek and Asian cities that were supposedly sacked by 'Scythians' in the late 260's, although this list makes no topographical sense.[77]

But there is good reason for thinking that the general picture given by Zosimus is exaggerated. Other fragments of Dexippus deal with the sieges of three cities: Marcianopolis (which lay on the Balkans), Philippopolis (an attempt that precedes its fall) and Side (which lay in the south of Asia Minor). The fragments can be summarized as follows: the 'Scythians' lay siege to the city, make several attempts to storm it that all end in miserable failure, and finally give up and move on to somewhere else.[78] These are certainly not the kind of tales one expects to find among the surviving material of the sole surviving contemporary historian from the worst of the 'crisis'.

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result of inexperience rather than a lax attitude, and the walls would prove effective enough to protect Maxentius from Galerius in 307 (so Lact., *DMP* 27.2).

[75] Cf. Potter (2004) 128, who notes that the effectiveness of the Roman army depended to a large extent upon the willingness of its enemies to frontally attack it, which they proved less and less willing to do.

[76] George 459; Dexippus F 26

[77] Zos. 1.26.1-27.1, 31-35, 37, 43; George 467 (listing Corinth, Sparta and Argos, which are not mentioned by Zosimus); the capture of Athens is also reported by Zon. 12.26 and corroborated by the archaeological record (on which see F. Millar, 'P. Herennius Dexippus: The Greek World and the Third-Century Invasions' *Journal of Roman Studies* 59 (1969) 1-2, 12-29, 27). For the problem with George's list, see S. Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men and Gods in Asia Minor* (Oxford 1993) 1: 235.

[78] Dexippus F 22 (but cf. Jordanes, *Getica* 92, who says that the inhabitants had to buy the attackers off), 24, 27.

It should be noted that these fragments all come from the Byzantine *Excerpt on tactics*, which would hardly have included accounts of 'Scythian' victories. Nevertheless, these scattered accounts of sieges do deserve more attention than they have previously been given, especially as the 'Scythians' have been seen as the most dangerous 'barbarians'.[79] The only previous author who has comprehensively studied them in order to arrive at conclusions concerning the 'Scythian' attacks is Millar, who notes that these fragments show a willingness on the part of the empire's Greek citizens to defend themselves if the need arose.[80] But the ease with which the defenders seemingly managed to sabotage and destroy the 'Scythian' siege equipment on multiple occasions also suggests another important conclusion: that 'Scythians' were not very good at sieges.[81] This is corroborated by an inscription from Didyma in Asia Minor that alludes to a failed 'Scythian' attack on a fortified temple.[82]

As such, it may be suggested that we should place little trust in the dramatic tales by Zosimus of 'Scythians' taking one city after another. The examples where cities are actually named should not be set aside so easily, but these examples are not all that common. And our sources often give mitigating circumstances in these cases: Philippopolis only fell because of betrayal from within, the fortress of Pityus held out until its commander, Successianus, had to be reassigned to another location and the 'Scythians' only managed to take Trapezus and Chalcedon because their respective garrisons put in a poor effort.[83] That the account of Syncellus is topographically problematic has already been noted.

It must be restated that the above only relates to events in the east, as there is simply no concrete information for the west. But the fact that the rule of the Gallic emperors was supported by the general populace until the victory of Aurelian, as well as the presence of the Bagaudae in later years (we will come back to both in the next chapter), shows that there, too, people were willing to drive back invaders if necessary.[84] And yet, it should not

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[79] See e.g. Drinkwater (2005) 43.

[80] Millar (1969) 24-29; Potter (1990) 85-86 also discusses the fragments, but only as part of his critique of Dexippus' value as a historian.

[81] This is not really a novel idea, but most authors seem content to make an offhand remark about 'barbarian' ineffectiveness at sieges, without interacting with the material provided by Dexippus (e.g. Burns (2003) 280).

[82] *SEG* IV (1929) 467.

[83] For betrayal at Philippolis, see Jordanes, *Getica* 103; for Pityus, see Zos. 1.32.1-33.1; for Trapezus and Chalcedon, see Zos. 1.33-34.

[84] I owe the view of the Gallic Empire and the Bagaudae as people taking the defence of their territory into their own hands to R. MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire* (Cambridge 1966), 211-213; contra Millar (1969) 26-29, whose suggestion that civil resistance in the west was less common compared to the east fails to take MacMullen's idea into account.

be forgotten that some cities were sacked, and this brings us to the third aspect of 'barbarian' incursions: the extent of the damage that they inflicted.

Answering that question conclusively is impossible, but in order to arrive at an approximation it is necessary to turn away from the dramatized picture painted by the literary sources to overviews of the archaeological material. Despite the problems of interpretation posed by the archaeological material, the available overviews of the western provinces – those available in the sadly unfinished series *History of the Provinces of the Roman Empire*, those in the collection of King and Henig and those undertaken by individual authors like Millar, Mitchell and Witschel – seem to be in general agreement that the damage caused by invaders differed strongly from area to area and from decade to decade. Thus, while areas like German provinces and Noricum (roughly present-day Switzerland) where hit hard repeatedly from the 260's onwards, other provinces, such as Italy, Gaul and Spain, were only partly affected by the crisis, and Pannonia experienced trouble intermittently throughout the 250's but remained relatively tranquil afterwards, while Britain was probably only troubled towards the end of the century, and Dalmatia barely ever experienced any trouble at all.[85] In addition, we should also remember that, as we saw in the first chapter, there appear to have been no major incursions across the Rhine throughout the 250's.

The only real bone of contention is the situation in Gaul after the unification of the empire. It has traditionally been held that, with the disappearance of the special attention of the Gallic emperors for the province, the 'barbarians' attacked in great numbers and succeeded in causing great damage before being driven off by Probus.[86] However, more recent

[85] On the German provinces and Noricum, see G. Alföldy, *Noricum* (trans. A. R. Birley; London/Boston 1974), 169-171; Witschel (1999) 338-361 (notably the only area in the west where he would agree that the situation was dire in the third century). On Italy, see Millar (1981) 144-145; Witschel (1999) 239-261. On the dichotomy between the disturbed north and reasonably tranquil south of Gaul, see Witschel (1999) 307-337; his conclusions for the south are supported by the earlier work of A. L. F. Rivet, *Gallia Narbonensis: southern France in Roman times. With a chapter on Alpes Maritimae* (London 1988), 93. On Spain, see S. J. Keay, 'The Conventus Tarraconensis in the third century A. D.: crisis or change?' in: King and Henig (1981) 451-486; Witschel (1999) 262-264. On Pannonia, see A. Mócsy, *Pannonia* (Stuttgart 1962), 565-567. On Britain, see S. S. Frere, *Britannia: a history of Roman Britain* (London 1987), 172-173; Witschel (1999) 362-374; cf. Casey (1994) 100-103 for the theory that piratical raids later in the century can help to explain British support for Carausius. On Dalmatia, see J. J. Wilkes, *Dalmatia* (1969), 416.

[86] Our sources for the incursions and Probus' victories are Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 37.3; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.17.1; *HA*, *Vit. Prob.* 13.5-14.7; Zos. 1.67-68; Zon. 12.30. For modern historians who agree with this picture, see J. F. Drinkwater, *The Gallic Empire. Separation and continuity in the north-western provinces of the Roman Empire* (Stuttgart 1987), 201-202; an even more bleak view is offered by E. Wightman, 'The fate of Gallo-Roman villages in the third century' in: King and Henig (1981) 235-243, who suggests that these invasions meant the beginning of the Middle Ages in Gaul; the essential truthfulness of the literary account is still accepted by G. Kreucher, *Der Kaiser Marcus Aurelius Probus und seine Zeit* (Stuttgart 2003), 135-136.

authors have not unreasonably pointed out that the evidence upon which this assumption rests is questionable: all our literary sources saw Probus as a hero and were consequently inclined to exaggerate the extent of his victories, and modern historians have reinforced this view by seeing confirmation in the archaeological record. In addition, the rapid construction of walls around Gallic cities and the many coin hoards that appear in Gaul during this period may have more to do with the economic situation – specifically the decree of the Central government that Gallic Empire coinage no longer had any value – than with fear for 'barbarians'.[87]

On the, as the literary sources would have it, much-suffering Balkan provinces and Asia Minor (the latter being attacked not just by 'Scythians' but also by Persians) less work has been done. But there are still some instructive comments: Millar has noted that the Balkan provinces only show signs of intermittent heavy raiding, suggesting that 'Scythian' incursions there were limited to the occasions known from the sources.[88] In addition, for Asia Minor Mitchell has noted that many cities show signs of damage and constructions of emergency fortifications, and there are several inscriptions of people who claim that they had been in 'Scythian' captivity. It is also at this time that *correctores* (ἐπανορθωτοί) appear, who, as their title indicates, had the task of 'putting things right'; Priscus, the brother of Philip, and Odaenathus also held this position. On the other hand, he notes that the countryside seems to have held out quite well.[89] However, Mitchell seems too determined to see the third century as a 'crisis' when he wants to redate an inscription from 330 to the third century based only on the fact that the phrase "saviour of the province" (l.3-4: σωτῆρα τῶν ἐθνῶν) also occurs on two third-century inscriptions.[90]

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[87] Wilkes (2005) 222; Witschel (1999) 97; that the scope of the Probic incursions are likely vastly exaggerated was suggested already by Gibbon (Bury ed. 1897-1900) 1: 330. The idea that the construction of walls in this period was a response to the raids has recently been defended by Kreucher (2003) 143-144, pointing to the apparent hastiness with which these walls were constructed; but cf. Dey (2011) 124-125: the building of walls came too late to fit with the 'crisis'. For the alternative hoard explanation, see S. Estiot, 'The later third century' in: W. E. Metcalf ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Coinage* (Oxford 2012), 538-560, 551.

[88] Millar (1981) 216-217, 236-238.

[89] Mitchell (1993) 1: 227-240. For captured people, see (in addition to the documents cited by Mitchell) *AE* (1949) 255 from Lydia in 263; *AE* (1895) 58 is an example from Bulgaria dating from as early as 238. There are two Asian *correctores* known by name: Aurelius Appius Sabinus during the 250's (*ILS* 9467 l.3: τῆς Ἀσίας ἐπανορθωτής) and Titus Oppius Aelianus Asclepiodotus during the 280's (C. Roueché ed., *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity: The Late Roman and Byzantine Inscriptions* (London 1988), no. 7 l.8-9: ἐπανορθωτὴν Ἀσίας).

[90] Roueché (1988) no. 14; Mitchell (1993) 1: 228, citing *SEG* XXVII (1977) 845 and E. Bosch ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Ankara in Altertum* (Ankara 1967), 351 no.289.

To summarize, therefore, while the 'barbarians' proved able during the 'crisis' to elude and even occasionally defeat the Romans in the field, to the average inhabitant of the empire things may not have been quite so bleak: we have good reason to question the effectiveness of the 'barbarians' at sieges, and how much damage they inflicted varied between time and place. Nevertheless, we have also seen that the 'barbarians' did sometimes inflict considerable damage. It is also important to remember that the empire had to abandon its territories across the Rhine and Danube at this time. The withdrawal from the so-called *Agri Decumates* (the German areas between the Rhine and the Danube) might have been undertaken by Postumus because of his unwillingness to defend it against Gallienus rather than 'barbarian' invaders, and the area was not that significant anyway. But Aurelian's surrender of Dacia appears to have been sheer necessity.[91] We should not, therefore, take the downplaying of the 'barbarian' menace compared to the period that preceded the 'crisis' too far. But what of the tetrarchic era that followed it?

The first thing to note about the activities of 'barbarians' from the accession of Diocletian onward is that we hear little about them. It is known from documentary sources that the tetrarchs regularly campaigned along, and occasionally over, the Rhine and Danube.[92] But these events only rarely ever appear in our literary sources, and when they do it is only in the Panegyrics that we get some information about why conflict broke out. Thus, as we saw in the first chapter, the Panegyric held before Maximian around 289 describes how a large conglomerate of various 'barbarian' groupings invaded the empire shortly after the suppression of the Bagaudae, only for Maximian to massacre them and move across the Rhine for a punitive expedition, with a later raid on Trier being suppressed by Maximian in person. In addition, in later Panegyrics both Constantius and Constantine are said to have campaigned against Franks on a few occasions in response to attacks.[93] But our other sources seem content to state that the tetrarchs won many victories over 'barbarians' and

[91] For the theory about the *Agri Decumates*, see Drinkwater (2007); for the withdrawal from Dacia, see Watson (1999) 155-157; Potter (2004) 270.

[92] The tables published in Barnes (1982) 254-258 provide a catalogue of campaigns from 284 to 337 based upon the available evidence.

[93] *Pan. Lat.* X 5, 6, VII 4.2, XII 22.3, VI 6.3-4, 10.1-2, 21.2 (cf. Lact., *DMP* 29.3-6), IV 17.1-2; Drinkwater (2007) 181-194 argues that most of these attacks were only very minor events that the various emperors eagerly used as an excuse for punitive expeditions. 'Barbarians' are also noticeably absent from the list of reasons wrongly given by Victor (*De Caes.* 39.20-24) and Eutropius (*Brev.* 9.22.1) for the establishment of the tetrarchy.

leave it at that. The general impression conveyed is thus one of mostly compliant 'barbarians', a sharp contrast to the bleak picture of invasions set up for the 'crisis'.[94]

Something that we do hear plenty about in this period is the restoration of peace with regard to external enemies by the tetrarchs. Previous emperors had already proclaimed themselves to be "the restorer of the world" on their coins. The most notable example is the series of coins of Aurelian issued after the reunification of the empire, but it also appears as early as 253/243 on a coin of Gallienus.[95] But the tetrarchs would take the restorative theme even further. The Panegyrics naturally have much to say on this theme,[96] but it appears in other sources as well.

One inscription calls Diocletian "the founder of eternal peace", another calls Maximian "great, invincible, and far braver that all previous emperors", a third calls both "the restorers of the whole world" and a fourth describes the tetrarchs establishing a military camp "after defeating the nations of the barbarians, and confirming the tranquillity of their world", while a papyrus containing a poem says of Diocletian that "he extinguished the memory of former grief for any of those still suffering in grim bonds in a lightless place" and also speaks of the "light of a golden age". The most striking fact is the early date of some of these comments: the third inscription comes from 288, while the papyrus may date from as early as 286.[97]

But they may have had good reason for doing so. After all, that there is so little information on 'barbarian' incursions is significant in and of itself, and it is also worth noting that Roman-'barbarian' conflict now often took place beyond Rome's borders.[98] Indeed, perhaps the most telling sign of the comparative tranquillity is the fact that, with the exception of a 'barbarian' raid in 323 that Constantine managed to exploit as an excuse to attack Licinius and possibly a Frankish incursion that may have taken place at the time of Constan-

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[94] Eutr., *Brev.* 9.25.2; Zos. 2.8.2; Zon. 12.31.

[95] *RIC* V2 Aurelian 291-306, Gallienus 234.

[96] The earliest example, and one of the most notable ones, is *Pan. Lat.* X 1.5: "one might justifiably call you [Maximian] and your brother [Diocletian] the founders of the Roman Empire, for you are, what is almost the same thing, its restorers" (*merito quiuis te tuumque fratrem Romani imperii dixerit conditores: estis enim, quod est proximum, restitutores*; trans. Nixon); see also the previously cited *Pan. Lat.* VIII 10.1-4.

[97] *ILS* 618 l. 4-5 (*fundatori pacis aeternae*), 619 l. 1-3 (*magno et invicto ac super omnes retro principes fortissimo*), 617 l. 6 (*totius orbis resitutores*), 640 (*post debellatas hostium gentis confirmata orbi suo tranquilitate in aeternum*; I owe the translation to Potter (2004) 296); *P. Oxy.* LXIII 4352 l. 21 (μνημοσύνην δ᾽ ἀχέων προτέρων σβέσε[ν]), 29-30 (φωτ̣[ὶ] χρυσείης γενεῆς).

[98] Something that *Pan. Lat.* X 7-9 naturally makes much of.

tine's invasion of Italy,[99] the 'barbarians' do not seem to have taken advantage of the internal conflicts in the empire between 307 and 324.

One theory sees the actions of the tetrarchs as the main factor: it was the strengthening of the frontiers that kept raiders out.[100] However, it may well be that the scope of Diocletian's frontier reforms was really rather limited, and that authors tend to overstate the difference between the frontier installations of the Principate on the one hand and the Dominate on the other hand.[101] I am inclined to think that the answer can be found in a Panegyric held before Maximian in the early 290's. Having noted earlier that Diocletian and Maximian "have transplanted civil wars to races worthy of that madness",[102] the speaker goes on to give a general overview of the state of things across Rome's various borders:

> "The unruly Moorish tribe rages against its own flesh, the Goths utterly destroy the Burgundians, and again the Alamanni wear arms for the conquered, and the Tervingi too, another group of Goths, with the help of a band of Taifali join battle with the vandals and Gepids. Ormies with the Saci and Rufii and Geli as allies assaults the Persians themselves and the king himself, and respects neither his king's majesty nor his brother's claims on his loyalty. The Burgundians have taken over the land of the Alamanni, but obtained it at great cost to themselves. The Alamanni have lost the land but seek to regain it. Oh great power of your deity! Not only those and other races, terrible in strength of arms, yield to their confidence, armed for the ruin of barbarism, but even those Blemmyes, I hear, used only to light arrows, seek arms which they do not have against the Ethiopians, and join murderous battle with as it were naked hatred."[103]

While it would be easy to dismiss the above as mere propaganda, we know that at the very least the part about internal unrest among the Persians is true, and the idea of wars among 'barbarians' is corroborated by the statements from Eusebius and the *Origo* that the campaign of Constantine against the 'barbarian' Goths in the 330's was launched when anther group, the Sarmatians, requested Constantine's aid against them.[104] According to Burns, this

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[99] For the raid of 323, see *Origo* 21 (calling the invaders Goths); Zos. 2.21 (calling them Sarmatians); with Barnes (1981) 76-77; Potter (2004) 378-379. For the Franks, see *Pan. Lat.* IV 17.1, with Nixon and Rodgers (1994) 362 n. 76.

[100] Williams (1985) 205; cf. Kulikowski (2007) 78, who sees the tetrarchic reforms in general as the main factor.

[101] B. H. Isaac, *The Limits of Empire: The Roman Army in the East* (Oxford 1990), 162-171, 186-208; cf. Rees (2004) 20-23. See also C. R. Whittaker, 'Grand strategy, or just a grand debate?' in: idem ed., *Rome and its Frontiers* (London/New York 2004), 28-49, 38-39, who mostly agrees but nonetheless sees a slightly more strategic approach to the frontier from Diocletian onwards.

[102] *Pan. Lat.* XI 16.2 (trans. Rodgers): *bella civilian ad gentes illa vesania dignas transtulistis*.

[103] *Pan. Lat.* XI 17 (trans. Rodgers).

[104] Frye (1983) app. 5; Euseb., *Vit. Cons.* 4.6.1; *Origo* 31.

situation was also the result of the actions of the tetrarchs, who succeeded in normalising the relationship between Rome and the 'barbarians' after the aberration of the 'crisis', although the 'barbarian' confederacies were now stronger than they had previously been.[105] But perhaps it is worth wondering if this conflict was not something that arose naturally among the 'barbarians', rather than being the result of Roman management. Still, the overall result seems obvious: the 'barbarians' were far less an issue for the Romans than they had been during the 'crisis'.

But the extent of the recovery is perhaps sometimes taken for granted too easily, and Constantius' struggle against Franks somewhere between 295 and 305 present a good example. According to Eutropius, Constantius was at one point attacked by a group of Franks and nearly killed, but managed to escape into the nearby city of Langres (supposedly by being hauled over the wall by a rope), rallied his forces and crushed the 'barbarians', killing almost 60.000. Drinkwater, who wryly remarks that nearly killing the father of Constantine was as close as the Alemanni ever got to influencing the course of history, notes that incidents like this "should not have happened".[106] But happen they did, and while Drinkwater may well be right in seeing this incident as provoked by Romans and the number of Alemannic soldiers given by Eutropius as an exaggeration, it is nonetheless a sign that dealings with 'barbarians' could occasionally still get out of hand.

The years between 307 and 310 provide another good example of this. All the various contenders for imperial power spent these years campaigning against external enemies, and it has been easy to assume, as Potter has done, that this was a way for the tetrarchs to prove their military credentials against an easy target in preparation for the upcoming battles with their rivals. But it is also possible to see these campaigns in another light, like Kulikowski does when he notes that they could also have been intended to keep the 'barbarians' quiet while the tetrarchs were fighting with each other. Indeed, one can take this even further, as done by Leadbetter, who has noted that Licinius' campaign of 310 delayed his planned attack on Maxentius, which suggests a situation on the Danube that needed checking rather

[105] Burns (2003) 296-308.
[106] Eutr., *Brev.* 9.23; Drinkwater (2007) 187-188; as Drinkwater notes, *Pan. Lat.* VI 6.3 naturally puts a positive spin on the event.

than a convenient excuse to gain an easy victory. Galerius' invasion of Italy in 307 may also have come sooner had it not been necessary for him to campaign on the Danube first.[107]

It must be admitted that it is impossible to gain certainty about the aims of the tetrarchic campaigns. But there are a few other indications in the sources that suggest problems with 'barbarians'. A Panegyric held before Constantine in 324 describes a recent incursion into Spain, and while the dramatic tales of 'barbarians' laying waste to the entire peninsula can be seen as rhetorical exaggeration intended to flatter the emperor that defeated the invaders, it is also known that Maximian had to campaign in Spain in the mid-290's. His adversaries were either Frankish pirates or Mauri from Africa, and it is even possible that he had to contend with both groups at the same time.[108]

If Frankish pirates did manage to get as far as Spain, it indicates that the Roman naval defences were in a poor state at this time. And there is another possible example of seaborne raiders striking at the empire: an inscription found in Sinop, located in the north of Turkey, mentions "enemy attacks", although the fragmentary state of the document means that we do not know what context this was said in. This fits in well with the fact that we know of practically no major naval operations between the battle of Actium in 31 BC and Constantine's final war with Licinius in 324, the only exceptions being Aurelian's recapture of Egypt and Carausius' operations against pirates.[109] And while it might be objected that we do not hear about incursions deep into Roman territory in the literary sources, it should not be forgotten that our only comprehensive source for events in the empire as a whole for this period, Lactantius, had practically no interest in foreign warfare.[110]

That being said, just as it was with the 'barbarian' incursions during the 'crisis', the denigration of the tranquillity during the tetrarchy should not be pushed too far. After all,

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[107] Potter (2004) 351 (cf. Rees (2004) 15, who suggests that the tetrarchs would have fought more external wars if they had not been so busy fighting with each other); Kulikowski (2007) 80-81; Leadbetter (2009) 193-194, 219; cf. T. D. Barnes, 'Imperial Campaigns, A. D. 285-311' *Phoenix* 30 (1976) 2, 174-193, 188-192, who has previously noted that the various external wars in the early fourth century tend to be rather easily overlooked.

[108] For the incursion under Constantine, see *Pan. Lat.* IV 17.1-2; a campaign in Spain by Maximian is attested by the papyrus published in D. L. Page ed., *Select Papyri III: Literary Papyri/Poetry* (London/Cambridge 1941) as no. 135, as well as a tetrarchic palace in Corduba, on which see E. W. Haley, 'A Palace of Maximianus Herculius at Corduba?' *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 101 (1994) 208-214, with 212-213 for a brief discussion of Maximian's enemies during these campaigns.

[109] *ILS* 660 l. 12 (*hostium* (…) *incursio*[*nes*]), 13 (*hosti*[*l*]*it*[*e*]*r adpetito*[*s*]). I owe the point about fleets to D. S. Potter, *Constantine the Emperor* (Oxford 2013), 211.

[110] As noted by Barnes (1976) 174; the two cases of foreign warfare that Lactantius does cover, the war with Narseh (*DMP* 9.5-8) and Constantine's 310 campaign against the Franks (*DMP* 29.3-5) both have some bearing on the internal power struggles that he gives most of his attention to.

the possible examples of 'barbarian' incursions discussed above were only relatively minor affairs; there was never anything like Decius' defeat at Abrittus or the incursions into Italy of the 260's and 270's, otherwise they would surely have appeared somewhere in the literary sources. Overall, therefore, it seems fair to say that the tetrarchic era was an improvement over the 'crisis' in the sense that Rome succeeded in regaining is managerial position towards the 'barbarians', although it should not be forgotten that the tetrarchs were greatly aided by the victories won over 'barbarians' form the late 260's onwards.[111] However, the empire also had to deal with an enemy that could match it in sophistication, to which we will now turn.

King of kings of Iran and non-Iran

While much work has been done to re-evaluate the nature of the 'barbarian' menace, most would still agree that the Sassanid Persians were a major danger to the stability of the empire, with Burns explicitly stating that the Sassanids should take precedence over the 'barbarians' when it comes to the factors that created the 'crisis'. Potter takes this one step further: "The weakening of Persia should not be underestimated as a factor in Rome's recovery in the later third century any more than Persia's strength should be underestimated as a contributory cause of the disorders of the mid-third century."[112] And indeed, if the effectiveness of 'barbarians' at taking cities can be questioned, this is not so for the Persians: the *RGDS* gives two long lists of captured cities during the attacks of 252-253 and 259-260, and frequent mentions of plundered cities in western literary sources show that this is not just propaganda. Their effectiveness in the field is shown by the battle of Barbalissos in 252, where the Persians managed to surprise and slaughter a large Roman force.[113] Finally, while the 'Scythians' succeeded in killing an emperor, the Sassanids managed to capture one.

But there are also reasons for placing less weight upon the rise of the Sassanids. In general, it should not be forgotten that the Sassanid state, while undoubtedly second only to

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[111] Kulikowski (2007) 21 notes that after the defeats suffered against Aurelian and Tacitus in the 270's the 'Scythians' vanish from our sources for a long time (becoming 'Goths' when they return); likewise, Drinkwater (2007) notes that after the incursions of the early 270's the Italian peninsula would remain free from foreign attacks until the fifth century.

[112] Burns (2003) 253; Potter (1990) 62.

[113] For the lists of captured cities, see *RGDS* l. 5-9, 12-15; cf. *Orac. Sib.* XIII.93-96, 125-128; Amm. Marc. 23.5.3; Zos. 1.27.2, 3.32.5; Mal. 12.26; George 466; Zon. 12.23. For Barbalissos, see *RGDS* l. 4; Shapur's figure of 60.000 Roman soldiers may not be quite true, but the defeat was significant enough for Shapur to ravage the eastern provinces seemingly unopposed.

Rome in de Mediterranean world of the third and fourth centuries in terms of military strength and cultural sophistication, could never come close to matching the sheer power of its rival. In particular, it should be noted that none of the various Persian wars in this period ever resulted in major long-term losses of territory, making them actually less significant than the 'barbarians in that respect.[114]

Of course, the fact that there were no major territorial shifts should not obscure the devastation that wars with the Sassanids could cause, so we will now investigate the separate incursions and try to determine just how serious they were. Before doing so, however, it is important to note that up to 252 the region was relatively tranquil. There was the revolt of Jotapianus (which seems to have been a minor affair), and the local Christian communities undoubtedly suffered from the consequences of the Decian edict. But the only conflict with the Sassanids at this time consisted of an abortive attempt by Philip in the mid-240's to regain the few territories that may have been lost during the unsuccessful Persian war of Gordian III in 241-244. Like the previous Roman-Sassanid conflicts, it took place only on the border.[115] This was, however, to change in 252.

Unfortunately, our sources for the Persian attack of 252-253 are so meagre that it is not really possible to add anything to what has already been said about it in the first chapter: that the Sassanids overwhelmed a concentrated Roman force and followed up on this success by splitting up into several groups and laying waste to the eastern provinces, aided by the Antiochene defector Mariades. However, it is at least reasonable to conclude from the complete absence of indications of resistance to the Persians from our sources that the Roman army in the area had been wiped out completely, giving the Persians free reign to plunder.[116] The long-term consequences of this war are even more difficult to determine, as the Persians would attack at least two more times before 259; the first of these was the incursion repulsed by Uraninus Antoninus, while the second resulted in the destruction of the frontier town Dura Europus somewhere between 255 and 257. In fact, given the absence of

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[114] Goldsworthy (2009) 135-137; E. Winter, *Die sāsānidisch-römischen Friedensverträge des 3. Jahrhunderts n. Chr. – ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der außenpolitischen Beziehungen zwischen den beiden Großmächten* (Frankfurt am Main 1988), 114-120, 125; Isaac (1990) 31-33; see also U. Hartmann, *Das Palmyrenische Teilreich* (Stuttgart 2001), 140: the full-scale integration of the entire Roman East into the Persian state would have been beyond the administrative capacities of the Sassanids anyway.

[115] F. Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 B.C.-A.D. 337* (Cambridge 1993), 154-159; Philip's attempt to regain lost territories is reported only by Zon. 12.19, but it may also be one of the factors lying behind the confused tale of conflict in the east during the late 240's found in *Orac. Sib.* XIII.25-49.

[116] Potter (1990) 307-308.

another campaign discussed by Shapur on the *RGDS* until the one of 259-260, it is held by Frye that these incidents were still part of the same campaign started by Shapur in 252, resulting in the following view on the 250's: "the entire period was one of war and pillage in Syria, Cappadocia and Cilicia, with the Romans on the defensive."[117]

But this blatantly ignores the evidence presented by Millar of an at least temporary restoration concurrent with Valerian's arrival in the east in 254. In addition, there are also indications from at least some cities taken by the Persians in 252-253 that life had returned to normal there at that time, despite the devastation that the Sassanids must have undoubtedly caused to these cities and their surroundings.[118] Furthermore, Frye's view is based upon the ideas that Antioch was captured in 256 rather than 253 and that the destruction of Dura should be equated with the capture of Dura listed on the *RGDS*, but Baldus has already demonstrated that both propositions should be rejected.[119] In addition, the fact that the *Oracle* originally ended with the victory of Uranius Antoninus and that the later addition only covers Shapur's attack of 259/260 and the exploits of Odaenathus is surely also significant.[120]

It is therefore better to see the absence of the incident involving Uranius Antoninus and the sack of Dura from the *RGDS* as a sign that these were not part of a full-scale campaign. The victory of Antoninus seems to have halted the renewed attack and would have been quite an embarrassment for Shapur, while the capture of Dura was probably an isolated incident that has been taken out of proportion by its rich archaeological remains, which have given us an unparalleled insight into the horror that siege warfare brought upon the inhabitants of a sacked city.[121]

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[117] R. N. Frye, 'The Sassanians' in: *CAH* XII (2005) 461-480, 469.

[118] Millar (1993) 162-164.

[119] Baldus (1971) 257-259, 263-265. The idea that Antioch was taken in 256 rests upon a passage of the Chronicle of Se'ert, an anonymous medieval Arabic work from which two extracts survive. The Antiochene patriarch Demetri(an)us, who is known to have been in the city is late as 254, was supposedly captured by the Sassanids and brought along to Persia (see Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 297 for the relevant section). But, as Baldus has shown, there is no reason why this could not have happened in 260, and as the next Antiochene patriarch is not attested until then this actually makes more sense. Alternatively, the statement of Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* 7.27.1) that Demetri(an)us died in Antioch suggests that he may never have been captured at all, which means that there is even less reason for postulating a sack to 256; so Potter (1990) 339, who also notes a capture of Antioch in 260 is itself unlikely. As for Dura, there is no reason why it could not have been captured prior to its destruction, and this is in fact what the archaeological record (see Millar (1993) 162) and in particular *P. Dura* 154 (= Dodgeon and Lieu 1991) App. 2 no. 2A) suggest.

[120] *Orac. Sib.* XIII.150-173.

[121] See Goldsworthy (2009) 101-102 for a narrative of the siege and capture of Dura based upon the archaeological remains.

When Shapur attacked again in 259/260, he was fortunate enough to find himself up against Valerian's plague-stricken Roman army, allowing him to capture the emperor himself and once again move on to ravage Rome's eastern provinces. The first point of discussion is the effect of Valerian's capture on the empire as a whole. Given that it was at this time that the empire's fortune were as low as they would ever be, with multiple usurpations and invasions all happening at once, it has naturally been easy to see the imprisonment of Valerian as the immediate cause: "As defective as the evidence is, it nonetheless seems possible to connect an enormous range of insurrections and upheavals to the arrival of the news".[122]

But the muddled chronology of these years means that alternative interpretations are also possible: the usurpation of Ingenuus in Pannonia may have taken place before Valerian's capture, while the establishment of the Gallic Empire seems to have come too late for a direct connection with the events in the east.[123] Nevertheless, the consequences of Valerian's loss of liberty should not be treated too lightly. The lack of contemporary mentions of Valerian's capture in the context of catastrophes is perhaps more a sign of embarrassment on the part of Gallienus, who distanced himself from his father after 260, than a sign of unimportance, while the relatively easy suppression of the usurpers Macrianus and Callistus by Aureolus and Odaenathus should not obscure the fact that Gallienus was forced to cede de facto control over the east to the latter; more will be said on that in the next chapter.[124]

The mentions of Macrianus, Callistus and Odaenathus bring us to the second point: the extent of the damage caused by the Persians in 259/260. Again Shapur gives an impressive list of cities and territories captured by his army, which once again appears to have split itself up into multiple columns, but it should be noted that these are mostly located in Mesopotamia and eastern Asia Minor, suggesting that Syria was generally left undamaged.[125] Moreover, it has been rightly observed by Potter that the ability of Macrianus to assemble an army shortly afterwards to challenge Gallienus in the west indicates that Roman losses may not have been all that heavy.[126] Indeed, the earlier minor successes of Macrinus and Callistus against some of the Persian columns that led to their usurpation also make for a notable contrast with the apparent absence of Roman army resistance in 252-253.

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[122] Ando (2012) 169; cf. Christol (1999) 139.
[123] J. Fitz, *Ingenuus et Régalien* (Brussels 1966), 35, 41-45; Drinkwater (1987) 26.
[124] Contra Strobel (1993) 245-247; for Gallienus' distancing from his father, see De Blois (1974) 20-21.
[125] *RGDS* l. 27-34; Millar (1993) 166-167.
[126] Potter (1990) 344.

So while the attack of 260, like that of 252-253, must have been devastating to those living in the captured cities and struck a considerable blow at Roman prestige, recovery was quite rapid. That Potter, who is known for emphasising the importance of the Sassanids as a factor in the onset of the 'crisis', should compare Shapur to Hannibal is therefore highly significant: "It is arguable that he was a general whose skill was comparable to that of Hannibal, for like Hannibal he seems to have proceeded from a careful study of the Roman way of war, and the disasters that he inflicted on Roman armies were on a par with some of the great catastrophes suffered at the beginning of the Second Punic War."[127] For while Potter may be right to equate the impressive victories of Shapur to those of Hannibal, the two are also similar in the sense that neither of them succeeded in dislocating Roman rule over the area that they ravaged despite their repeated triumphs over Roman forces, as Odaenathus quickly recaptured whatever territory had been lost.[128] And it should not be forgotten that after the campaign of 259-260 Shapur would not trouble the empire again. Of course, a difference between Hannibal and Shapur is that the latter probably never aimed at permanent large-scale conquest; it is more likely that Shapur had more modest aims and was perhaps not even aware of the exact size of the Achaemenid Empire.[129]

Why Shapur repeatedly failed to follow up on his victories is difficult to tell. It is possible that, having achieved his main aim of acquiring prestige and booty to satisfy his followers, the aging monarch could now rest upon his laurels as far as the Romans were concerned, and move his attention to issues on his other borders.[130] But the successful campaign against the Persians of Odaenathus, who seems to have been able to strike deep into Persian territory on at least one occasion practically without meeting any opposition, suggests something else entirely: that the earlier campaigns of Shapur, as triumphant as they seemed to be, seriously overstretched the resources of the Sassanid state. This necessitated the disbanding of its standing army after 260, as Shapur likely did not foresee the ability of the Romans to strike back within a few years of their resounding defeat.[131]

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[127] D. S. Potter, 'The Transformation of the Empire: 235-337 CE' in: idem ed., *A Companion to the Roman Empire* (Oxford 2006), 163-173, 158.
[128] Winter (1988) 125.
[129] So Potter (1990) 370-371, 376; Isaac (1990) 21-33; Hartmann (2001) 68-69; Goldsworthy (2009) 91-94, 135-137. For a differing view, see Winter (1988) 37-38, 41-43.
[130] Frye (2005) 469-470; Goldsworthy (2009) 136-137.
[131] Hartmann (2001) 171-172.

Admittedly, this reasoning must remain speculative, as there is simply no evidence from Persia itself to check its correctness. Nevertheless, it seems to be the best explanation for Odaenathus' seemingly effortless success against Persia, and its implications – that the Sassanid state could only sustain prolonged warfare for limited periods – are highly significant. And indeed, Shapur's successors proved incapable of repeating his triumphs, despite the fact that, as evidenced by the abandonment of Aurelian's and Probus' plans for war with Persia, the Roman Empire remained troubled. When the Romans did finally launch a campaign, that of Carus in 282-283, there once again seems to have been practically no opposition to him, although the extremely confused traditions about how far Carus got, how he died, and why the Romans retreated mean that very little can be understood of this campaign anyway. The most that can be said is that there were once again no territorial shifts.[132]

Carus' campaign would prove to be an exception in the years from 260 to 296, and this brings us to the onset of the tetrarchic period. Diocletian and the then-reigning Sassanid monarch Bahram II agreed on a peace treaty in 288, when both sides had something to gain from this peace. the Persian state was still wrecked by internal disorder at this point, while Diocletian's authority had not been firmly established yet and would, in fact, soon be challenged by the revolt of Carausius.[133]

But with Narseh firmly in control by 296, war was inevitably renewed. The course of the war has already been sketched in the first chapter: initial defeat followed by resounding victory for Rome. For our comparative purposes it is intriguing that the Sassanids once again failed to follow up on their initial success. This contrasts noticeably with Galerius, who, after his initial victory in Armenia, went on to score victories in the Persian provinces of Media and Adiabene.[134] However, it may simply not have been possible for the Persians to move into Roman territory, as the approach of summer would have made campaigning difficult.[135]

The treaty that was concluded in 299 was very advantageous to Rome, with some modest territorial gains among the Tigris, most notably the fortress city of Nisibis, which gave the empire far better control over its eastern border. In addition, the treaty provision that all trade passing through the border had to be checked at Nisibis ensured considerable

[132] Winter (1988) 136-137.
[133] Ibidem, 137-146; the treaty is alluded to in *Pan. Lat.* X 10.6.
[134] Barnes (1981) 18.
[135] Williams (1985) 80-81.

economic gains at the expense of the Sassanids.[136] At the same time, the Persians would not forget the humiliation that they suffered through this treaty, and the wars fought with Rome after the death of Constantine were intended to recoup these losses – a goal the Sassanids would finally achieve after the disastrous Roman campaign of 363. But to blame this treaty for that would not be fair, as Diocletian actually showed restraint in not demanding more territory from the Persians: Aurelius Victor explicitly notes that Diocletian opposed the creation of a new province, even though Galerius' victory had made that a possibility.[137]

The war with Narseh itself was perhaps just as much an exception in Roman-Persian relations between 267 and 337 as Carus' campaign was. There were no major conflicts, but some coins and inscriptions suggest occasional fighting under Daja in 310 and 312 and under Licinius in 313 or 314. In addition, Constantine is known to have prepared for a Persian campaign in the last year of his life, but his unexpected death meant that the campaign had to be aborted.[138] The following period would be one of renewed warfare, the Sassanids now being led by Shapur II, whose vigour matched that of his great-grandfather of the same name. But those events are beyond the scope of this thesis. For now it is most important that the border with Persia generally appears to have remained tranquil throughout our period. Then again, Lactantius' lack of interest in foreign warfare is as much of a problem here as it was with regard to the 'barbarians'; in fact, the lack of a Near East-centric narrative source after the *Oracle* leaves off makes the problem even more significant in this case.[139]

All in all, if we look at the history of Roman-Persian relations between 249 and 324, there are two points that merit great interest. First, the incursions of 253 and 259/260 were devastating, but also fairly unique: other than some intermittent attacks throughout the 250's and some possible conflict in the first half of the 310's, the only three other major conflicts throughout the 'crisis' and the tetrarchic period were the campaigns of Odaenathus

[136] Winter (1988) 191-200; R. C. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy: Formation and Conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius* (Leeds 1992), 6-7.
[137] Victor (*De. Caes.* 39.36); Blockley (1992) 7; B. Dignas and E. Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge 2007), 125-130.
[138] The meagre evidence for conflict under Daja and Licinius is collected in Barnes (1982) 66, 81; for 310, there is a coin proclaiming an extension of territory (*RIC* VI Antiochia 134); for 312, Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* 9.8.4) reports a defeat against Armenians while a coin (*RIC* VI Cyzicus 107) proclaims a victory; for 313-314 there are two dubious inscriptions, *ILS* 696 and 8942 (whose authenticity is defended by Barnes (1982) 81 n.145) that proclaim a victory over the Persians. However, this does fit with the comment found in Amm. Marc. 22.12.1 that by the early 360's the Persians had been attacking the Roman Near East "for nearly sixty years" (*per sexaginta ferme annos*). For Constantine's preparation for a Persian war, see Euseb., *Vit. Cons.* 56-57; the notion that war was averted by the Persians suing for peace is contradicted by *Origo* 35.
[139] See n.104 above.

and Carus and the war with Narseh. The first and third of these were Roman victories; our sources for the second conflict also speak of Roman success, although the fact that Carus may well have been murdered by his own men means that things were perhaps not going as well as the sources indicate.[140] Second, the Sassanids had a tendency to not follow up on victories won over Roman forces. This may well have been due to the modesty of their aims in general and to unfavourable campaigning circumstances in the case of the 296-298 war. But for our purposes it is more important that the Sassanid incursions, while devastating in the immediate aftermath, could not inflict long-term damage on the Roman Near East.

The above, then, suggests a large degree of continuity. But, as with the 'barbarians', care must be taken not to go too far. After all, the defeat without any real consequences suffered against Narseh does not really compare with the two long lists of captured cities that the *RGDS* proudly displays. Therefore, as with the 'barbarians', the tetrarchic era was an improvement over the 'crisis' in the sense that the Persians could never come close to matching the successes of Shapur in the 250's and 260. How did this improved situation come about? Again, the frontier defence reforms of Diocletian have been seen as an important factor. There is considerable evidence of fortification construction under Diocletian, and Williams has a point when he notes that the withdrawal of men from the Balkans to reinforce the army of Galerius after his initial defeat does not seem to have resulted in disturbances, which contrast with similar withdrawals from the Balkans under Gallus and from Gaul under Valerian in response to Persian attacks.[141]

But the doubts expressed about the revolutionary character of Diocletian's reforms[142] are valid here as well, and the lack of 'barbarian' responses to the withdrawal of men from the Danube could just as well be a result of the stabilised relationship between them and Rome. And it should also be noted that the little internal evidence that survives from Narseh's reign indicates that his control over the Sassanid state was far less solid than that of Shapur I had been and that of Shapur II would be.[143] As we have already seen that the periods between Narseh and both Shapurs were times of deep-seated instability for the

[140] Potter (2004) 279 believes that Carus was murdered despite his successes, making the charming suggestion that the lightning bolt that supposedly killed him came "in the form of torches hurled into his tent." However, Leadbetter (2009) 38-39 notes that enemy territory is not a good place to plan a coup, and the fact that Numerian seems to have succeeded his father in an orderly fashion also speaks against assassination.
[141] Williams (1985) 84; the literary and epigraphical evidence for construction on the Eastern frontier is collected in Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 122, 136-139 nos. 5.2.5, 5.5.5-6.1.
[142] See n.95 above.
[143] Frye (1983) 307.

Persian state, it is once again legitimate to wonder whether the Romans did not simply get lucky.

We have now dealt with the three frontiers that have traditionally received the most attention: the Rhine, Danube and Syrian/Mesopotamian frontier. But there were also desert borders along Palestine, Arabia, Egypt and Africa. The various nomads that lived across these borders have made far less of an impact on the historical record than the northern 'barbarians', but they existed, and as such they are well worth dealing with here, even if comparatively little space will be allotted to all but Africa. In the next section we will first look at the provinces of the western half of North Africa, then we will turn to Egypt, and finally Palestine and Arabia will be discussed.

Out beyond the desert

Traditionally, the northwest of Africa has been seen as unusual during the third century in that, other than a brief civil war in 238, it remained relatively undisturbed. While there are some signs of decay, most notably the lack of construction activities in African cities on the fringes of Roman territory between 244 and 284, compared to other areas these signs are minor. In fact, for the core territories the third century was generally a time of great economic growth. And while inscriptions record fighting with various tribes of raiders during the reign of Valerian, this was only a temporary problem without long-term consequences.[144] However, a far less optimistic picture of third-century Africa has been presented by Marcel Bénabou, who stresses the severity and perseverance of the raids.[145] As he has conveniently listed the relevant material, occasionally even providing the entire texts of inscriptions, we will now look at these inscriptions to see whether he is right to see them as signs of major trouble, or whether the incidents that the epigraphic material describes were actually as minor as is usually thought.

Bénabou gives three inscriptions that indicate conflict with 'barbarians' in 253. The first of these, from the north of Algeria dating from August 254, celebrates a victory "because of barbarians who surrendered and also fled". The second, found in the same place as the first but dating from February 255, honours the cavalry commander Primianus as "the defender of his province". The third, found in the northeast of Algeria and dating from

[144] Millar (1981) 180-181; Witschel (1999) 285, 293.
[145] M. Bénabou, *La résistance Africaine à la Romanisation* (Paris 1976), 218-231; cf. Christol (1999) 135.

around 256, has Veturianus, legate of Numidia, thanking the gods for making his province prosperous once again.[146] But notwithstanding the fact that only the first inscription provides direct evidence of conflict with foreign enemies, the general impression conveyed is that, at most, there were some minor difficulties that have now been overcome.

Next, Bénabou discusses Cornelius Octavianus, who held a special command in Africa between 255 and 258, during which he fought against "Bavaran rebels".[147] Bénabou uses a text found in Teniet Mesken, which describes a Roman victory over the Bavares but also mentions kings and a multitude, to argue that the situation was quite serious, something that the seeming necessity to create a special command emphasises. Moreover, two inscriptions, one from the northeast of Algeria, another from the north, list a number of battles against various tribes of invaders; the soldier honoured on the second inscription, Gargilius Martialus, is known to have been killed by raiders not long after the erection of the inscription. From this, combined with a later inscription that addresses the restorative goddess Fortuna Redux and another detailing the establishment of a fort, Bénabou concludes that Octavianus' command accomplished little: there would continue to be disturbances during the 260's.[148]

The latter point is reasonable, as the documents cited by Bénabou do indicate that the Romans had some rouble re-establishing order. But as this was a period when the danger of usurpation often forced emperors to do as much as possible themselves rather than delegating matters to their generals,[149] the existence of Octavianus' special command is perhaps less significant than the fact that Valerian and Gallienus did not feel the need to come to Africa themselves. So while Bénabou is probably right with his contention that stamping out the unrest took a long time, there also seems no need to attach any real weight to them.

Between Gallienus and Probus the history of the area is rather sketchy. Saturninus, a pretender, is said to have "recovered Africa, captured by the Moors" in the *HA*, a comment that may have been based upon minor trouble in Africa, but the only possible piece of cor-

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[146] *ILS* 3000 (l. 8-10: *ob barbaros cesos* (sic) *ac fusos*); *ILS* 2766 (l. 6-7: *defensor prov*(*inciae*) *suae*); *AE* (1914) 245 (l. 11-12: *reb*(*us*) *in pr*(*ovincia*) *Numidia prospere gestis*); Bénabou (1976) 219-220.
[147] *AE* (1907) 4 (l.2: *bavaribus rebellibus*).
[148] Bénabou (1976) 221-227; *ILS* 1194, 2764; *AE* (1920) 108 l. 2-3.
[149] Goldsworthy (2009) 152-153 ; Ando (2012) 120.

roboration is an inscription from this period about the subjugation of several tribes.[150] From the reign of Probus it is known that the Romans conducted a treaty with the Baquates, a tribe living in the east of present-day Morocco, suggesting that peace was maintained at least there, and there are no further reports of unrest for the 'crisis'. On the other hand, the remote town of Volubilis had to be abandoned within the next few years, suggesting that the peace broke down again in Mauretania.[151] But as Volubilis was remote and not all that important, its abandonment is perhaps not that significant, like it was with the Agri Decumates. Overall, while the incidents discussed by Bénabou do indicate that the tranquillity of Africa should not be taken as lightly as is sometimes done, there seems to be no good reason for being as bleak about it as he is either.

As it was with the previous sections of this chapter, there is less that can be said about foreign warfare in Africa during the tetrarchic period. There was trouble during the 290's, which apparently involved the enigmatic 'Quinquegentanei'. One inscription reports that a "bridge destroyed during the war with the savages" has been repaired, while two others proclaim victories over raiders.[152] Order was restored again by 298 at the latest, in a campaign led by Maximian in person. Bénabou has suggested that the presence of Maximian has made this campaign seem more important than it actually was.[153] But that an emperor actually went to Africa makes for an important difference with 'crisis', when no emperor ever went on campaign there, and perhaps suggests that the unrest caused by the 'Quinquegentanei' was the most serious threat to Africa's internal security in the third century. However, this must remain conjecture: nothing is heard of trouble in the African provinces for the remainder of the tetrarchic period, and Maximian's presence may just as well be due to the relative absence of frontier warfare on Rome's other borders, or due to the fact that there were now four emperors, allowing them to take on even minor issues in person.

In addition to the above, Africa is one of the few cases in Ancient History where we have contemporary observations about the area on record from an individual who was well situated to comment on current events: Cyprian of Carthage. In terms of foreign warfare he has, unfortunately, little to offer. One of his letters is about a number of Christians that have

[150] *HA*, *Tyr. Quadr.* 9.5 (*a Mauris possessam Africam reddidi*); *ILS* 4495; Bénabou (1976) 227-228.
[151] The relevant inscriptions are provided in Bénabou (1976) 229 n.113, 230 n.116; see also Kreucher (2003) 144-145.
[152] Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 39.22; the Quinquegentanei also appeared earlier in *ILS* 1194 l. 10. For the bridge, see *ILS* 627 l. 4-5 (*pontem belli saevitia destructum*); for the victories, see *ILS* 628; *AE* (1998) 1591.
[153] *Pan. Lat.* VIII 5.2-3, XI 21.2, VII 8.6; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.23; Bénabou (1976) 235-236.

been captured, with Cyprian attempting to buy them free. There is possibly another attestation of such an event: the inscription dating from between Gallienus and Probus discussed above speaks of "their captured families".[154] However, this incident, while certainly traumatic for those involved, seems to have been relatively minor – indeed, even Bénabou states that he hostage crisis probably amounted to little.[155] But while Cyprian has little to offer with regard to events, he is invaluable for the way in which he viewed the crisis, even if the way in which he should be interpreted is controversial. While this subject is not quite directly relevant to this chapter or any other, it is important for the thesis as a whole, and this is the best place to discuss the various ideas about Cyprian's writings.

One view is that of Alföldy, who holds that Cyprian gave equal weight to the internal troubles of the church and the 'crisis' that he thought held the empire in its grip. However, MacMullen, who holds that Alföldy makes Cyprian into too rational a mind, argues that Cyprian's view on the crisis was determined solely by his Christianity. Strobel agrees with this, but goes one step further in claiming that, as a result, his pessimism should not be seen as a sign that there was actually a 'crisis' in progress around him at all. Most recently, Brent has suggested that Cyprian, like his contemporaries, saw the 'crisis' in metaphysical terms: the world was transitioning from the golden age to an iron age of decline. [156] But one thing is not under debate: that Cyprian's mood was subject to change throughout the 250's. Changes in the degree of bleakness in his account of third century mostly seem to be related to the appearance and disappearance of schisms within the church and of persecution attempts, as well as individual events like the plague epidemic of 252-253.

So what are we to make of these various ways of looking at Cyprian's mode of thought? The different viewpoints ascribed to him can be reconciled through the notion of inconsistency developed by Versnel: Cyprian was simply not consequential in his degree of negativity towards his own time, and as such his variable comments can take on multiple different meanings depending on the observer, meanings that are not necessarily mutually exclusive.[157] But while this helps to explain why the notion of 'crisis' has multiple meanings

[154] Cyp., *Ep.* 59; *ILS* 4495 l. 9 (*familias eorum abductas*).
[155] Bénabou (1976) 218.
[156] G. Alföldy, 'Der Heilige Cyprian und die Krise des römischen Reiches' *Historia* 22 (1973) 3, 479-501; MacMullen (1976) 7-8, 218 n.26; Strobel (1993) 176-177, 182-184; A. Brent, *Cyprian and Roman Carthage* (Cambridge 2010), 4-7, 79-81.
[157] H. W. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion I: Ter Unus* (Leiden 1990), 1-35, esp. 14-24.

for Cyprian, it also means that it cannot be determined to what extent his views can be seen as evidence for what was happening around him.

However, I think that there are reasons for assuming that Cyprian cannot be used for determining the existence of a structural 'crisis'. In observing Cyprian's changing mood in the 250's in a chronological fashion Alföldy has not, I think, sufficiently appreciated that most of Cyprian's examples of pessimism come from his treatises, which have all been written in response to some sort of crisis. By contrast, his letters show little sign of apocalyptic thinking, which indicates that the day-to-day state of the empire did not give him much cause for alarm. The first letter from his corpus, which describes a general state of turmoil, is highly uncharacteristic; most letters deal with the disputes between him and the antipope Novatian.[158] Moreover, a tendency to equate the state of the church with the degree of 'crisis' faced by the empire can also be found in letters of the Alexandrine bishop Dionysus preserved by Eusebius. Indeed, it was also present in the tetrarchic period: Lactantius admits that Diocletian's rule was initially prosperous, but when he started persecuting Christians conditions became ruinous.[159]

Egypt can be dealt with more briefly: while it will figure prominently in the next two chapters, there is very little known about foreign warfare there. The *HA* mentions an attack by Blemmyes, nomads originating from modern-day Sudan, during the reign of Probus; that there was indeed such a campaign is corroborated by Zosimus, but the HA's claim that the Blemmyes had taken cities seems doubtful, and Zosimus actually seems to imply that the affair was handled by Probus' generals rather than the emperor himself. In addition, a few years earlier there were also battles against the Marmaridae, another nomadic tribe that lived in the desert between modern-day Egypt and Libya.[160] But nothing further is explicitly attested.

However, Christol has argued that the second half of the 250's was also a time of instability for Egypt. Papyri attest the presence of 'correctors' in Egypt, and Aemilianus, pre-

[158] The last judgement is said to be imminent in Cyp., *De Unit. Eccl.* 10, 16, 26-27, *Ad Demetr.* 22-25, *De Mort.* 2, *De Patient.* 21-24, while various disasters appear throughout *Ad Demetr.* and also in *De Mort.* 8, 16, 25. By contrast, the only claims that the apocalypse is near are found in *Ep.* 21.1 (a letter not even written by Cyprian himself), where Decius is said to be a prelude to the Antichrist, *Ep.* 57.2, where the Antichrist is said to be near, and *Ep.* 61.18, where the Second Coming is said to be approaching. Cf. Strobel (1993) 155-157, although he neglects to cite *Ep.* 61. *Ep.* 1.6, 10 describes a general state of insecurity.

[159] Lact., *DMP* 7.1-5, 9.11-12; cf. Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* 8.13.5. See also Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* 7.23.

[160] *HA*, *Vit. Prob.* 17.2-3, 6; Zos. 1.71.1. The fighting against the Marmaridae is attested by *AE* (1919) 94 and *AE* (1934) 257, two nearly identical Greek inscriptions.

fect of Egypt between 258/259 and 261/262 (not to be confused with the ephemeral emperor of 253), is referred to as "deputy prefect" (διέποντος τὴν ἡγεμονίαν) in some documents between 256 and 258, a unique position altogether. According to Christol these special measures indicate major trouble on the Egyptian frontier, much like Octavianus' special command in Africa.[161] But again, as was the case with Octavianus' command, what really matters is that Valerian and Gallienus felt no need to handle the situation themselves. In addition, while Christol claims that the documents allude to military problems, in fact they either deal with day-to day matters like freight contracts and inheritance issues or with minor brigandage.[162] So while something must have been going on to necessitate the presence of 'correctors', this should not be made too much of.

Even less can be said about the Arabic provinces. While the Arabic nomads seem to have become more active from about the early third century onwards, resulting in occasional raids, it was not until the late fourth century that these raids became somewhat significant.[163] In our timeframe only Diocletian is known to have campaigned against Saracens in 290;[164] much like Maximian's African campaign this might suggest that at this time the raids were sufficiently threatening to necessitate the presence of an emperor or it might suggest that the changed circumstances allowed for the presence of the *augustus*.

To summarize this chapter, it would appear that the position of the empire vis-à-vis its neighbours was indeed better during the tetrarchic period than it was during the crisis. Defeats suffered against 'barbarians' and Persians during the 'crisis' like Abrittus and Barbalissos would not be repeated. Indeed, the one major Roman-Persian conflict of the tetrarchic era, the war against Narseh, ended in a clear victory for the Romans, and the 'barbarians' appear to have remained generally quiet. Of course, we have also seen that both 'crisis' and tetrarchy need to be nuanced in this regard.

For the 'crisis' it has been noted that the 'barbarians' were usually only effective in the field and that the Sassanids were unable or unwilling to follow up on their great victories

[161] Christol (1999) 135; the corrector Pasus is mentioned in *P. Oxy.* XLIII 3111 l. 5 and probably 3112 l. 2, which also refers to Aemilianus as deputy prefect in l. 2, while another corrector called Theodorus is mentioned in *SB* XX 14229 l. 7-8, with Aemilianus once again being called deputy prefect (l. 8). The latest document where Aemilianus is deputy prefect is *P. Oxy.* IX 1201 (l. 14), which dates from late September 258, although he is also called full prefect here (l. 1); Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* 7.11) also refers to him as 'deputy prefect'. See *P. Oxy.* XLIII p. 58-59 for a general discussion of Aemilianus' career.

[162] Strobel (1993) 285 has previously remarked on the continuity displayed by the papyrological record.

[163] Isaac (1990) 68-77 is especially dismissive of Arabic activities during this period; Hartmann (2001) 83-85 gives them slightly more importance.

[164] *Pan. Lat.* XI 5.4, 7.1.

over Roman forces. Neither groups managed to inflict long-term damage on the empire, except for some western provinces like Germania that were subjected to raids for prolonged periods. For the tetrarchy there were some instances, like Constantius' near-death experience against the Alamanni and other events attested by epigraphic and numismatic sources, that show that the extent of stabilization should not be taken for granted. The African and Arabic provinces, which seem to have been relatively untroubled during the 'crisis', present an ambiguous picture: the presence of emperors on campaign there during the tetrarchic period may be either a sign of urgency or a sign of restored order. But these nuances cannot be pushed too far: overall the tetrarchic era was an improvement over the 'crisis' in terms of external warfare. When it comes to internal warfare, however, things were rather different.

3. Internal strife

> "The war against the usurper is my concern, the one against the barbarians, the state's, and it is proper that that of the state take precedent."[165]

These words were put into the mouth of Claudius II by Zonaras (or perhaps rather one of his sources) in the context of his decision to let the Gallic Empire be in favour of war against the 'Scythians'. The sentiment expressed here is remarkably similar to the line of thought attributed by Ammianus Marcellinus to another emperor, Valentinian I (r. 364-375), who, in 365, had to decide between responding to an attack by Alamanni and assisting his younger brother and co-ruler Valens (r. 364-378) against the usurper Procopius:

> "At last, after giving careful thought to what was expedient, he followed the view of the majority, often repeating that Procopius was only his own and his brother's enemy, but the Alamanni were enemies of the whole Roman world; and so he resolved for the present nowhere to leave the boundaries of Gaul."[166]

These quotes give a clear indication of what it was that the Roman aristocracy valued in its emperors – success against 'barbarians' and other external enemies. It also shows what they did not value: 'selfish' wars against usurpers. Indeed, Gallienus' regular wars against pretenders may well be one of the main reasons for his poor reputation in the pro-senatorial Latin historiographical tradition.[167] And yet, most historians nowadays would agree that it was internal unrest, not 'barbarian' invasions, that was "the real bane of the age".[168]

In this chapter we will compare the internal struggles during the 'crisis' on the one hand and the tetrarchy on the other hand on several levels. Usurpations, which can be divided into the straightforward sort by men that made a direct bid for imperial power and the less common variety by men who instead chose to consolidate their power over just a specific part of the empire, form the most obvious category. But internal troubles were not just caused by individuals. Groups, whether they were brigands or unruly soldiers, could inflict considerable damage upon the areas that they ravaged. This mostly affected the common man and as such belongs to the most basic level, so we will start our survey there. From

[165] Zon. 12.26 (trans. Banchic and Lane).
[166] Amm. Marc. 26.5.13 (Loeb translation).
[167] De Blois (1974) 68-69.
[168] Drinkwater (2007) 51.

there we will move steadily up on the ladder until we reach those who risked all in the pursuit of supreme power.

Robbery, assault and battery

With brigandage the main problem is that it generally increases and decreases in intensity as part of long-term trends, which makes it difficult to determine when exactly it became a major problem and why this happened. But in general, it seems as if there was a rare lull in banditism between the mid-first and mid-second century, after which it became more common again. Usually, the imperial response was to send in soldiers to take on the bandits. But for the general populace this might only make things worse: the soldiers would plunder at will and occasionally even join forces with the brigands. In his *Enemies of the Roman Order* MacMullen has listed several examples of conflicts between brigands and Roman authorities as well as measures undertaken by said authorities to curb the problem. He even goes so far as to suggest that the proliferation of bandits and the ravaging bands of soldiers that came in their wake provoked the first major raids by foreign enemies into Roman territory in the third century (presumably after said soldiers had cleared off). This then led to more internal unrest, which then provoked more foreign attacks, thus creating the cycle that was one of the main problems during the 'crisis'.[169]

This brings us to the thorny chicken-and-egg question of which came first: the external issues or the internal ones. We already saw in the previous chapter that the threat posed by 'barbarians' has often been exaggerated, which makes it more plausible that it was indeed the internal issues that came first, giving the 'barbarians' an easy chance to gain plunder from Roman territory.[170] On the other hand, so little can be said about the start of the vicious cycle that the fact that both issues started at about the same time may also have been a coincidence,[171] or they may both spring from an entirely different factor.

But as far as banditism is concerned, the most important point is that for both of our timeframes the sources tell us little about the activities of bandits and deserters, and nothing about imperial measures to deal with them; the Bagaudae would seem to be an excep-

[169] MacMullen (1966) 193-197; see also Isaac (1990) 85-89, who notes that banditry was endemic in Palestina even during the Principate, and that this could also have been the case in provinces with less evidence.
[170] Kulikowski (2007) 28-30; Goldsworthy (2009); but cf. Burns (2003) 279, arguing against the idea of 'barbarians' eagerly seizing any chance to attack the empire: "Northern barbarians were not sitting around their campfires eagerly waiting for the first sign of Roman weakness."
[171] Millar (1981) 240.

tion, but as these cannot be dismissed as mere brigands they will be dealt with in the next section. In fact, other than a notice in Zosimus about escaped gladiators who became bandits in the early 280's the only examples of banditry that can be securely dated to the period between 249 and 324 come from two papyri: the first, which was previously discussed as one of the attestations of an Egyptian 'corrector', dates from the second half of the 250's and concerns the manhunt for a murderer in the city of Oxyrhynchus and its province; in the second, a fragmentary trial text from the city of Antinoopolis that dates from the last quarter of the third century, it is claimed that the accused was "in the company of brigands".[172]

Of course, MacMullen is probably right to note that this does not mean that there were no such problems; after all, the absence of imperial countermeasures could be related to the well-known fact that there are few surviving rescripts from the third century, particularly from the reigns of Claudius II, Aurelian, Tacitus and Probus.[173] But it does indicate that we should not give too much weight to banditism between 249 and 324: it was a serious problem, but not significantly more so than in the periods before and after. In addition, it is in general important to remember that on the spectrum between 'embarrassing' and 'disastrous' banditry belongs firmly on the side of the former.[174]

For our comparative purposes, it would therefore seem that there was mostly continuity. However, the 'crisis' did differ from the tetrarchy in the sense that in the former period bandits more commonly appeared with leaders. Mariades, whose activities were discussed in the first chapter, is said to have been assisted by a large number of 'friends'. In addition, during the reign of Probus an Isaurian bandit leader called Lydius managed to take the city of Cremna, located in Asia Minor, and even after his death his followers only surrendered after a lengthy siege. The *HA* gives two other major Isaurian bandit leaders, Trebellianus during the 260's and Palfuerius during the reign of Probus, although these two may well be inventions, or, in the case of Palfuerius, an alternative name for Lydius.[175] But fa-

[172] Zos. 1.71.3; *SB* XX 14229; *P. Ant.* II 87 l. 13 (συνῆσαν τοῖς λησταῖς).
[173] MacMullen (1966) 195, with 255-268 for a list of evidence; Ando (2012) 195 conveniently provides a catalogue of surviving rescripts per emperor.
[174] A division I owe to Hekster (2008) 17.
[175] The supporters of Mariades are mentioned in *frag.* 1 of the anonymous Continuator of Dio (= Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 53 no. 3.1.5); see also *Orac. Sib.* XIII.111. The dramatic account of the siege of Cremna provided by Zos. 1.69-70 is at least partially corroborated by the archaeological record (on which see Mitchell (1993) 1: 234-235; Potter (2004) 277). For Trebellianus, see *HA*, *Tyr. Trig.* 26; a Trebellianus is also mentioned by Eutr., *Brev.* 9.8.1, but as this mention occurs in the context of the rebellion of Ingenuus it is surely an error for Regalianus. For Palfuerius, see *HA*, *Vit. Prob.* 16.4.

mous brigand leaders were not unique to the 'crisis': Bulla Felix from the Severan era is just one noteworthy example.

However, if banditism in and of itself was not more of a problem than usual, problems caused by ravaging bands of soldiers were. That the military was often a plague for the civilian populace is well attested throughout the entire history of the empire. It would therefore seem reasonable to suggest, as De Blois has done, that the greater frequency of passing armies in the third century – for now it was not just brigandage, but also raids and combating usurpers that necessitated the presence of soldiers – must have led to much damage to the towns that they came accross. Indeed, Zosimus criticises Valerian for "only doing damage to the cities he passed through" during his journey through Asia Minor in response to the Scythian attacks of the mid-250's.[176]

But De Blois only speaks of the 'crisis' and not of the tetrarchy, when, according to the fourth paragraph of the Panegyric held before Maximian around 290, he and Diocletian were constantly traveling from place to place, something that the documentary evidence of the movements of the tetrarchs confirms. As such, this particular problem would appear to have been just as prevalent during the tetrarchy, especially as there is at least one attested example of soldiers plundering the countryside, namely the army of Galerius after the failed attempt to unseat Maxentius.[177]

It might be objected that the tetrarchic journeys would not always have had military purposes and would consequentially have involved fewer soldiers. But the comment that during these journeys "you conquered everywhere" and the reference to "your martial feats and victories" that immediately follows it suggest otherwise.[178] And even in the best of times imperial visits could be rather problematic for the host. Millar has vividly described them as a decidedly mixed blessing: for the average inhabitants of the empire they provided an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to address their personal grievances to the emperor, but the preparations for the visit also meant enormous costs for the organisers. Furthermore, for imperial capitals such costs were always present.[179]

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[176] De Blois (2002) 105; Zos. 1.36.1 (trans. Ridley): μόνον ἐπιτρίψας τὰς πόλεις.
[177] *Pan. Lat.* XI 4; for imperial journeys during the tetrarchic era, see the exhaustive overview in Barnes (1982) 49-87. The plundering by Galerius' men is attested by Lact., *DMP* 27.5-7; *Origo* 7; however, see also Leadbetter (2009) 195-196 and Potter (2013) 119, who suggest that this helped to make Maxentius unpopular.
[178] *Pan. Lat.* XI 4.4 (*vos ubique vicisse*), 5.1 (*rebus bellicis victoriisque vestris*).
[179] F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (London 1977), 32-35; for capitals, see MacMullen (1976) 105.

In addition, an interesting point of nuance can be made with regard to unrest caused by soldiers during the 'crisis'. It is well known that a number of second and third-century inscriptions from the eastern provinces are about citizens who petition the emperor to restrain his soldiers from looting at will. But these all date from the first half of the third century: nothing is heard from 249 onwards, the point at which the 'crisis' is generally agreed to have gained force. It might optimistically be supposed that the soldiers realised that the situation was so grave that they had to mend their ways.[180] It might more cynically – and probably more realistically – be suggested that they were simply too busy fighting wars to continue their extortionist hobbies, or perhaps there remained little to extort anyway. But the result is much the same: for many inhabitants of the empire the external and internal conflicts that affected the empire during the 'crisis' may have been a blessing in disguise.

To round off this section, it is worth taking a brief look at the role of the ordinary soldiers in the internal unrest. As early as Late Antiquity itself the senators responsible for most of the surviving literary sources made soldiers into their main scapegoats; Aurelius Victor in particular seized every opportunity to insert a moralizing digression on their depravity. And when an emperor was acclaimed or murdered, the agents are usually said to have been 'the soldiers'.[181] But it is well worth noting that, with the exception of the account of Probus' murder and a short-lived tetrarchic usurpation that will be treated below, in all the cases in which the sources provide some circumstantial detail about usurpations and assassinations the common soldiers are conspicuous by their absence.

Consider, for instance, the tale of Gallienus' murder. The identity of the murderers differs per account, mostly due to a desire in the Latin tradition to exculpate Claudius II, who had been 'adopted' by Constantine as his divine ancestor. But all agree that "the conspiracy was an officers' affair": Gallienus' favouring of the common soldiers seems to have succeeded in making him popular with the rank and file, who are said to have been upset over his assassination, and it may well be that Claudius' subsequent decision to have Gallienus dei-

[180] The material is collected in P. Hermann ed., *Hilferufe aus römischen Provinzen: ein Aspekt der Krise des römischen Reiches im 3. Jhdt. n. Chr.* (Hamburg/Göttingen 1990); for another example, see Mitchell (1993) 1: 229 n.16. The problem of extortionist soldiers goes back a long time: see J. B. Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army* (Oxford 1984), 243-263. For the optimistic view of the army's conduct during the 'crisis', see MacMullen (1976) 213; but cf. De Blois (2002) 105, arguing the fact that we only hear nothing new due to the decreasing number of inscriptions.

[181] For anti-military comments in Victor, see *De Caes.* 3.15, 8.3, 11.9-11, 18.2, 26.6, 31.2; when the soldiers show themselves virtuous, Victor calls it a rare exception (*De Caes.* 34.1, 35.11).

fied was made to profit from his popularity.[182] Likewise, the assassination of Aurelian is said to have been the work of a small group of officers who had been misled by a clerk into believing that Aurelian wanted their blood. The story may not be quite true, but Aurelian's popularity with the regular soldiers is confirmed by the fact that none of the general staff dared to take power for a few weeks.[183]

With regard to the military's role in proclaiming emperors, Constantine's elevation to *caesar* is highly instructive. The romantic story told by Lactantius and Eusebius, in which Constantine reaches his father on his deathbed, is flatly contradicted by the *Origo* and a Panegyric recited in 310, which has father and son campaigning together for some time prior to the death of the former. As a result of this public association between the *augustus* and his son, Constantine became the prime candidate for the succession in the eyes of the army. In other words, his acclamation was actually engineered from above: the acclamation by the regular soldiers was predetermined. In fact, only the *Origo* can be taken as saying that the regular soldiers provided the main impetus, and this is only an offhand and general remark. Lactantius and Eusebius state that the succession was determined by Constantius, Zosimus has Constantius' praetorian guardsmen as the main players, while according to the Epitome one of the main acclaimers was the Alamannic king Crocus. The name may be an invention, but it is certainly not implausible that Constantius had a major Alamannic associate that helped to engineer the accession of his son. As such, it seems proper to play down the involvement of the rank and file in this matter.[184]

This gives us a good reason to doubt the various claims about emperors being created by the army during the 'crisis' - the supposedly reluctant usurpation of Decius against Philip immediately springs to mind.[185] Admittedly, it is certainly true that the usurpations would not have been possible if soldiers had not been willing to both support illegitimate pretenders and fight their colleagues, and there can be little doubt that soldiers were often

[182] Drinkwater (2005) 48; for a thorough discussion of Gallienus' military policy and its many advantages for the rank and file, see De Blois (1974) 21-108. As for their resentment at Gallienus murder, according to Zos. 1.41.1 the soldiers needed to be "calmed" (ἡσυχασάντων) afterwards. *HA*, *Vit. Gall.* 15.1-2 also records angry soldiers at this point that needed to be bought off. Even if the author is correct to dismiss their fondness for Gallienus as a pretence, this still corroborates my case that they had no part in his death.

[183] Watson (1999) 105-106.

[184] The various versions are, in chronological order, *Pan. Lat.* VI 7.3-8.3; Lact., *DMP* 24.5-8; Euseb., *Vit. Cons.* 1.18.2-22.2; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. De Caes.* 41.2-3 (the (partial) authenticity of the report is defended in Drinkwater (2007) 146); Zos. 2.9.1.

[185] See e.g. the story found in Zon. 12.19 in which Decius sends Philip a letter explaining that he usurped against his will. On the notion of the 'reluctant usurper', see Syme (1971) 198, 205-206.

difficult to control during the 'crisis'. But this had also been the case during the Principate, and the story of Galerius having to beg his men on his knees not to desert him before the walls of Rome suggests that it continued to be so during the tetrarchy as well.[186] So as far as internal disorder on the 'basic' level is concerned, it can be said that it was generally not all that significant, with the possible exception of damage caused by extortionist soldiers to cities, and that there is mostly continuity between the 'crisis' and the tetrarchy.

Rebels with a cause

Of course, the general populace was not just a passive recipient of violence: it was quite capable of revolts. Unfortunately, this is another area where the source material fails us badly. It seems reasonable to say that revolts occurred, and they are known to have been a serious problem for Maxentius in the weeks leading up to his final battle with Constantine. There was also the revolt of the mint-workers of Rome under Aurelian, an obscure episode that will be treated in the next chapter. But alas: "The political effectiveness of disorders is more easily assumed than proved."[187] Nevertheless, in some cases we know about such rebellions, or at least of people taking the law into their own hands, because their leaders have left an impact upon the historical record. These men differ from the bandit leaders discussed in the previous section in that they actually had coins issued in their name that contained imperial titulature, but they also differ from run-of-the-mill pretenders in the sense that they never strove to anything but local authority. Indeed, some may not even have been aware of the fact that issuing their own coinage amounted to treason.[188]

Admittedly, the boundary separating these men from other pretenders is somewhat fluid. Mariades, for example, might also be said to belong to this group: while there is no reason to believe the claim of the *HA* that he declared himself emperor,[189] he seems to have had a considerable number of followers. But to my mind, this group forms a category on its own that deserves its own section. First, we have the rebels that were active in the late 240's and the first half of the 250's. Then, we have the Bagaudae, who can be dated to the first half of the 280's, as well as an Egyptian 'civil war' of which it has been suggested that it was part of a similar phenomenon. Finally, there were two Egyptian revolts in the 290's.

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[186] Lact., *DMP* 27.4; for problems with the army during the Principate, see Campbell (1984) 186-198.
[187] MacMullen (1966) 172-173.
[188] Potter (2004) 250.
[189] *HA*, *Tyr. Trig.* 2.2-3.

On three of the four members of the first group little can be said. Jotapianus, who was already briefly alluded to in the first chapter, supposedly revolted against Roman authority due to oppressive new tax practices in the eastern provinces, and we have a few coins from him. Anything said about Silbannicus and Sponsianus, of each of only one coin of uncertain authenticity survives each, from Gaul and Dacia respectively, must be speculation.[190] But as we only know of the oppressive eastern tax practices through the east-centric account of Zosimus, I would suggest that there was also a reform of the western tax system at this time, and that at least the rebellion of Silbannicus should also be seen in this context; there seems no reason to ascribe a motive of self-help against foreign enemies in the way that we can with Uranius Antoninus. The revolt of Sponsianus can perhaps be seen as a precursor to the one of Pacatianus that we opened the first chapter with.

More is known of Uranius Antoninus, as a good number of coins of differing type and image have survived from him. From these, Brent has presented the interesting argument that Uranius was joining the central emperors from this era in attempting to bring about a new golden age through thanksgiving, although his case is unfortunately weakened by the dated and erroneous assumption that Uranius was a contemporary of Philip and Decius rather than Gallus, Aemilian and Valerian.[191] In addition, as mentioned above, it seems reasonable to see self-help against attacking enemies as the motive for his actions,[192] although the fact that we hear nothing of him during the main Persian attack suggests that his concern was for Emesa alone. But much about him will always remain obscure, in particular his end: did he willingly submit himself to Valerian or did he have to be put down?

Next, we have the Bagaudae. According to the literary accounts this was a simple peasant's revolt, but Potter rightly notes that the existence of coins where their leader Amandus is called 'imperator' and 'augustus' points in a different direction.[193] He goes on to suggest that Amandus' pretentions were an attempt to establish local autonomy in the face of the continued inability of the central government to re-establish its monopoly on violence, adducing two further events where this may have been the case. The first of these is the revolt of Lydius discussed above; the second was an obscure civil war in Egypt from

[190] Their coins can be found in *RIC* V1 p. 66-67. Silbannicus' revolt may be the civil war that Decius is said to have suppressed by Eutr., *Brev.* 9.4. For the tale of Jotapianus' rebellion, see Zos. 1.20.2-21.2; Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 29.2 also reports the rebellion but says nothing of the taxation issues.
[191] Brent (2010) 149-152; the numismatic evidence is collected and discussed in Baldus (1971).
[192] Isaac (1990) 247-248; Potter (2004) 249-250.
[193] *Pan. Lat.* X 4.3; Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 39.17; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.20.2; *RIC* V2 Amandus 1-3; Potter (2004) 281.

about the same time. Apparently, the people from the city of Ptolemais attacked the city of Coptus and its surroundings, even calling upon the Blemmyes for help, which led to the incursion discussed in the previous chapter.[194]

It is certainly reasonable to see the Bagaudae as a form of self-help made necessary by a lack of imperial attention for Gaul, now that there was no longer a separate Gallic Empire that concentrated its efforts on the western provinces.[195] In addition, their existence, as well as that of Lydius and the conflict in Egypt, is another sign that the idea of a 'crisis' that lasted into the 280's is certainly not based upon nothing. But to see this as part of a general phenomenon in which the imperial monopoly on violence was challenged throughout the empire is, in my view, overdramatic, as none of the given examples really justify such a grand interpretation.

That there could be something like a civil war between the two Egyptian cities is indeed rather startling. However, there are two good reasons for questioning its significance. First, I think that it is once again important that Probus does not seem to have felt the need to visit Egypt in person. Second, our only knowledge of the civil war comes from a characteristically muddled notion in Zosimus; when the *HA* covers similar problems during Probus' reign the cities are said to have been captured by the Blemmyes rather than being at war with each other. That its author apparently did not know of any conflict between the two cities (otherwise he would surely have used it to craft yet another fanciful anecdote) might perhaps even suggest that there was never any such thing, but that must remain conjecture; it does at least indicate that the episode was insignificant.[196]

For Lydius there is no evidence – more specifically coins bearing imperial pretentions – that he ever was anything other than what Zosimus describes him as, a brigand leader. Such evidence does, as previously seen, exist for the Bagaudae, but to explain this as a sign of how grave the underlying difficulties that led to the rise of the war bands were is perhaps still connected to the traditional view of large-scale disaster in Gaul during the second half of the 270's, a view that, as previously seen, can be questioned.[197] Potter's alternative suggestion, that Amandus was causing trouble because he was a remaining supporter of Carus'

[194] Potter (2004) 277-279, 281; for the Egyptian civil war, see Zos. 1.71.1.
[195] MacMullen (1966) 211-213; cf. Leadbetter (2009) 52.
[196] *HA*, *Vit. Prob.* 17.2-3, 6; however, it is possible (so Potter (2004) 647 n.85.
[197] See n.83 above.

dynasty, is preferable;[198] it can be reconciled with the element of self-help if we see Amandus as using the Bagaudae as a means to his own end.

However we might interpret the Bagaudae, in the end Maximian appears to have disposed of them without too much trouble. But before the end of the century there would be two differing insurrections in Egypt. First, in the first half of the 290's, the cities of Busiris and Coptus revolted. Then, in either 296 or 297, a man named Domitius Domitianus declared himself emperor in Alexandria. This revolt, seemingly continued by Domitianus' subordinate Aurelius Achilleus after the death of the former, did not end until the capture of Alexandria by Diocletian in 298. Unfortunately, what exactly happened is obscure due to the extremely cursory treatment given by the literary sources to these events. Only two authors – Eusebius (as preserved by Jerome) and Zonaras – even knew or cared about the first insurrection, and while Domitianus' revolt is better attested everyone seems to have confused him with Achilleus.[199]

The documentary evidence is of some help: coins and papyri show that it was Domitianus who was declared emperor and that Achilleus was his adjutant. But, much like it was with the question of Egyptian instability in the 250's, the papyri generally show people carrying on as usual.[200] The only exception is a papyrus that seems to indicate something of a divide between supporters and opponents of the rebellion: the author notes that his brother-in-law has seemingly chosen to stay with the Egyptian prefect rather than report himself to Achilleus.[201] But while these revolts are obscure, some useful comments on these incidents have still been made by modern historians.

For the revolt of Busiris and Coptus, Leadbetter has noted that, while embarrassment prevented the tetrarchs from recording its suppression in their propaganda, the presence of Galerius shows that Diocletian took the revolt very seriously.[202] Then again, it could once again also be the case that the relative tranquillity on the frontiers allowed the *augustus* to

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[198] Potter (2004) 281.

[199] For the earlier revolt, see Euseb.-Jer., *Chron.* s.a. 293, with http://www.tertullian.org (accessed on 30-05-2014) for the text and a translation; Zon. 12.31. For the later one, see Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 39.23, 38; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 39.3; Zon. 12.31.

[200] For Domitianus' coins, see *RIC* VI Alexandria nos. 5-6, 19-20, 45. *P. Cairo. Isid.* 62, which describes a conflict between a group of siblings and their stepmother, lists Domitianus as emperor but also has Achilleus be referred to as "his highness" in l. 24 (τὸ μέγεθος) and 28 (τοῦ μείζονος). For other texts from this archive that refer to Domitianus as emperor, see *P. Cairo. Isid.* 38-39 (grain receipts), 80 (a liturgy replacement), 99-100 (land leasing contracts), 104-105 (division of inherited land).

[201] *SB* III 7252.

[202] W. L. Leadbetter, 'Galerius and the revolt of the Thebaid in 293/4' *Antichton* 34 (2000) 82-94, 83-84.

send his right-hand man to restore order. For Domitianus' usurpation there is general agreement that the immediate cause was a reform of the census and tax structure, which will be dealt with in the fourth chapter;[203] as such, it had a similar background to the rebellion of Jotapianus and possibly also Silbannicus. Considering the extremely unclear chronology, the suggestion by Williams and Leadbetter that the Alexandrian rebels tried to take advantage of the war with Persia is possible but unprovable.[204]

Everything or nothing

Perhaps the most notorious section of the *HA* is the book that deals with the so-called 'thirty tyrants' (*tyranni triginta*). As part of his overall effort to heap all kinds of abuse upon Gallienus, the author mashed together a large number of people who had set themselves up as usurpers against that emperor. In fact, in order to reach the number of thirty to match the number of Athenian 'tyrants', the author had to scrape the absolute bottom of the barrel: some, like Zenobia, never arrogated imperial power for themselves; others, including one of the pretenders called Valens, do not belong to Gallienus' reign; and of yet others, like the supposedly famous statesman Censorinus, there is no evidence that they even existed. Moreover, as the author notes, "not much concerning them can be either related by scholars or demanded of them".[205] As such, he resorted to invention even more than usual, with the section on the ephemeral Gallic emperor Marius being a nice example:

> "But we have already said too much about this man, concerning whom it will be sufficient to add that there was no one whose hands were stronger, for either striking or thrusting, since he seemed to have not veins in his fingers, but sinews. For he is said to have thrust back oncoming wagons by means of his forefinger and with a single finger to have struck the strongest men so hard that they felt as much pain as though hit by a blow from wood or blunted iron; and he crushed many objects by the mere pressure of two of his fingers."[206]

That very little reliable information can be gleaned from these biographies is no novel conclusion. Nevertheless, historians are fairly unanimous in seeing the third century as a time of constant usurpations. In particular, the hyperboles of De Blois and more recently Liebeschuetz concerning pretenders are perhaps not too dissimilar from the idea of 'thirty tyrants'

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[203] Barnes (1981) 17; Williams (1985) 79-80; Corcoran (1996) 174; Potter (2004) 333-334; Rees (2004) 39; the relevant edict is preserved on *P. Cairo Isid.* 1.
[204] Williams (1985) 79-82; Leadbetter (2009) 91.
[205] *HA*, *Tyr. Trig.* 1.2 (Loeb translation): *non multa de iis vel dici possint a doctioribus vel requiri*.
[206] *HA*, *Tyr. Trig.* 8.4-5 (Loeb translation).

during the 260's; similarly, Hekster accepts the proliferation of usurpers even while challenging the concept of the 'soldier emperor'.[207] To be fair, it is true that usurpations were at their most common during the 'crisis'.[208] And as far as the comparative purpose of this thesis is concerned, the 'crisis' easily beats the tetrarchy when it comes to the number of usurpers. In fact, other than the pretender Julianus put down by Carinus in 285, who can be seen as part of the transition from 'crisis' to tetrarchy, as well as Carausius and Allectus, about whom more in the next section, we only know of three 'proper' pretenders from the tetrarchic period. The most significant one was Lucius Domitius Alexander, who was declared emperor in Africa against Maxentius. But he was subdued easily, and his overtures to Constantine, attested by a milestone where Alexander lists him as his co-emperor, appear to have been ignored.[209]

The other two are only directly known from Eusebius.[210] Of the first, in Mytilene, nothing is known. However, we do have more information about the second one, from Syria. This usurpation occurred in 302 or 303 in the city of Seleucia, when a company of soldiers, dissatisfied by their workload, forced their unwilling commander Eugenius to assume the purple. Then, after a heavy bout of drinking, they marched on Antioch, whose population defeated them. In the aftermath, Diocletian would order a purge of the city councils of Seleucia and Antioch. The misfortune of these councillors would prove to be a boon to modern historians: one of the executed men was the grandfather of the famed Antiochene rhetor Libanius, to whom we owe all our information about this incident – an important reminder of the fact that there may well have been more incidents like this.[211] And yet, most authors of works on the tetrarchic era written in the last few decades tend to ignore Eugenius altogether; Barnes, Corcoran and Leadbetter, the third of whom rightly notes that Libanius' obvious resentment about his grandfather's execution there may well have been more to the story than can now be known, are the only exceptions that I know of. Indeed, Eusebius' Loeb

[207] De Blois (1974) 21: "usurpers arose everywhere" (my translation); Liebeschuetz (2007) 17: "an endless succession of usurpations"; Hekster (2008) 57-58.
[208] De Blois (1974) 15.
[209] Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 40.17-18; Zos. 2.12, 14.2-4; *ILS* 8936.
[210] Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* 8.6.8.
[211] Lib., *Or.* 11.158-162, *Or.* 19.45-46, *Or.* 20.18-20; *Or.* 1.3, 125 and *Ep.* 124.3 also mention the execution of his grandfather. Cf. Euseb., *Hist Eccl.* 8.6.8-9, who claims that in the wake of the usurpation there were mass arrests of Christians.

translator even admitted that he had no idea what Eusebius' Syrian uprising was supposed to refer to.[212]

However, while usurpers were notable for their quantity during the 'crisis', this says nothing about their quality. In that respect, the following story from Zosimus concerning the revolts of Jotapianus and Marinus Pacatianus, of which a very similar version appears in Zonaras, is highly significant:

> "Philip was disturbed by these events and asked the senate either to help him against the revolts or else, if they were displeased with his rule, to dismiss him. No-one answered until Decius, renowned for his birth, reputation and virtue, said that he was worrying himself needlessly, because such revolts collapse quickly of their own accord from complete lack of support. In fact, everything turned out as the experienced Decius had predicted, and Iotapianus and Marinus were put down with little trouble."[213]

The story itself is probably an invention, intended to enhance the reputation of Decius,[214] but this does not change the fact that the observation about the quick collapse of revolts is remarkably astute. It certainly seems to have been the case with Pacatianus, as there is no indication in any of our sources that he was put down by Decius,[215] and it likely went like that in many other cases as well.

If we look at the 'straightforward' pretenders, those who made a bid for imperial power and either succeeded or failed, it is striking how many usurpations seem to have quickly fizzled out again, generally ending in the assassination of the would-be emperor. And even when it came to a battle between a usurper and the 'legitimate' emperor, that one battle would generally be all that happened: the winner would have the empire, the loser would be dead (either immediately or shortly afterwards), and that would be the end of it. It has been suggested that one usurpation would quickly encourage another, but this is only explicitly attested along the Danube, and it would not happen again after Gallienus' strengthening of the region.[216]

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[212] Barnes (1982) 12; Corcoran (1996) 217 n.68; Leadbetter (2009) 133; Lake and Oulton (1926-1932) 2: 269 n.2. Eugenius is also discussed in D. Kienast, *Romische Kaisertabelle: Grundzüge einer römischen Kaiserchronologie* (Darmstadt 1990), 266-267, but the very slim bibliography listed there is telling. There was also a usurper on Cyprus called Calocaerus sometime around 330 (see Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 41.11; Euseb.-Jer., *Chron.* s.a. 334), but he falls outside our timeframe.

[213] Zos. 1.21.1-2 (trans. Ridley); cf. Zon. 12.19.

[214] Potter (2004) 244.

[215] Contra ibidem, 240, who calls Decius "the agent of [Pacatianus'] desctruction" but does not elaborate.

[216] E.g. Potter (1990) 41; Goldsworthy (2009) 152; cf. Mócsy (1962) 567-570; De Blois (1974) 26-29.

A chronological survey of the various usurpers between 249 and 285 will help to make this clear. First, there were Valens and Priscus under Decius. We have no record of their suppression, but we also have no coins of them, which means that we can safely assume that their rebellions were highly ephemeral, although Priscus would, as previously seen, cause some damage by allowing the 'Scythians' into Philippopolis. For the various pretenders that appeared around the time of Valerian's capture much is unclear, even how many of the men mentioned in the sources existed. There are coins of both the sons of Macrianus, as well as of Regalianus and his wife;[217] it is also known that Ingenuus and Aemilianus (the prefect of Egypt discussed in the previous chapter) existed, although the latter was probably a supporter of Macrianus and Callistus rather than a pretender in his own right. Nothing can be said about another Valens, who is said to have usurped as an act of loyalty to Gallienus in order to block the advance of Macrianus.[218]

But while the revolt of Macrianus and Callistus required multiple battles to be put down, and would, as we will soon see, also necessitate the granting of special powers to Odaenathus of Palmyra, this was due to the unique circumstance of a duumvirate of pretenders who also had an important supporter in the form of Aemilianus. The other pretenders were more easily death with: Ingenuus was defeated by Gallienus, Regalianus was killed by an attack of Roxolani (possibly with the connivance of Gallienus) and Valens, if he even existed, was killed by his own men.[219]

There are some conspirators belonging to the early 260's mentioned by Zosimus; three of them, Memor, Antoninus and Aureolus, are mentioned by name. The third would, as previously seen, only openly usurp in 268. Of Memor it is said in another source that "he was immediately slain by the soldiers" before he could even come to a usurpation, and we can probably say that the same thing about the otherwise unattested Antoninus, especially as neither of them were known to the author of the *HA*.[220] As for Aureolus, the siege of his main base Milan was lengthy, and significant because it would mean the end not just for Aureolus but also for Gallienus, but it did not involve large-scale battles.

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[217] *RIC* V2 Macrianus II, Quietus, Regalianus, Dryantilla.

[218] Aemilianus is said to have usurped in his own right by *HA*, *Tyr. Trig.* 22; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 32.4; however, there is no documentary evidence to confirm it. For Valens, see *HA*, *Tyr. Trig.* 19.1-2; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 32.4; Amm. Marc. 21.16.10 possibly alludes to him.

[219] For the theory concerning Regalianus' suppression, see Fitz (1966) 15, 58-63; for Valens' death, see *HA*, *Tyr. Trig.* 19.3.

[220] Zos. 1.38.1; Anonymous Continuator of Dio *frag.* 4 (= *FHG* IV 193-194): σπουδῇ ὑπὸ τῶν στρατιωτῶν ἀναιρεῖται.

The next group of pretenders appears under Aurelian: Domitianus, Firmus, Septimius and Urbanus are all said to have usurped during his reign at varying times. However, the only one of whom we have any coins is Domitianus, and then only two, the second of which was only discovered recently. In addition, the fact that the two coins originate from France and Britain respectively suggests that he is actually in some way related to the Gallic Empire. It is surely also significant that only Firmus got his own bogus 'life' in the *HA*; apparently he ate ostriches, swam with crocodiles and had so many books that he boasted of his ability to support an army on papyrus and glue.[221]

There are also a number of pretenders known from the last years of Probus' reign, between 280 and 282. First, there was an abortive attempt at usurpation in Britain by a man whose identity is unknown. It has been suggested that this was the result of Aurelian's coinage reform and the new threat of Saxon pirates, the same reasons that later allowed Carausius to claim regional authority. However, the former point is highly problematic on its own, and the latter point is bound up with the long-standing debate about the series of fortifications erected on the British coast from about this time, the 'Saxon Shore', so nothing can be said conclusively.[222]

In addition, there were two usurpers, Proculus and Bonosus, who usurped concurrently in Lyon and Cologne, as well as a man called Saturninus who was, supposedly against his will, proclaimed emperor by his men in the east. But Kreucher, who spent some pages on these men in his monograph on Probus, has rightly noted that there is only scant numismatic evidence for Bonosus and Saturninus (and none for Proculus) and no confirmed epigraphical evidence for any of them. This, coupled with the fact that Probus does not seem to have felt it necessary to march against any of them in person – in fact, Saturninus' revolt is a clear example of the usurpations that collapsed on their own accord – shows that these men, too, were of only marginal importance.[223]

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[221] Zos. 1.49.2 has Septimius, Urbanus and Domitianus; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 35.3 only has Severus (explicitly stating that he was immediately killed); Firmus is only known from *HA*, *Tyr. Quadr.* 3-6. For Domitianus and his coins, see R. A. Abdy, 'The second-known specimen of a coin of Domitian II recorded in a hoard from Oxfordshire' *Revue Numismatique* 160 (2004) 6, 219-221.

[222] Zos. 1.66.2; Frere (1987) 172-173; cf. Kreucher (2003) 164-165, who rejects the reform as a factor but accepts the military threat, also adding a penetration of Hadrian's Wall, but his main evidence for this are the always problematic coin hoards. For the Saxon Shore, see the overview in Casey (1994) 115-126.

[223] Kreucher (2003) 166-177. The sources are Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 37.3; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.17.1; {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 37.2; *HA*, *V. Prob.* 9.14-15 (most or all of *Quadr. Tyr.* 7-15 is useless); Zos. 1.66.1; Zon. 12.29.

The only other usurpation that can be argued to have been part of the 'crisis' is that of Julianus from 283/284 to 285 in Pannonia, which was put down by Carinus after a single battle. Of Julianus we can only say that, on the basis of one of his coins that describes him as "the *augustus* of Pannonia", he might have been striving for regional authority; in addition, his suppression by Carinus has plausibly been taken as a sign that the latter was not quite as depraved and useless as the sources would have us believe.[224] Overall, the track record of pretenders during the 'crisis' is generally not at all impressive. But admittedly, we have not yet discussed the most significant aspect of internal disorder during the 'crisis': the temporary secession of one or more regions from the central Empire.

Better off alone?

Between 249 and 324 there were three major secessions: the Gallic Empire and the kingdom of Palmyra during the 'crisis', and the 'British Empire' of Carausius and Allectus during the tetrarchy. In this section we will tackle them in that order, starting with the empire of Postumus. We will mainly be thinking about how stable these secessions were, how they came to an end, what their consequences were and why people were willing to support their leaders. If we try to answer the first question for the Gallic Empire, we immediately come up against major controversy. First, there is the matter of the empire's stability under Postumus.

On the one hand, Postumus' record of success against the 'barbarians' appears to have been excellent, and archaeological data suggest generally peaceful conditions and a noticeable lack of city fortification in provinces ruled over by the Gallic emperors between 260 and 275.[225] On the other hand, Zonaras tells us that Postumus was twice nearly overthrown by Gallienus, there are several coin hoards connected to the Gallic Empire, and we have an inscription from the west of Germany detailing the repairs of a public bath seemingly necessitated by "the appearance of the enemies of the State".[226] However, the supposed near-collapses of Postumus' regime may actually have been part of a deliberate strategy to avoid a pitched battle with Gallienus on both occasions, and while Gallienus and Postumus

[224] The relevant coin is *RIC* V2 Julianus no. 4 (*Pannoniae Aug.*); see also Leadbetter (2009) 50.
[225] Drinkwater (1987) 29-30, 229-231.
[226] Zon. 12.24; Drinkwater (1987) 30, 199-200; W. Eck, 'Krise oder Nichtkrise – das ist hier die Frage. Köln und sein Territorium in der 2. Hälfte des 3. Jahrhunderts' in: Hekster, de Kleijn and Slootjes (2007) 23-43, 38-40, also providing the inscription (l. 4-5: *prodit*[*ionem hostium*] *publicorum*).

would continually use their coins to wage ideological warfare against each other, they never took military action against each other again.[227] Coin hoards are always problematic as indicators of major unrest, and the inscription on its own cannot be used to indicate major problems.

The second controversy concerns the stability of the Gallic Empire in its last months, which brings us to the manner of its end. There is agreement among scholars that, after the instability following the murder of Postumus that led to the defection of the Spanish provinces, order was mostly restored under Victorinus.[228] Most think that under his successor Tetricus the instability returned, the short-lived usurpation by a man named Faustinus being a particularly notable example, which weakened his position to a point where Aurelian was able to win an easy, if bloody, victory.[229]

This view has been questioned by Drinkwater, who postulates a much stronger Tetricus based upon the confidence exuded by his coinage and the fact that the battle at Châlons that ended the empire is said to have involved considerable slaughter and was thus hard fought; he also suggests that Faustinus was actually a supporter of Tetricus who rebelled against Aurelian after the battle, as this fits with the comment of Zonaras that Aurelian soon had to suppress a second Gallic revolt.[230] But this, I feel, places too much trust in the coin evidence, which may well reflect a situation precisely opposite to what the messages on the coins proclaim. And the references to the battle are too brief to say anything about the battle being only a close victory for Aurelian, although the same must be said for the view that they "leave little doubt that the slaughter was fairly one-sided".[231] The redating of Faustinus is plausible, but this need not make him a supporter of Tetricus, and as he is known only from a brief notice in Victor[232] his revolt must have been quite insubstantial anyway.

As for Postumus' support, it is interesting to note that his decision to stay in Gaul (a decision he supposedly explained in a letter to Gallienus),[233] whether it was a sign of conscientiousness or simply pragmatism, seems to have endeared him to the populace, even as

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[227] Drinkwater (1987) 30-31; for the coin war, see C. Grandvallet, 'L' Affrontement Ideologique entre Gallien et Postume: l' exemple des bustes casques et des bustes à attributs Herculeens' in: Hekster, de Kleijn and Slootjes (2007) 337-351, esp. 345-351.
[228] Drinkwater (1987) 38-39; Watson (1999) 89-90; Potter (2004) 265-266.
[229] Watson (1999) 92-94; Potter (2004) 272.
[230] Drinkwater (1987) 39-43; *Pan. Lat.* V 4.3; Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 35.3-5; Zon. 12.27.
[231] Watson (1999) 246 n.13.
[232] Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 35.4.
[233] Anonymous Continuator of Dio *frag.* 6 (= *FHG* 4 194-195); see also Drinkwater (1987) 82-84, accepting it.

the multiple missed opportunities to march on Rome cost him the affection of his army. The best explanation is that the populace evidently desired the presence of an emperor to control the pressures on the frontier; even if, as seen in the previous chapter, the significance and extent of this pressure is questionable, we also saw that there can be little doubt but that those living near the frontier perceived a serious threat.

It has been suggested that the disappearance of the Gallic Empire soon provoked the devastating 'barbarian' invasions under Probus,[234] but we have previously already seen that their severity can be questioned. The Gallic Empire's long-term significance is difficult to ascertain, but it was probably rather minor: it can be seen as part of a tendency towards 'self-help' in the western provinces, but there is no reason to connect it with separatism.[235] As such, it seems reasonable to follow Drinkwater in seeing the Gallic Empire as a temporary construct that was bound to collapse at one point or another.[236] In that sense, the fact that a single victory was enough to bring down the empire entirely, just as it was with most usurpations, was also significant. The Gallic Empire was generally stable under the rule of Postumus, and later Victorinus, but during the last year of Tetricus it began to fall apart.

Next, we have the Palmyrene kingdom. This came about as a consequence of the large-scale revolt of Macrianus, Callistus and Aemilianus. While two of his generals managed to tackle Macrianus and Aemilianus, Gallienus had to ask Odaenathus to take care of Callistus, who was still in Syria. This Odaenathus did, but in return Gallienus had to cede de facto control over the east to him. There were, however, precedents: Odaenathus' new position had previously been given to Priscus, the brother of Philip.[237] We have already seen in the previous two chapters that Odaenathus' reign was successful; this was also the reason for the support that he received, as, much like the Gauls, the Palmyrenes firmly saw themselves as Romans and were simply taking matters into their own hands rather than fulfilling separatist ambitions.[238] We will now mostly consider the stability of his relation with Gallienus.

How loyal Odaenathus was to Gallienus is not immediately obvious. His arrogation of the title of King of Kings after his victory over the Persians suggests an open flaunting of his independence, and despite his very favourable reputation in the literary sources there is a

[234] Drinkwater (1987) 43-44.
[235] Ibidem, 250-251; cf. MacMullen (1966) 213-214.
[236] Drinkwater (1987) 30-34, 239-242, 250-251.
[237] *ILS* 9005 (= Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) no. 2.3.2).
[238] Hartmann (2001) 430-439.

disreputable story that he had previously tried to join forces with Shapur.[239] But a title like King of Kings was not Roman and would thus not have caused offence to Gallienus (in fact, it proclaimed his rejection of Shapur), and the story of his earlier attempted betrayal may well stem from a refusal of its author to accept that Odaenathus was wholly Roman. In general, Odaenathus seems to have been pragmatic enough to accept the at least nominal overlordship of Gallienus.[240] Relations between Palmyra and the central Empire were therefore peaceful throughout most of the 260's, a significant difference with the Gallic Empire.

But both were essentially temporary constructs. In this case, however, it was a conflict of views rather than structural weaknesses that ensured conflict: Rome envisioned Odaenathus' position as being unique, while the Palmyrenes saw it as hereditary, leading to the investiture of Odaenathus' son Vaballathus after the death of the former.[241] Whether hostilities were initiated already by Gallienus, said by two late sources to have been complicit in Odaenathus' death, cannot now be known, but an expeditionary force was sent to the east under Claudius II at the latest.[242] The result was, as described in the previous chapter, a short period of conflict, but by 272 the east had been brought back under Roman control by Aurelian. And while the only detailed account of that campaign, by Zosimus, makes it clear that there were multiple battles and that Palmyra revolted a second time afterwards, it also shows that most eastern cities needed little incentive – Aurelian's pragmatic mildness towards captured cities sufficed – to re-join central authority.[243] However, there was one long-term consequence: the destruction of Palmyra after its second revolt deprived Rome of a major buffer city between them and the Persians.[244]

Finally, we must deal with Carausius and Allectus. As we saw in the first chapter, the literary evidence allows us to construct the basic history of their 'British Empire'. But it is utterly insufficient to come to a deeper understanding of their secession. The epigraphical evidence is even worse: there is only one relevant inscription, and that only confirms that

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[239] The title appears posthumously on the first inscription published as Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) no. 4.7.2; for the story, see *frag.* 10 of Petrus Patricius (= Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) no. 4.1.3).
[240] Watson (1999) 30-32; Hartmann (2001) 135-138, 182-183.
[241] Potter (2004) 260; Ando (2012) 172.
[242] See *frag.* 7 of the Continuator of Dio and *frag.* 152 of John of Antioch (= Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 4.5.1). It is rejected by Watson (1999) 57-58; seen as a possibility by Isaac (1990) 222; and accepted by Hartmann (2001) 226-230. *HA*, *Vit. Gall.* 13.4-5 claims that a Roman army sent eastwards was defeated by Zenobia under Gallienus, but Potter (2004) 266-267 has plausibly argued that this belongs to the reign of Claudius.
[243] Zos. 1.50.1-61.1; Watson (1999) 71-72; see also Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 103 no. 4.10.1, an inscription that indicates support for Aurelian from within Palmyra.
[244] W. Ball, *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire* (London/New York 2000), 83.

Carausius' control stretched all the way to Hadrian's Wall.[245] There is plenty of numismatic and archaeological evidence, but using this to reconstruct the history of Carausius' empire is problematic, although various scholars, most notably John Casey, have made good attempts. Nevertheless, with the source material being as poor as it is – it is not even certain what Allectus' position was prior to his accession[246] – only brief and speculative comments can be made regarding the questions posed at the beginning of this section.

With regard to stability, there are some negative signs: there may have been a brief economic crisis, and, of course, Carausius was assassinated in 293. But the fact that the empire held out for nearly a decade despite an unenviable military position, even beating of Maximian's initial attack, shows great tenacity. The length of the final phase of conflict between Britain and the tetrarchs is also noteworthy: even after the capture of Boulogne it still took two years to assemble a fleet strong enough to bring down Allectus, and the presence of Allectan coins in France that do not include his final issues indicates that he managed to retain continental possessions for most of his reign.[247] Especially speculative must be an answer to the question of ramifications of the empire's dissolution: perhaps there were raids by Picts, but there seems to have been no major damage.[248] The most likely reason for Carausius' popularity found is a fear, whether this was justified or not, of 'barbarian' raiders.[249] In that sense the British Empire was similar to the Gallic one. Another interesting similarity between the empires of Carausius and Postumus is that Carausius may also have been murdered because the soldiers were dissatisfied with his policy of staying in one place.[250]

Overall, however, Carausius was more similar to Zenobia, in that he tried (and failed) to be acknowledged as a legitimate partner in government. But whereas Zenobia was satisfied with simply minting coins that had the portraits of both Vaballathus and Aurelian on them, Carausius took the additional step to have himself, Diocletian and Maximian depicted

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[245] *ILS* 8928.
[246] For Allectus as a finance minister, see Casey (1994) 127-129; according to A. R. Birley, *The Roman Government of Britain* (Oxford 2005), 375-377, he was Carausius' praetorian prefect.
[247] Casey (1994) 65, 127-134.
[248] Frere (1987) 332; Casey (1994) 136, 147.
[249] Frere (1987) 175-176; Casey (1994) 100-103; Leadbetter (2009) 57-59. These authors all seem too traditional in their view of the 'barbarian menace', particularly Frier with his nowadays discredited emphasis on the 'barbarisation' of the legions, but this does not change the fact that the perception of danger was probably real. See also Birley (2005) 376-377, who suggests that the Vergilian quotations found on some of Carausius' coins could have endeared him to the British elite.
[250] Casey (1994) 113-114, with *Pan. Lat.* VIII 12.2.

on coins with the text "Carausius and his brothers".[251] Whether this was a desperate attempt at gaining acceptance or him taking pleasure in the inability of the diarchy to unseat him is impossible to say. Another important similarity with Palmyra was that it took more than one battle to bring Britain to heel. But in the end the most important difference with the 'crisis' secessions is that Carausius and Allectus only ever controlled a small part of the empire as opposed to nearly a full third. This is probably most significant, even if they deserve more attention than they usually get for their tenacity.

An empire divided

Throughout this chapter we have seen that on its various levels, the internal disorders should not be overstated for the 'crisis', and their presence must not be overlooked for the tetrarchy. But in all cases the periods either suffered from the problem to the same degree, or it was less present in the tetrarchic era. It might therefore appear that this chapter must end on the same note as the previous one, but this is not so. For there is one category of internal disorder that did not appear during the 'crisis', and it is, in my view, the most significant one: wars between the various members of the imperial college.

The course of these wars between 306 and 324 has already been sketched in the first chapter, so there is no need to repeat it here. It is, however, worth emphasising that these wars were protracted and led to great loss of life on both sides. Eusebius' claim that Constantine always tried to limit the number of casualties in battles is belied by the large number of dead from his battles listed in other sources.[252] This is certainly not ignored by other scholars. Once again, Gibbon already recognized that the tetrarchy only functioned for as long as Diocletian held power, and later scholars, most notably Kolb, have not shied away from attacking "the selfishness of Constantine" in breaking with Diocletian's plan.[253] Yet this can still be seen as a positive development: the new system of Diocletian kept internal strife within the confines of the imperial college or the male relatives of its members, thus greatly reducing the number of potential threats and finally ending the vicious cycle of usurpations that characterised the third century. And those who did break into the college from outside

[251] *RIC* V2 Carausius no.1 (*Carausius et Fratres Sui*); see also Rees (2004) no. 44.
[252] Euseb., *Vit. Cons.* 2.13; *Origo* 16 (more than 20000 dead on Licinius' side during the first war), 27 (25000 of Licinius' men dead during the second war); cf. Zos. 2.19.3, 23.7, 24.2, 26.3 (although likely exaggerated).
[253] Gibbon (Bury ed. 1897-1900) 1: 394; Kolb (1987) 143 ("der Egoismus Constantins"); see also Nixon and Rodgers (1994) 186, 215.

were content with only part of the empire rather than all of it, thus 'only' weakening the bond between the various provinces rather than the office of emperor itself.[254]

Indeed, so great is the appreciation of the idea of multiple emperors that it has also had an impact upon the historiography of the 'crisis', by making scholars see the actions of certain emperors as a precedent leading up to the tetrarchy. This has been done by Millar with regard to the situation of the 250's, when Valerian, his fellow *augustus* Gallienus and his *caesar* Saloninus were all active in different parts of the empire. Horster has done likewise with Antiochene coins from the reign of Carus, which speak of three *augusti* through the legend *AUGGG.*, thus making the emperor and his sons into an imperial triad.[255] It is also present in Drinkwater's critical stance towards Aurelian for his failure to end the 'crisis', blaming his unwillingness to take a colleague: "as Diocletian did immediately after he became sole emperor, Aurelian should have shared the burdens of his office".[256]

That the measures of Valerian and Carus are part of a long-term development leading up to the establishment of the tetrarchy is possible, if unprovable. But to blame emperors like Aurelian and Probus for failing to do the same misses the fairly essential point that these men lacked an obvious heir. It could be argued that a colleague could easily be found among the Balkan-dominated cabal of generals that had appeared under the reign of Gallienus, but while the existence of the group is well attested the various links between them are mostly forgeries by the *HA*.[257] Moreover, there are indications of conflict within this group: Potter has noted that Claudius II may well have desired that his brother Quintillus rather than Aurelian should have succeeded him (and what happened with Tacitus, Florian and Probus could perhaps be a parallel), and Drinkwater himself has acknowledged that Carus was probably behind the coup that brought down Probus.[258]

In those circumstances only a capable adult son could be trusted as a colleague. The only suitable candidates during the 'crisis' appear to have been Volusianus, Gallienus and Carinus, all of whom received the hatred of later authors for their troubles. That Diocletian

[254] Williams (1985) 49, 198, 209; W. Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army, 284-1081* (Stanford 1995), 199-200; E. Flaig, 'Für eine Konzeptualisierung der Usurpation im spätrömischen Reich' in: F. Paschoud and J. Szidat eds., *Usurpationen in der Spätantike* (Stuttgart 1997), 15-34, 27-28.

[255] Millar (1993) 164; M. Horster, 'The emperor's family on coins (third century): ideology of stability in times of unrest' in: Hekster, de Kleijn and Slootjes eds. (2007) 291-309, 303; the specific coins are *RIC* V Carus nos. 125, 205, 208, 327, 375, 378.

[256] Drinkwater (2005) 61-62; cf. Ando (2012) 219, who does not explicitly criticize Aurelian for this but also points to a continued lack of charisma associated with the office.

[257] As demonstrated by Syme (1971) 208-220.

[258] Potter (2004) 268; Drinkwater (2005) 56-57.

selected someone who was unrelated to him was not a bold and necessary change of strategy, he was simply lucky enough to have an associate as loyal as Maximian, whose loyalty is acknowledged even by the hostile Lactantius: "two people could not combine in so loyal a friendship if there were not in them both a single mind, the same line of thought, an equal will, and identical opinions".[259] Loyalty seems to have been the prime consideration for admission to Diocletian's college in general, and while all the tetrarchs seem to have been decent enough administrators, their military record is rather mixed.

Licinius made the best out of a bad job in his first conflict with Constantine, and Galerius scored an impressive victory over the Persians. But that victory only came after an initial defeat, and the previously discussed incident before the walls of Rome does not suggest that his men had much confidence in him; similarly, that Severus' army deserted him so quickly means that his generalship can hardly have been inspiring. Maximian seems to have done better in this regard, as his declaration of support for his usurping son seems to have been a major factor in the unwillingness of Severus' men to fight.[260]

But while he was a good enough commander to defeat the Bagaudae and the various 'barbarian' tribes that he had to contend with, he had little success against Carausius. Similarly, while it is likely that Constantius oversaw the recapture of Carausius' continental possessions, the only non-Panegyrical account of the final attack on Britain, that of the 'Kaisergeschichte', suggests that the role of the praetorian prefect Asclepiodotus was far greater than that of Constantius.[261] And we have previously already seen how Constantius nearly allowed himself to be overwhelmed by a force of Alamanni on one occasion. Maxentius was effective enough to defeat Alexander, but his generalship at the battle of the Milvian Bridge appears to have been anything but inspired. Daja seems to have been defeated by Licinius with little difficulty. As for Diocletian, we know of only one major battle where he was in personal command, namely the battle of the Margus against Carinus, which he very nearly

[259] For the quotation, see Lact., *DMP* 8.1 (trans. Creed): *nec enim possent in amiticam tam fidelem cohaerere, nisi esset in utroque mens una, eadem cogitation, par voluntas, aequa sentential*. The role of Gallienus and Carinus in government is well attested. Less is known of Volusianus, the son of Gallus, but he appears as an adult on his coinage (e.g. *RIC* V1 Gallus no. 214, a plate of which can be found in Potter (1990) 45). See also Nixon and Rodgers (1994) 43-44.

[260] Potter (2004) 357.

[261] Casey (1994) 109, 134-135; Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 39.42: "Constantius destroyed him through Asclepiodotus" (trans. Bird; *Constantius Asclepiodoto* (…) *delevit)*; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.22.2: "He was crushed through the generalship of Asclepiodotus, the praetorian prefect" (trans. Bird; *Qui ductu Asclepiodoti praefecti praetorio oppressus est).* It is worth noting that both Victor (*De Caes.* 40.12) and Eutropius (*Brev.* 10.1.2-4) otherwise speak highly of Constantius. Naturally, *Pan. Lat.* VIII does not even mention Asclepiodotus.

lost.[262] Considering this poor record, it is highly significant that the most capable commander of all, Constantine, was ignored during the succession.

That Constantine played a significant role in the collapse of the tetrarchic order can hardly be doubted. For contrary to what most sources for both his wars with Licinius would have us believe, he was almost certainly the aggressor in both cases.[263] But the focus on Constantine should not obscure the fact that most of the other tetrarchs also did their fair share of plotting and scheming. While he did eagerly support Maxentius' usurpation when it came, Maximian should probably be excluded from plotting against Diocletian, since the suggestion of König that the acclamation of Constantius was an action taken without Diocletian's consent (forcing him, in turn, to appoint Galerius) has been convincingly refuted by Kolb: if Maximian really wanted to stir up trouble, he would surely have selected Maxentius.[264] Constantius would do just that when he consciously decided that Constantine should be emperor in his place, as we saw above.

The attempt of Leadbetter to downplay the involvement of Constantius – according to him Constantine came to his father of his own accord to secure his own interests, and the latter was not necessarily glad to see him – does not quite convince. He is right to note the suspiciousness of the fact that Constantius has little function in the historiographical tradition beyond being ill, dying and passing the torch to Constantine. But his argument that Constantius' campaigns in the last years of his live, most notably the one in Britain, show that he cannot have been very ill at that time and would thus not have been planning forward for the succession, is too weak to overturn the standard view of Constantius.[265] For it ignores the fact that there was another emperor that went on campaign (in Britian, in fact), even as he was dying, namely Septimius Severus.

And if that point can still be questioned, it seems reasonably certain that Constantius tried to distance himself from Diocletian's persecution of the Christians as much as he could. Conversely, Daja tried to avoid implementing Galerius' toleration edict even as he avoided openly setting himself against his imperial colleagues for now: first he ordered only a limited

[262] Potter (2004) 358 notes Maxentius' mistake in choosing to fight with the bridge behind him. For the defeat of Daja, see Lact., *DMP* 45.2-47.6, 49.1-2; Zos. 2.17.3. For the battle at the Margus, see Aur. Vict., D*e Caes.* 39.11-12, going so far as to call it a defeat for Diocletian, who was saved by the assassination of Carinus; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.20.2.
[263] Potter (2013) 210-211, 230.
[264] I. König, 'Die Berufung des Constantius Chlorus und des Galerius zu Caesaren. Gedanken zur Entstehung der Ersten Tetrarchie' *Chiron* 4 (1974) 567-576, 573-576; Kolb (1987) 77-80.
[265] Leadbetter (2009) 156-165.

restoration, then he undertook new repressive measures, and finally he went back to partial tolerance.[266] However, we already saw in the first chapter that he too eventually declared war on his colleagues when he allied himself to Maxentius.

Of the items listed above we can be reasonably sure that they happened. In addition to those, Lactantius has conveyed a general impression of both Diocletian and Galerius being continually undermined by their direct subordinates. Thus, upon hearing of the appointment of Licinius as *augustus*, a discontented Daja, who remained *caesar*, demanded equal treatment, and actually managed to have himself acclaimed as *augustus* by his troops against the wishes of Galerius.[267] But in general, the main theme of the *De Mortibus* is that of a nervous Diocletian, who is constantly hounded and pressured by the crude bully Galerius. How much of this can be believed is difficult to tell, and relates to the controversial question of Lactantius' veracity, and that matter therefore demands some consideration.

On the one hand, it is beyond doubt that Lactantius was heavily biased against most of the tetrarchs and against Galerius in particular. And some items, such as his claim that the tetrarchs quadrupled the size of the army, are patently exaggerations. It is therefore easy to see why not all historians have been convinced of the veracity of his narrative. On the other hand, it has also been observed that documentary sources confirm many of Lactantius' details, and as he was living in Diocletian's capital Nicomedia in the northwest of Turkey until at least 305, he would have been close to the action.[268] It is therefore easy to see why he has received such a differing reception.

Here, the most important point is the role ascribed by Lactantius to Galerius in determining the succession. The critical passage is a conversation between Diocletian, still weak from his recent illness, and an aggressive and determined Galerius. The latter first succeeds in forcing the former and Maximian to abdicate, and then manages to have his associates Severus and Daja selected as *caesares* rather than the intended heirs Constantine and

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[266] For Constantius as a reluctant persecutor, see Lact., *DMP* 15.7; Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* 8.13.13, *Vit. Cons.* 1.13.1-3. For Daja's pronouncements, see Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* 9.1.3-6, 9.7.3-14 (= *AE* (1988) 1046), 9.9a.1-9, with Corcoran (1996) 148-152; for Galerius' toleration edict, see Lact., *DMP* 34; Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* 8.17.

[267] Lact., *DMP* 32; see also Barnes (1981) 32-33; Leadbetter (2009) 205. The position of the later tetrarchic *caesares* was, of course, always problematic: as Rees (2004) 11 has noted, by 310 none of them were satisfied with the title of *caesar* alone.

[268] The case for the prosecution has been most fully put by Kolb (1987) 131-139; more recently, Leadbetter (2009) 115-119 has focused on the dubiousness of the picture of Galerius that Lactantius presents. The most notable case of the defence has been made by Barnes (1981) 12-14. See also Lact., *DMP* 7.2 for the radical enlargement of the army.

Maxentius, despite the fact that Constantine was expected to become an excellent ruler and both Severus and Daja were unfit for command.[269]

Lactantius' claim to give a verbatim account of a private conversation between two emperors has naturally been a cause of some concern to those disinclined to believe him. Nevertheless, while it would be a bad idea to take the conversation as we have it literally – those involved, particularly Galerius, are clearly caricatures – it is quite plausible that the general gist of it became publicly known, and that Lactantius' view of the political situation as contained in the dialogue has validity.[270] Moreover, the main argument advanced against the arrangement presented by Lactantius is that a ruler as strong as Diocletian would never have allowed this to happen. For if he was really that weak, why was he so effective as a referee at the Carnuntum conference mentioned in the first chapter?[271]

However, this will not do. Diocletian was still weakened from his brush with death, so while the relentless pressure from Galerius is likely to be exaggerated, and the claim that he was responsible for Diocletian's abdication highly questionable, it is by no means implausible that he seized a unique opportunity to rearrange matters to his own liking. And Diocletian's weaker health need not have damaged his charismatic authority at Carnuntum, especially as he was one of the main innovators on that front.[272]

The argument that there was a change in the plans for the succession is far better supported: two of the Panegyrics contain references to hereditary succession, which was, after all, the preferred mode of succession, and both Severus and Daja had little to commend them other than being associates of Galerius. It is therefore reasonable to see Galerius as the architect of some sort of change intended for his own benefit; indeed, Leadbetter, the most recent defender of Galerius' loyalty towards Diocletian, notes that even if the new arrangement was created through friendly rather than hostile persuasion, Galerius still wilfully set himself against both Maximian and Constantius.[273] We have seen that the results were catastrophic: by passing over two claimants to imperial power Galerius created two obvious threats to the stability of his new order, and both threats would soon manifest themselves.

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[269] Lact., *DMP* 18.
[270] Barnes (1981) 297 n.95; Potter (2004) 338, 662 n.22.
[271] Kolb (1987) 5, 136, 143; Rees (2004) 9.
[272] So Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 39.2-4; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.26; Amm. Marc. 15.5.18; see also MacMullen (1976) 44-47.
[273] *Pan. Lat.* X 14.1, VIII 20.1; Barnes (1981) 25-26; Potter (2004) 340-341; Leadbetter (2009) 134-146. For the careers of Severus and Daja, see Barnes (1982) 38-39. For heredity, see Potter (2004) 85; Harries (2012) 42.

However, like it was with Constantine, it would not be fair to pile all the blame upon Galerius:[274] it has been shown throughout this section that all the tetrarchs were in one way or another responsible for creating internal instability. Moreover, the conflicts between the tetrarchs also set a dangerous precedent for the future. While Constantine's final victory led to a brief period of peace, after his death in 337 internal stability soon returned: first most of his relatives were massacred with the connivance of his sons, and then those sons proceeded to quarrel with each other. This only ended after the bloody victory of Constantius II, Constantine's last remaining son, over the usurper Magnentius in 353. This was followed by further discord between Constantius and his cousins and *caesares* Gallus and Julian. But this pales compared to what happened in 378, when two-sided rivalry between the eastern emperor Valens and his nephew, the western emperor Gratian, prevented the forces from both halves of the empire from linking up in time to take on the Goths, which resulted in the battle of Adrianople, one of the worst defeats that the Roman Empire would ever suffer.[275] Having multiple emperors, then, was really not a good thing at all.

If this seems a rather obvious conclusion, then it is worth emphasising that only two scholars, Jochen Martin and Boris Bleckmann, appear to have argued the same at length. And even they neglect to do something that strengthens the argument further: provide a comparison between the problems caused by having multiple emperors and the problems caused by the third-century usurpers.[276] Fortunately, this chapter puts us in a position to do just that. For we have seen that most usurpations were generally put down after one battle, if it even came that far. Conflicts between emperors of the fourth century, on the other hand, were protracted affairs, even in cases where this is not immediately obvious,[277] as both contestants had already had time and resources to establish themselves. In short, while the tetrarchic era witnessed fewer usurpations, it introduced the more significant practice of wars between pre-established emperors, and as such that period was worse than the 'crisis' when it comes to internal strife.

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[274] In that regard, I agree with Leadbetter (2009) 2.

[275] A theory I owe to N. Lenski, *Failure of Empire: Valens and the Roman State in the Fourth Century AD* (Berkeley 2002), 356-367; see also Drinkwater (2007) 310-314.

[276] J. Martin, 'Das Kaisertum in der Spätantike' in: Paschoud and Szidat (1997) 47-62, 47-49; B. Bleckmann, 'Bemerkungen zum Scheitern des Mehrherrschaftssystems: Reichsteilung und Territorialansprüche' in: Demandt, Goltz and Schlange-Schöningen (2004), 74-94. Goldsworthy (2009) 153 comes the closest: "Civil wars became somewhat less common, although they tended to be much bigger and more costly when they did break out." But he does not really pursue the point.

[277] Cf. Potter (2004) on Constantine's victory over Maxentius: "His overwhelming success, and the aura of divine intervention that surrounds it, occludes the genuine difficulty of his accomplishment."

4. The economy

> "Now he officially issued new money after arranging for the state to buy in the debased coinage to avoid confusion in financial dealings."[278]

This throwaway line found in Zosimus' account of Aurelian's reign is the only reference found in the literary sources to the coinage reform of that emperor, a symptom of the general lack of interest in economic affairs displayed by most ancient writers, which is further compounded by the fact that these authors would have had little economic data available to them.[279] Nevertheless, economic difficulties were just as important in the history of this period as the external and internal conflicts, and we will accordingly deal with them in this chapter.

While in the previous two chapters two large phenomena that are made up of separate events were investigated as two long-term trends, economic history is characterized by long-term developments by definition. As such, a comparison between the economic situation of the 'crisis' and that of the tetrarchy is likely to show a large degree of continuity. Thus, for instance, the diminishing of seaborne trade that began during the 'crisis', revealed by the decline of port cities like Ostia and a decrease in the number of Mediterranean shipwrecks, continued throughout the fourth century, while other developments, such as the economic problems in Spain, date back to the second century, in which the Antonine plague (165-180) was a significant factor.[280]

It is also difficult to say something about the economy in general: it seems as if the empire at large suffered economic decline, but data is scarce and contradictory. Thus, we have an admission from Egypt that cities are now far less prosperous than they were under the Severans, but also a large number of documents telling us that there was a large-scale free distribution of grain in Oxyrhynchus and other cities from the late 260's onwards.[281]

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[278] Zos. 1.61.3 (trans. Ridley).

[279] Witschel (1999) 25-28.

[280] For the decline of trade, see R. Reece, 'The Third Century; Crisis or Change?' in: King and Henig (1981) 27-38, 31-32; K. Hopkins, 'Taxes and Trade in the Roman Empire (200 B.C.-A.D. 400)' *Journal of Roman Studies* 70 (1980) 101-125, 105-106. For the changing economic situation in Spain, see Keay (1981) 463-464; Witschel (1999) 262-284. For economic trends during this period in general, see W. M. Jongman, 'Gibbon was right: the decline and fall of the Roman economy' in: Hekster, Slootjes en de Kleijn (2007) 183-199.

[281] For the decline in wealth, see the text published in T. C. Skeat and E. P. Wegener, 'A Trial before the Prefect of Egypt Appius Sabinus, c. 250 A.D. (P. Lond. Inv. 2565)' *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 21 (1935) 2, 224-247 (=*SB* V 7696), concerning the matter of whether villagers should be forced into the increasingly unpopular liturgies. See esp. l.100-101, where a "law of Severus" (Σευήρον νόμον) forbidding it is said to have been enacted

Nevertheless, there are some individual matters that are worth investigating and that can benefit from a comparative perspective.

The main issue here is coinage debasement. This refers to the practice of succeeding emperors to steadily decrease the percentage of gold and silver in their coins, a process that went back to the reign of Nero (54-68) but would reach especially great heights from 250 onwards. The precious metal content of the coins would be at their lowest around 270, but it would remain an issue until the late fifth century.[282] This matter, and the inflation that may or may not be related to it, will be the most important matter considered in this chapter, but there will also be brief looks at the questions of the interrelation of the empire's various provinces, the costs of the army and taxation reforms.

An irrelevant disaster?

The opinions of previous scholars on the consequences of the coinage debasement have undergone such a radical shift throughout the years that this subject deserves its own historiographical section. Until fairly recently, there was common consent that the rapid debasement of the coinage was an absolute disaster, resulting in the closing of the local mints that produced bronze coins, the collapse of the old system of denominations, a partial return to an economy with barter and even taxation in kind, and rampant inflation, especially in the last quarter or so of the century. Some comments on the monetary policies of these emperors even took on a moralizing tenor. Aurelian's reform, on the other hand, which appears to have consisted of the creation of new coins with a higher percentage of precious metal and a better appearance that were intended to replace the old coins, was a valiant attempt to set things right. Thus, in his 1969 article on the heaviest debasement under Claudius II the numismatist Lawrence Cope spoke derogatorily of "Claudius' conduct", and the later reform was described as "the necessary restoration of the coinage".[283]

Historians made similar comments on the debasement issue. The strong degree of debasement enacted by Gallienus is one of the main reasons why the verdict that he has

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"while the cities were still prosperous" (ἔτι τῶν πολέων εὐπόρων οὐσῶν). For the free grain, see *P. Oxy.* XL 2892-2940.

[282] For an overview of the process of debasement, see the mass of data in J.-P. Callu, *La Politique Monétaire des Empereurs Romains, de 238 à 311* (Paris 1969), 237-248; more accessible are the graphs in K. W. Harl, *Coinage in the Roman Economy* (Baltimore 1996), 130, 137, 142, 145.

[283] L. H. Cope, 'The nadir of the imperial antoninianus in the reign of Claudius II' *Numismatic Chronicle S7* 9 (1969) 145-161, esp. 147, 161.

received from his foremost modern political biographer, De Blois, is rather mixed. MacMullen, while more appreciative of the factors that forced these emperors to debase, nonetheless concluded that by Aurelian's reign reform had become a dire necessity, and he saw that reform as a great success. Williams wrote in a similar vein. In his article on the connection between Roman taxes and trade Keith Hopkins argued that the increased taxation in kind, previously mentioned as one of the proposed consequences of the mass debasement, was one of the main factors responsible for the decline of Roman trade.[284] Finally, Drinkwater has also referred to the actions of third-century emperors as "the irresponsible production of uncontrolled quantities of debased antoniniani in whatever metal they could get their hands on", and commended Tetricus for trying to find a way out in the Gallic Empire like Aurelian was doing in the central Empire; he did, however, note that things were perhaps not quite as dramatic as other scholars made them out to have been.[285] In fact, it may be that the dramatic story of debasement told by the coins is an important reason for the third century's poor reputation.[286]

This orthodoxy was ably summarized in the 1996 handbook on Roman coinage by Kenneth Harl. He described how the debasement resulted in a loss of confidence of the populace in the coinage, led to the withdrawal from circulation of many older coins, an increasing scarcity of bronze coins, the collapse of local coin systems and rampant inflation. However, he did recognize that the debasement measures did help the empire through the monetary shortages of the 'crisis'. Moreover, he saw Aurelian's reform as only a limited success: in some areas it instilled renewed confidence in the money and lowered prices, but in other areas the coins made little headway, and in Egypt the result was that prices increased eightfold, perhaps even tenfold. In his 1999 monograph on Aurelian Alaric Watson would go so far as to call the reform a long-term failure even if it was a short-term success. Nevertheless, both maintained the traditional bleak view of the depreciation problem, with Watson arguing that nobody could have solved the problem at that stage.[287]

But by the late 1990's, another view had appeared. This perhaps goes back to Jean-Pierre Callu's massive treatment of the debasement problem from 1969, in which he recognized that there were also some good consequences aside from the bad ones (for instance,

[284] De Blois (1974) 77-90, 200-201; MacMullen (1976) 107-110; Williams (1985) 116-117; Hopkins (1980).
[285] Drinkwater (1987) 156, 207-214.
[286] C. J. Howgego, *Ancient history from coins* (London 1995), 136.
[287] Harl (1996) 131-148, 156-157; Watson (1999) 125-136, 141-142.

the commercial unity of the empire became stronger), and argued against a large-scale demonetization as a consequence of the debasement. A further notable step was the contention by Peter Brunt and Richard Duncan-Jones that the Roman economy had never been truly monetized: payments in kind had also been important prior to the large-scale debasement.[288]

More importantly, in 1995, shortly before Harl published his work, Christopher Howgego had presented a radically different perspective on the matter in his own handbook. While previous numismatists and historians were aware of the fact that the inflation did not really gather force until after the worst of the debasement had passed, they saw it as a delayed reaction. Howgego, on the other hand, suggested that the fineness of coins was of little concern to their ancient users (at least not up until a certain point), who were generally perfectly willing to accept debased coins as a valid means of payment. It was the restorative reforms, like those of Aurelian, that led to the skyrocketing inflation. In addition, he argued that the disappearance of local coinage, previously ascribed to the mass debasement, was also caused by other long-term developments like the widening gap between rich and poor.[289]

A concurrent development was the publication of an article by Dominic Rathbone in which he advanced two important arguments. First, the third-century inflation in Egypt, and thus presumably also in the rest of the empire, was not all that high, at least not until he later third century. Second, despite all the debasement problems the government always remained willing to accept the silver coins as tax payments at the same value that the coins had when they were first issued, and as a result the coins retained their value despite the ever-decreasing percentage of precious metal that they contained; as such, they had successfully been converted into a token coinage. When Witschel published his previously discussed survey of the third-century west a few years later he therefore concluded that the debasement did have some unfortunate consequences, but that its effects should not be overestimated.[290]

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[288] Callu (1969) 286-287, 289-309; P. A. Brunt, 'The Revenues of Rome' *Journal of Roman Studies* 71 (1981) 161-172, 161-162, 170-171; R. P. Duncan-Jones, *Structure and Scale in the Roman Economy* (Cambridge 1990), 187-198.

[289] Howgego (1995) 117-134, 138-140.

[290] D. W. Rathbone, 'Monetization, not price-inflation, in third century A.D. Egypt?' in: C. E. King and D. G. Wigg eds., *Coin Finds and Coin Use in the Roman World: The Thirteenth Oxford Symposium on Coinage and Monetary History, 25.-27.3.1993* (Berlin 1996), 321- 339; Witschel (1999) 85-91.

Potter would take the aforementioned to its logical conclusion: it was the actions of Aurelian, rather than the debasement, that threw the coin system into chaos by removing the link between gold and silver money. Furthermore, the fact that he waited until near the end of his reign to implement the reform does not suggest that it was a necessity (the old system had, after all, worked for him in preceding years), but that it was a political act: he wanted to remove the coinage of all previous emperors and usurpers. "By so doing, he may have done more harm to his subjects than he did good through all the rest of his actions."[291]

A more optimistic appraisal of the debasement issue has, in fact, become dominant: Olivier Hekster, who still wrote about it in negative terms in his reference work on the 'crisis' from 2008, appears to be something of an exception in that regard. In Clifford Ando's 2012 study debasement is also acknowledged as a sign of trouble; rightfully so, as the radical drops in purity do show that something must have been wrong. However, the consequences of the debasement are nuanced, and his comments on Aurelian's reform echo those of Potter.[292] In her two articles on the economy during the third and fourth centuries written for the *Cambridge Ancient History* Mireille Corbier went even further than Potter had gone: the greater number of coins brought into circulation by the debasement actually had a beneficial effect in the sense that they contributed to the monetization of the Roman economy, and the effects of the inflation of prices were limited by the fact that wages tended to rise at the same time.[293]

Similarly, in the two articles in the recent *Oxford Handbook on Greek and Roman Coinage* that cover the third century, those of Roger Bland and Sylviane Estiot, it is noted that there now seems good reason to reject the apocalyptic views of earlier scholars. However, a more critical perspective has recently been offered by Constantina Katsari, who argues that the monetary tinkering of third-century emperors resulted in the virtual disappearance of gold coins from circulation, many of which were used for trading with Rome's neighbours for whom these coins were more valuable.[294] And in general we should also not forget the cautionary remark of De Blois: our only way of checking inflation are Egyptian

[291] Potter (2004) 273-274.
[292] Hekster (2008) 32-33 (cf. Leadbetter (2009) 34); Ando (2012) 102-103, 214-217.
[293] M. Corbier, 'Coinage and taxation: the state's point of view, A.D. 193–337' in: *CAH* XII (2005) 327-392, esp. 329; idem, 'Coinage, society and economy' in: *CAH* XII (2005) 393-439, 425-427.
[294] R. Bland, 'From Gordian III to the Gallic Empire (AD 238-274)' in: Metcalf (2012) 514-537; Estiot (2012) 553-554; C. Katsari, *The Roman Monetary System: The Eastern Provinces from the First to the Third Century* (Cambridge 2011), 78-97, 104-166.

prices, but these may not have risen before the mid-270's because Egypt had its own coin (the tetradrachm), and this says nothing about the consequences of debasement in the rest of the Empire.[295] Then again, this still does not change the fact that we have no direct indications of problems caused by debasement in areas that did use the 'common' coinage.

Much like it was with tetrarchic historiography in general, the historiography of the money situation after the 'crisis' is far less complex; there is also none of the moralizing found in some accounts of the 'crisis'. There is agreement on the overall picture: there would continue to be trouble with the silver and bronze coinage (eventually the former disappeared completely) as well as inflation, but the new gold coin instituted by Constantine, the *solidus*, would keep its value until the eleventh century, and there was never any debasement on the scale seen during the 'crisis'.[296] Nevertheless, there is uncertainty about the precise causes, aims and effects of the three major economic reforms of the period: the replacement of the coinage, Diocletian's currency edict and his *Edict on Maximum Prices* (both from 301). In circumstances such as these, adding something can be difficult, but that is nonetheless what we will try to do in the next section.

Raging greed burns without end

Perhaps the main problem that plagues research on coinage debasement in the third century is that the evidence is so difficult to interpret. Consider, for instance, a proclamation of the *strategos* of Oxyrhynchus from the early 260's, which is our only direct piece of evidence of an unwillingness on the part of the empire's inhabitants to accept certain coins, although there are also some indirect indications.[297]

> From Aurelius Ptolemaeus also called Nemesianus, strategus of the Oxyrhynchite nome. Since the officials have assembled and accused the bankers of the banks of exchange of having closed them on account of their unwillingness to accept the divine coin of the Emperors, it has become necessary that an injunction should be issued to all the owners of the banks to open them, and to accept and exchange all coin except the absolutely spurious and counterfeit, and not to them only, but to all who engage in business transactions of any kind whatever, know-

[295] De Blois (2002) 103-104.
[296] Jones (1964) 1: 107-109, 438-448; Callu (1969) 472-473; Williams (1985) 207-208; Harl (1996) 148-173.
[297] See e. g. Keay (1981) 466.

> ing that if they disobey this injunction they will experience the penalties already ordained for them in the past by his highness the praefect. Signed by me. The 1st year, Hathur 28.[298]

At first sight, this would seem to confirm the view that people did not accept coins that were debased too heavily. But the alternative explanation, that some coins were not accepted because they had the portrait of defeated pretenders on them (in this case presumably Macrianus and Quietus), is probably preferable.[299] After all, the evidence from Egypt strongly suggests that the real inflation did not start until around 275, as wheat then suddenly costs 200 drachmae per *artabas* (a Roman term of measurement), about ten times higher than its cost throughout the 260's, and there also appears a request of weavers from Oxyrhynchus for more money necessitated by a sudden rise in costs of materials.[300] Of course, De Blois' comment on the situation of Egypt should still be kept in mind, but the indications provided above are nonetheless highly significant.

Indeed, in general the authors following the revisionist trend have succeeded in challenging not just the idea of the rampant inflation starting before Aurelian's reform, but also several other main assumptions lying behind the traditional view, like the disappearance of local mints being caused solely by the debasement and the failure of the old system of denominations: this was actually done by Aurelian to increase central control.[301] As such, they are probably right to argue that previous scholars were wrong to portray the debasement problem in such dramatic terms. That being said, I think that there are a few reasons for thinking that the debasement was becoming a problem from about 270 onwards.

One of the most interesting features of the Gallic Empire is that its coins were usually of better fineness than their central Empire counterparts. The difference was especially clear under Postumus; under Tetricus the coins were actually slightly worse than the central Empire ones, but they always retained a superior appearance. Similarly, the coins issued by Carausius were of better quality than those minted by Diocletian and Maximian at the same

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[298] *P. Oxy.* XII 1411; a translation by N. Zair is also available in Hekster (2008) no. 23.

[299] Potter (2004) 274; for a recent restatement of the traditional view, see K. Verboven, 'Demise and Fall of the *augustan* monetary system' in: Hekster, de Kleijn and Slootjes (2007) 245-257, 255. It should be noted that *P. Oxy.* XII p. 23 offers both as possibilities.

[300] *O. Mich.* I 157; *P. Oxy.* XII 1414; for prices during the 260's, see the overview in J. E. Lendon, 'The Face on Coins and Inflation in Roman Egypt' *Klio* 72 (1990) 1, 106-134, 109. Lendon himself, however (112-119) argues that the death of Claudius, followed by the Palmyrene invasion of Egypt, led to inflation; this is possible, but I feel that he overstates both the significance of the Palmyrene attack and Claudius' two-year reign.

[301] Corbier (2005) 348-349.

time, especially after the failure of Maximian's initial expedition.[302] Even more interesting is that in the case of the Gallic Empire the central Empire may have recycled the superior coins minted by the former for its own ends when it could get them. That at least was the explanation of Cope for the fact that some Italian coins from the reign of Claudius II found in Italy are metallurgically much closer to Gallic Empire coins than those from the mint at Milan.[303] While we have previously seen that Cope attached far too much weight to the importance of debasement, this does not invalidate his argumentation here, and it indicates that at least Claudius felt the need to have better coins in circulation. Furthermore, the fact that Claudius decided that the fineness of coins should be increased at least slightly[304] also shows that describing the reform of Aurelian as being primarily politically motivated is not entirely fair, although political considerations probably did play a part in his decision.

The revolt of the mint-workers in Rome also demands consideration, even if it is another of those cases where the sources are poor and confused. Chronologically the revolt, which only appears in the Latin tradition, could have been in either 271 or 274 (in the latter case it would have been shortly before the monetary reform), and there is disagreement between Aurelius Victor and Eutropius about what the mint-workers had been doing: Victor states that "they had been filing off the coin marks", while according to Eutropius "they had debased the coinage".[305] Eutropius' *vitiatis* could also be read as tampering in a general way, which might indicate that it refers to the filing mentioned by Victor. But the extraordinarily low precious metal content in the coins honouring the consecration of Claudius II suggest that it is Eutropius who is closer to the truth, and as such Aurelian's ruthless repression of the rebels is another sign of an interest in the state of the coins that goes beyond mere political motivations.[306]

In particular, one point that previous authors do not seem to have fully appreciated is that responses could differ between regions. We have already seen that scholars are aware of the mixed results of Aurelian's reform across the empire and that De Blois has challenged

[302] For the Gallic Empire coins, see Drinkwater (1987) 154-158; Harl (1996) 145. For the British coins, see Williams (1985) 61-62; Casey (1994) 106.
[303] Cope (1969) 151-154.
[304] Ibidem, *passim*.
[305] Victor, *De Caes.* 35.6 (trans. Bird; *nummariam notam corrosissent*); Eutr., *Brev.* 9.14 (trans. Bird; *vitiatis pecuniis*). *HA*, *Vit. Aurel.* 38.2-4 and {Aur. Vict.}, *Epit. de Caes.* 35.4 also mention the actions of the mint-workers but add nothing new.
[306] Watson (1999) 52-53; Estiot (2012) 545-546.

the validity of the Egyptian evidence for determining empire-wide inflation.[307] But they do not take the point as far as they perhaps should have done: if the response to Aurelian's reform could vary between total rejection in Gaul and a massive increase in prices in Egypt, there is no reason why the response to the debasement could not have varied from region to region as well. As such, I think that the two items discussed above do indicate that at least in Italy the debasement was reaching a point where it was getting out of control and needed sorting out. In that respect, the comment of Katsari that the exchange rate between gold and silver remained constant only for so long as emperors were not necessitated to tinker with the fineness of the gold coins, which did happen from the reign of Gallienus onwards, is also significant.[308] Aurelian's reform can therefore justifiably be called necessary for Italy, even if he brought economic disarray to other provinces by issuing an empire-wide reform, which he did for the aforementioned political reasons.

While charting the consequences of Aurelian's reform is hopelessly difficult, it at least seems reasonably clear that his system remained in use for the next twenty years (even if it also seems probable that inflation kept rising at least during Probus' reign),[309] and this brings us to the economic reforms from the tetrarchic era. The first of these came between 293 and 296 when Diocletian radically overhauled the coinage system by introducing two new silver coins: the *argenteus* and the *nummus*. This reform had rather mixed results. It succeeded in replacing the old coinage by the new and bringing money to provinces where this had become scarce, but despite their strong fineness and robust appearance the new coins seemingly failed to win public confidence (possibly simply due to their newness), leading to even more inflation.[310] From 293 we have a price of 300 drachmae per *artabas* of grain, a noticeable increase compared to the price from 276, but still far lower than the price of 1200 that appears on a papyrus from either 304 or 305.[311]

Diocletian's response was two further measures enacted in 301, possibly intended to act in conjunction with each other. The first was an edict on currency that doubled the face value of all the coins.[312] The second was the *Edict on Maximum Prices*, an extraordinarily

[307] See n.275, 283 above.
[308] Katsari (2011) 80-82.
[309] Kreucher (2003) 242.
[310] Harl (1996) 148-154; Verboven (2007) 257.
[311] *P. Oxy.* XVII 2142; *P. Oxy.* XXXVI 2798.
[312] The edict partially appears on an inscription that also contains an explanatory letter. It is available as Roueché (1988) no. 230.

ambitious attempt to control the prices of goods at an empire-wide level. In its infamous preamble the strong moralising tone makes the exasperation of the tetrarchs with the economic situation quite clear.

> "If any restraint might curb those inclinations with which raging greed burns without end – avarice which without care for humankind hurries towards its own growth and gain, not by year or month or day, but almost by hour and minute – or if society's experience could with equanimity tolerate the licence to rage freely by which in its misfortune it is harmed most seriously day after day, perhaps there would be left an opportunity for dissimulation and reticence, since the communal patience in spirit would alleviate the hateful cruelty and wretched situation. But because it is the single desire of untamed fury to give no account to the common need, and amongst wicked and extravagant people it is almost held a religion of greed, swelling and rising with violent emotions, to hold off harming the fortune of all through necessity rather than its own will, and since those whom extremes of poverty brought to an appreciation of their most wretched circumstances can no longer close their eyes to it, as we looked on, we who are the parents of the human race decided that justice should intervene as arbiter, so that a solution which has for a long time been desired but humankind has been unable to provide could, by the remedy of our foresight, be brought, for the general moderation of all."[313]

In fact, the tetrarchs may, as Corcoran has argued, well have been among the main culprits themselves. For on their many journeys they would invariably have brought a large number of courtiers with them, and on some occasions also soldiers. And while the coin problems were probably the most important factor in causing the inflation, in individual cities the effect on prices of having so many extra people in and around a city should not be underestimated. It is therefore interesting to see Lactantius claim that the price edict was promulgated because "by [Diocletian's] various misdeeds he was causing an immense rise in prices", although he could be referring to the consequences of the emperor's earlier coin reforms.[314]

Lactantius derided the price edict as an embarrassing failure that was quickly repealed because it only resulted in even greater inflation and much unrest. Modern scholars have scarcely been more complimentary (Potter in particular describes the edict as "an act of economic lunacy"), though it has been noted that Diocletian's aims were perhaps more

[313] *Edictum De Pretiis Rerum Venalium* (= Rees (2004) no. 19) pr. 6-7.
[314] Corcoran (1996) 215-219; Lact., *DMP* 7.6 (trans. Creed): *cum variis iniquitatibus immensam faceret caritatem*).

modest than the grandiose language of the preamble suggests.[315] Nevertheless, it seems clear that the edict was abandoned prior to Diocletian's abdication in 305, and despite the large number of copies of the edict that have been found (it is, in fact, the best-preserved Latin inscription from the Greek east) there is no evidence of its enforcement in the west. Admittedly, this does not in and of itself prove that a measure with a clear universal intent was never implemented there, but considering how Constantius barely ever enforced the persecution edicts it is certainly possible that this measure suffered the same fate.[316]

It has already been noted that there would continue to be trouble with the coinage and inflation during our period (in 314 an *artabas* of wheat cost 8000, which means that prices had increased more than sixfold since 305, though the precise reason is not known)[317] and long after the end of the tetrarchic era, although Constantine's solidus at least resulted in some measure of improvement. However, for Egypt it has been noted that, no matter how high the inflation got, the economy never ceased functioning, as its institutions were not as vulnerable to inflation as those of the modern economy.[318] This was probably true for the rest of the empire as well. That being said, the rise in prices must have been a real problem in people's day-to-day business.

What does all this mean for our comparison? Overall, the coin problem was a long-term issue: the large-scale debasement was limited to the crisis (although the internal strife from 307 to would result in some renewed debasement),[319] but the inflation that was in some way or other related to it was especially prominent during the tetrarchy. That there is mostly continuity in this regard is not surprising, as economic history is as a rule a more long-term matter than the military conflicts discussed in the previous chapter. It must also once again be admitted that the scarcity of data keeps any conclusion from being definitive.

Nevertheless, two important points have emerged from all this. First, the tinkering with coins, which had managed to give the emperors enough economic breathing room to make it past the worst of the 'crisis', apparently had no serious consequences until about 270, the point at which the military situation had, as previously seen, begun to improve con-

[315] Lact., *DMP* 7.7; Callu (1969) 394-407; MacMullen (1976) 122-123; Barnes (1981) 10-11; Williams (1985) 128-132; Corcoran (1996) 233; Potter (2004) 335-336; Harries (2012) 65-70.
[316] Corcoran (1996) 229-233; cf. the cautionary remarks in Rees (2004) 43 and Harries (2012) 65-66, 69.
[317] *CPR* VIII 22.
[318] R. S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton 1993), 330-332; with idem, *Currency and Inflation in Fourth Century Egypt* (Atlanta 1985) for the raw data.
[319] Harl (1996) 158-159.

siderably. Second, the fact that the impact of both Aurelian's coinage reform and Diocletian's prices edict seems have differed sharply between regions suggests that this was the same with coin issues in general during both periods. This latter point is particularly important, and it leads us to a consideration of the economic relationship between the various Roman provinces.

Outer and inner provinces

Our starting point is the model of Hopkins, who proposed a divide between two kinds of provinces: on the one hand the rich internal provinces that produced taxes, and on the other hand the militarized provinces on the fringes of the empire and the central government in Italy that consumed taxes. Under Roman rule the former had to export their taxes to the latter, forcing the cultivators from the tax-producing areas to produce a surplus for purposes of export in order to maintain revenues, thus promoting trade. The demonetization of the late antique economy wrecked this model, leading to a permanent decline in trade.[320]

The trade aspect of Hopkins' thesis has come under considerable criticism. Duncan-Jones in particular has argued that the idea of increased trade through taxation is untenable, considering the relative lack of exchanged regional coins, the likelihood that the economy of the Principate was not all that monetized and the fact that Mediterranean trade had also been vigorous during Hellenistic times. In addition, after investigating the distribution pattern of Roman lamps he concluded that the empire was not, in fact, a single integrated economy when it comes to trade.[321] Nevertheless, Witschel has rightly noted that criticisms such as these need not invalidate the model altogether.[322] For now, Hopkins' division between provinces that created and provinces that consumed revenue demands consideration, as it shows that some provinces were far more important to the survival of the empire than others.

Back in the second chapter we saw that the effects of 'barbarian' invasions on the Latin part of the empire and Asia Minor differed strongly from province to province. But the provinces that were hit hardest – Germany, Noricum, the Balkan provinces – were border regions. Of the internal, revenue-producing provinces, only Greece and parts of Spain suf-

[320] Hopkins (1980) 101-103.
[321] Duncan Jones (1990) 30-58, 187-198.
[322] Witschel (1999) 20 n.2.

fered some damage, while precisely the economically most important part of Gaul, the south, was not touched by the troubles afflicting the rest of that area.[323] It is another matter with Syria, one of the critical tax provinces, as that had to bear the main brunt of the Sassanid attacks in the 250's and 260. However, we have also seen that recovery appears to have been reasonably fast.[324]

Whether the damage caused during the 'crisis' was still present during the tetrarchy cannot really be said. There is one piece of evidence that this was so: the Panegyric held before Constantine by an orator from Autun in 311 or 312, which seems to imply that his city has still not recovered from the third century ravages, particularly its sack by the forces of Victorinus in 270, with the speaker also hinting at a generally poor agricultural situation in Gaul. However, Witschel has rejected the idea of great poverty, as there is a tradition of cities overdramatizing their economic situations. The agricultural problems were real, but they were part of a long-term development that had its origin in the second century.[325] But even if the situation was as dire as the orator claims, as most of the moneymaking provinces were not that disturbed by the 'crisis', there seems no reason why their revenues should not have been able to bring a measure of restoration to the provinces that were more badly afflicted.

However, we should also not forget that the central government did not have direct control over all its provinces during much of the period from 249 to 324. In the case of the Palmyrene Empire this meant the loss of some of the richest provinces. But, as we have previously seen, because Palmyra remained at least nominally loyal to Rome, other than the limited period of conflict that led to the reintegration of the east, this did not have any real impact on revenues.[326] Britain and the northwest of Gaul both belonged to the areas that consumed revenue, so Carausius and Allectus are not relevant in this regard.

The Gallic Empire is another manner. While its core was formed by northern Gaul and the Germanic provinces, all of which were frontier areas, it also contained economically important regions like Gallia Narbonensis and the northern Spanish provinces. The loss of these provinces was economically probably a considerable blow to the economy of the central Empire. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that it was precisely these areas that returned to central rule during the period after the death of Postumus. Indeed, the economic im-

[323] See n.81, 84 above.
[324] Millar (1993) 162-167.
[325] *Pan. Lat.* V 6.1-7.4; Witschel (1999) 31-38.
[326] Potter (2004) 260.

portance of southern Gaul is perhaps the best explanation for the fact that the forces of Claudius II went no further than that area, and calling Claudius' lack of support for the besieged Autun "an act of appalling moral and political failure"[327] ignores the possibility that Claudius was simply being pragmatic, as any other Roman emperor might have been. But perhaps most important is that Rome never lost control of Africa, ensuring the city and its empire of a steady supply of grain. Indeed, the loss of Africa in 439 was perhaps the event that sealed the fate of the Western empire more than any other.[328]

From the death of Constantius in 306 to the final defeat of Licinius in 324, it is difficult to say what 'central authority' actually was. Galerius was nominally the senior *augustus*, but it is evident that he always lacked the unchallenged seniority of Diocletian. After his death in 311 there was no superior authority at all, and while Constantine had clearly established himself as senior *augustus* over Licinius after the end of their first war in 317, the empire remained divided until 324. How did this affect the economic situation of the empire? We cannot know for certain; our only evidence for the degree of interaction between both halves comes from the spheres of law and government, from which we have indications that the empire's civil servants could cooperate effectively even if their masters could not.[329]

It is, however, questionable whether this was also the case while the empire really was split into rival blocks. We hear nothing of famines in areas controlled by a tetrarch that lacked an Africa or an Egypt, suggesting that there must at least have been some economic exchange, but we know very little about famines anyway.[330] Overall, if the division between the Gallic and central Empires was economically disadvantageous, then there seems no reason why the rivalry between the members of the post-Diocletianic college of emperors should not have been at least equally problematic, especially once that rivalry turned into outright war.

The army: costs and complement

That the army was an enormous drain on the Roman treasury seems beyond doubt. In the early third century the total number of soldiers – also including the praetorians and sailors - appears to have been about 400000; while this was actually a relatively small army to con-

[327] Ando (2012) 213.
[328] Potter (2004) 257; Goldsworthy (2009) 358.
[329] Potter (2004) 373-377.
[330] What little evidence there is has been collected in MacMullen (1966) 249-254.

trol a stretch of territory as large as the Roman Empire, it was probably as large as it could be, as it already cost the state hundreds of millions of coins per year.[331] Far from obvious, however, is how much of a cost it became during our two timeframes.

It is known that, after military pay had remained constant throughout the second century, it was doubled in 197 by Septimius Severus and further increased by half in 211/212 by his son and successor Caracalla. It is also known that these pay increases resulted in a considerable strain upon the treasury. However, while Maximinus Thrax is said to have doubled pay once again in 235, there is no way of knowing whether this was ever intended as a permanent measure.[332] For the time of Diocletian our main source of information is an exchange of letters between Aurelius Isidorus, the procurator of the Thebaid (the southern half of Egypt) and several of his subordinates (whom he often berates for their incompetence and even outright obstructiveness) that occasionally includes orders to arrange for the pay of local forces. This data, however, is difficult to interpret: Jones, the first scholar to investigate that part of the papyrus, concluded that pay was just about the same as it had been after the reform of Caracalla, but Duncan-Jones argued that, when factoring in the payments in kind reported in the papyrus and another collection of letters written by an official from the Thebaid, the figures confirm an additional doubling of pay, whether under Maximinus or a later emperor.[333]

Compounding the problem is the fact that the size of the army in the later third and early fourth century is utterly obscure. It seems logical that the various defeats suffered by the third-century army would have decreased its numbers. And indeed, this view is strengthened by the fact that at several points during the 'crisis' it was seemingly necessary for a local militia to take action where the regular army had failed. We have already talked about Uranius Antoninus and the Palmyrene forces, but the rallying speech to the Athenians preserved by Dexippus also appears to be addressed to a militia, Zosimus reports a panicky senate gathering civilian volunteers into a militia in response to the 'barbarian' incursion into

[331] Potter (2004) 125-126; see Hopkins (1980) 124-125 for a calculation of the army's cost in the first century A.D.

[332] For the yearly salary of different soldiers, see M. A. Speidel, 'Roman Army Pay Scales' *Journal of Roman Studies* 82 (1992) 87-106, accepting a permanent doubling of army pay under Maximinus; this last point has been challenged by Potter (2004) 168-169. See also Campbell (1984) 171-176 for the problems caused by the Severan pay raises.

[333] Jones (1964) 3: 187-189; Duncan-Jones (1990) 105-120, 220-221. For the data, see *P. Panop. Beatty* 1 l.131-139, 392-399 (only payments in kind), 2 l.37-41, 57-59, 161-174, 180-206, 259-269, 291-297.

Italy of 259/260, and the Ausburg inscription mentions a militia that helped the regular forces repulse this attack.[334]

Obviously, the existence of these militias shows yet again that there was a certain degree of instability, and certainly a lack of trained manpower. But from a purely economic viewpoint, this may arguably have been an advantage: a soldier that died in battle needed no retirement donative,[335] and the militias, which seem to have been reasonably effective when they were used, were not under the employ of the state and thus received no salary whatsoever. In a time when the economic situation made the government debase the coinage to its absolute limit, this would have been most welcome.

For the fourth century there are at least a few indications of the size of the army, but these are from late sources and not really reliable. Thus, Zosimus gives figures for the forces of Constantine and Licinius during their wars, but these figures suggest that the size of the army had swollen to 500000 or even 600000. [336] Nevertheless, historians have traditionally tended to assume that there was at least a major increase even if the numbers themselves are not precisely accurate. However, when MacMullen surveyed the available evidence in his 1980 article on the subject he concluded that the evidence is so doubtful that it is impossible to postulate anything beyond a minor increase in size, and Potter, focussing on the discrepancy between paper strength and actual strength, has gone so far as to argue that the fourth-century army was either of about the same size as its earlier counterpart or even somewhat smaller.[337]

A final complicating matter is the role of inflation. We have already seen that the one thing that we can be certain about in this regard is that prices had greatly risen by 301, when Diocletian issued the Edict of Maximum Prices. In fact, in the preamble it is claimed that prices are now so high that soldiers sometimes lose all their pay in a single transaction. This has led scholars to argue that, despite their comparatively high wages, soldiers were quite poorly off; indeed, while the views of Jones and Duncan-Jones on the pay rate under Diocletian differ strongly, they do agree that prices were so high that soldiers had little chance to

[334] Dexippus F24; Zos. 1.37.2; *AE* (1993) 1231 l.6 (*militibus*); see also Potter (2004) 250-251.
[335] P. Herz, 'Finances and Costs of the Roman Army' in: P. Erdkamp ed., *A Companion to the Roman Army* (Malden 2007), 306-322, 317.
[336] See n.245, also for the far more conservative numbers of the *Origo*.
[337] R. MacMullen, 'How big was the Roman army?' *Klio* 62 (1980) 451-460; Potter (2004) 454-457. For the traditional view, see Jones (1964) 2: 679-686; and, more recently, Treadgold (1995) 43-59.

profit from their high salaries.[338] But this presents another conundrum: if the well-paid soldiers could not pay for basic goods, how did civilians manage? It is therefore likely that the inflation was not quite as dramatic as the preamble indicates.

The inflation may also account for the fact that military pay had risen so much from the reform of Severus onwards: because goods had become more expensive, salaries had to be adjusted accordingly to prevent the soldiers from starving. That is, after all, what the Edict on Maximum Prices proclaims. However, with regard to the raise by Severus it is actually quite possible that the state had already compensated the soldiers by providing them with equipment that they previously had to buy at their own expense, which means that his pay raise was done for political reasons only. In the case of Caracalla and Maximinus this is not even in doubt.[339] But was the inflation also mitigated by government support in the tetrarchic era? We cannot say. However, it seems unlikely that pay raises could keep up with the increasing prices indefinitely, especially not when the prices rose as fast as they did from 276 onwards.

What are we to make of all this? Little, as there is simply not enough known about the fourth-century economy. Nevertheless, it does seem clear that army pay rates had risen to truly astronomical rates at this point, and this might perhaps be the best explanation for the fact that one of the foremost contemporary ancient historians can argue that there was actually a minor decrease in army size: the state could simply not afford more soldiers. The issue of army pay is therefore similar to the debasement problem in the sense that it was during the tetrarchy that its consequences were really being felt, while the losses of manpower during the 'crisis' may actually have had positive effects on the army budget.

Taking on the taxman

Up until now we have seen that as far as the economy goes both periods were troubled, and in the case of the coinage debasement and army pay there is good reason to suppose that the full effect of measures taken during or before the 'crisis' was only felt during the tetrarchic period. Previous historians have certainly not been blind to the monetary crises faced by the tetrarchs. However, they have generally directed most of their attention at individual

[338] *Edictum De Pretiis Rerum Venalium* (= Rees (2004) no. 19) pr. 14; Jones (1964) 2: 623; Duncan-Jones (1990) 106.
[339] Potter (2004) 130-136.

measures, especially the Edict on Maximum Prices, without looking at the economic situation as a whole. The lack of information on economic matters makes this understandable, but this only makes it all the more strange that the debasement of the coinage has been so eagerly been taken for a sign of 'crisis', while Diocletian, for all his faults in his economic policies, has been praised for never debasing his reformed coins. That the other emperors would regularly debase their coinage in the period of turmoil that followed Diocletian's abdication has only been noted and not really been elaborated upon.[340] We will end this chapter by looking at taxation reforms, as these provide another illustration of that tendency.

The tax system of the Principate was problematic. The state expected its cities to pay as much as they could reasonably be expected to, but this only stimulated cities to claim that their income was lower than it actually was. Moreover, taxes fell the heaviest on those who could least afford it, the urban poor and common peasants. The small group of senators and equestrians that controlled the overwhelming majority of wealth had to pay only relatively minor amounts of taxes, and there was little that the government could do about it other than outright confiscations, as was supposedly done by Aurelian, who "fell upon the rich like a torrent".[341] This inherently inefficient tax structure may well have been one of the deeper causes of at least part of the third-century 'crisis', as it left emperors with not enough money to maintain an army large enough to keep Rome's enemies at bay.[342]

By contrast, the tax reforms of the tetrarchs have been seen as one of their greatest administrative achievements, even by historians who deplore their monetary policies. Through the initiation of censuses Diocletian ensured that every taxpayer was now assessed separately, which went a long way towards dealing with the inequality issue. In addition, the right of tax-exemption for Italy, the *ius Italicum*, was also abolished. Moreover, the precise delineation that Diocletian drew between the *iugum* (a land-tax generally paid in money) and the *caput* (a head-tax now mostly paid in kind), and the institution of the *capitatio* (a measure that regularized the previously random seizures of property) would prove effective in dealing with the two main economic problems. The payments in kind negated the poor quality of the coins and the institutionalisation of taxes levied on the wealthy went a long

[340] See e.g. Harl (1996) 158-159.
[341] Amm. Marc. 30.8.8 (Loeb translation): *torrentis ritu ferebatur in divites*. However, cf. Watson (1999) 162 and Potter (2004) 270, who argue that Aurelian was far less aggressive than Ammianus makes him out to have been.
[342] MacMullen (1976) 129-137; Potter (1990) 7-11.

way towards dealing with the inefficiency of the taxation system. While the new system was by no means perfect, Diocletian's measures can nonetheless be seen as a success: "together they constituted a workable plan for survival".[343]

However, it should be noted that ancient comments on the new system were less generous. That Lactantius should write that "with farmers' resources exhausted by the enormous size of the requisitions, fields became deserted and cultivated land was turned into forest" is perhaps unsurprising.[344] But we should also not forget the testimony of Aurelius Victor, who claims that the system initially functioned judiciously, but that it had become subject to abuse by the 350's, when Constantius II reigned. Ammianus, while not saying anything about the tetrarchic era, lodges a similar complaint, although his hostility towards Constantius makes his comment problematic.[345]

And if Victor and Ammianus only show the long-term effects, there is also evidence for immediate negative consequences. As part of their effort to determine who should taxed for what, the tetrarchs had initiated a census for Egypt (we cannot know whether there was a concurrent census for the rest of the empire).[346] There survives a letter from the prefect of Egypt in which he explains the necessity of the census to the populace. It states that the emperors, "having learned that the levies of the public taxes were being made capriciously so that some persons were let of lightly while others were overburdened, decided in the interest of their provincials to root out this most evil and ruinous practice and to issue a salutary rule to which the taxes would have to conform".[347]

Both Jones and MacMullen have cited this document with approval, praising its egalitarian intent.[348] But we have previously seen that this precise document was probably the immediate cause for the revolt of Domitius Domitianus, as the Egyptian populace resorted to a rather radical form of tax evasion. And the fact that most of our documents where Domitianus is listed as emperor deal with everyday issues shows that the common people, who

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[343] MacMullen (1976) 137-152, especially 152 for the quote; see also Jones (1964) 1: 61-67; Williams (1985) 123-125; Rees (2004) 38-40 is more neutral.

[344] Lact., *DMP* 7.3 (trans. Creed): *ut enormitate indictionum consumptis viribus colonorum desererentur agri et culturae verterentur in silvam*.

[345] Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 39.31-32; Amm. Marc. 21.16.17.

[346] Barnes (1982) 230-231.

[347] *P. Cairo. Isid.* 1 l.3-6 (ὡς ἔτυχεν τὰς ἐπιβολὰς τῶν δημοσίων εἰσφορῶν γίγνεσθαι ὥς τινας μὲν κου[φ]ίζεσθ[α]ι ἄλλους δὲ βαρῖσθαι, τὴν κακίστην ταύτην καὶ ὀλέθριον συνήθειαν ἐκκόψαι ὑπὲρ τοῦ [συμ]φέροντος τῶν ἑαυτῶν ἐπαρχειωτῶν τύπον τε σωτήριον δοῦναι καθ' ὃν δέοι τὰς εἰ[σφο]ρὰς γίγνεσθαι κατηξίωσαν).

[348] Jones (1964) 1: 61-62; MacMullen (1976) 151.

could be expected to have been the main beneficiaries of the new tax policy, supported the rebellion as well.[349] Nor was this the only measure that encountered stiff resistance.

Lactantius devotes an entire paragraph to Galerius' decision to tax all the provinces and cities, even of Italy and Rome, sketching a gloomy picture of poverty and desolation as a consequence of the census undertaken in preparation for the taxation. There is undoubtedly a lot of overdramatizing in this paragraph; particularly the claim that Galerius was avenging the taxes levied upon his native Dacia when the Romans conquered it in 106 is highly questionable. Nevertheless, that Lactantius went as far as he did, does show how much of a shock the levying of taxes from Rome and Italy was, and lends credit to Lactantius' claim a little further into his text that dissatisfaction with Galerius' tax measures was the main reason for the civilian populace of Italy to support Maxentius when he usurped, even if, as Leadbetter has argued, the measures were not as foolhardy as Lactantius makes them out to have been.[350] In addition, Licinius may also have provoked hostilities by his rash economic measures in the early 320's in preparation for his second war with Constantine.[351] Eventually the reforms were pushed through: Victor confirms this for Italy, and Eutropius states that Egypt was greatly reorganised after the revolt had been crushed, although the previously discussed letters from Panopolis show that the new tax system was still being resisted.[352] Nevertheless, the above shows that in many cases economic reforms were not easily accepted.

Despite the repeatedly mentioned lack of data, then, this chapter has a clear theme: there were several economic difficulties that arose during or shortly before the 'crisis', but these were either of no great consequence or very difficult to fix once they got out of hand. Overall, and as far as our scarce sources allow us to be sure, from an economic point of view there is much continuity between 'crisis' and tetrarchy. If this seems an unoriginal conclusion, then it must be emphasised again that most other scholars seem insufficiently aware of this, and instead choose to emphasise both the economic troubles of the 'crisis' and the supposed recovery in that sphere under tetrarchy.

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[349] See n.194, 197 above.
[350] Lact., *DMP* 23, 26.2; Leadbetter (2009) 170-176.
[351] Barnes (1981) 69-70.
[352] Aur. Vict., *De Caes.* 39.31-32; Eutr., *Brev.* 9.23; *P. Panop. Beatty* 2 l.145-152.

Conclusion

Over the previous 95 pages we have been comparing the third century 'crisis' (249-284) and the tetrarchic era (284-324). We started out by looking at the available sources (which are poor especially for the first period) and at what previous historians have written about these two periods. This showed that, despite the recent attacks on the idea of the third century as a time of 'crisis', there remains agreement that the tetrarchic era was generally an improvement over the troubled period that preceded it. This theme has also recurred throughout the thematic chapters: the general lack of interest in foreign warfare during the tetrarchy, the insistence that the college of emperors was, despite its many problems, still an improvement over the many usurpations of the 'crisis', and the more detached way in which the tetrarchic economy is described as opposed to the apocalyptic and occasionally even moralizing treatments of its third-century counterpart (individual tetrarchic measures like the price edict notwithstanding). By looking back at the previous chapters we can now see that, by and large, this is to distort the history of both these periods.

1. In the case of foreign warfare, it is mostly a question of nuance. As far as the 'crisis' is concerned, we have seen that some surviving fragments of Dexippus give us a good reason to think that 'barbarians' had little success taking cities even if they could inflict serious defeats on Roman armies in the field. The Sassanid Persians launched devastating incursions deep into Roman territory on two occasions, but the Romans recovered rapidly both times. And the Sassanids seem to have exhausted their resources during these two attacks, as they remained remarkably quiet between 261 and 292. Areas like northwestern Africa, Egypt and the Arabian provinces appear to have been reasonably tranquil during both periods.

   With regard to the tetrarchy, the fact that we hear so little about attacks by external enemies is at least partially due to the lack of interest in these matters of our prime informant Lactantius and the good fortune (for the Romans) that both the 'barbarians' and the Persians entered a period of internal strife. In fact, however, there are some scattered indications of military conflict with external enemies during this timeframe.

   This nuancing should not be taken too far: the tetrarchic era never witnessed the kind of military disasters against foreign foes that did occur occasionally during the 'crisis'. But things were not as black and white as most studies have made them out to have been.

2. Internal wars are another matter entirely. Perhaps the most notorious aspect of the ‘crisis’ is its multitude of pretenders, and the fact that between about 260 and 272 two-thirds of the empire were not under the direct control of the central government. While there were still a few usurpations under the tetrarchy, and the era experienced its own secession with the empire of Carausius and Allectus, this does not really compare to what happened during the ‘crisis’. The tetrarchic era also lacked the charismatic bandit chiefs known from the ‘crisis’, like Mariades and Lydius, although the Bagaudae and their leaders Aelius and Amandus were active during the time of transition from ‘crisis’ to tetrarchy.

   But in matters like the role of the army in causing problems, there was continuity between both periods. Also, pretenders were less numerous during the ‘crisis’ than sources like the *Historia Augusta* would have us believe, their impact was generally limited to a single battle, after which they would either be emperor or dead. Indeed, in various cases they were killed by their own men before it could even come to a battle. We have also seen that the long-term effects of the secessionist empires were not that major. By contrast, the existence of a college of rivalling emperors would prove to be disastrous in the long run. The protracted wars between 307 and 324 were already bad enough, but the rivalry between the various emperors would continue to haunt the empire, with the crushing Roman defeat at Adrianople in 378 being the most notable consequence.

   In short, despite the consensus among historians that the most significant way in which the tetrarchy improved on the ‘crisis’ was in the sphere of internal disorder, we have seen that it was actually the other way around: the many usurpations that have made the ‘crisis’ infamous actually amounted to little in most cases, while the wars between emperors that became common from the tetrarchic era onwards were both protracted ad destructive.

3. A third problem faced by the empire during the ‘crisis’ was the rapid debasement of the coinage. The very negative view of most older writers has mostly been replaced by an alternative perspective that argues that its consequences should not be exaggerated and that there were actually some beneficial effects as well. We have, however, seen that there is good reason for thinking that the debasement was getting out of hand at least in Italy. But reforms undertaken to save the situation did not work and led to skyrocketing inflation; tetrarchic measures like the Edict on Maximum Prices only seem to have made things worse.

The general picture that emerges is mostly one of continuity, although the real effects of the monetary policies of succeeding emperors were seemingly not really felt until the worst of the 'crisis' was over, and attempts at repairing the damage backfired. In fact, this also seems to have been the case with another important aspect of the Roman economy: the costs of the army. Investigating the difference between outer and inner provinces suggests continuity alone. Finally, our look at attempts to reform the tax system indicated that economic change was difficult to push through, further supporting the idea that the tetrarchic era meant no end to the economic 'crisis'.

So once again, the conventional dichotomy between 'crisis' and recovery does not fit. Instead, we see a large degree of continuity, with economic problems being virtually impossible to solve once they arose. In many cases the problems only got worse as time went on.

The results are clear: on only one of the three subjects was the tetrarchic era a clear improvement on the 'crisis', and on another point it only got worse from there on, while on the third item results were neutral at best. That does not mean that we should reject the idea of a 'crisis' altogether: we have seen time and again that much of the period between 249 and 284 was indeed a difficult time for the empire. However, it was not all bad all the time. While the proliferation of military problems during the 'crisis' is generally still taken for granted, these were mainly, though not exclusively, limited to short periods within the timespan from 249 to about 270, while the economic problems only seem to have become serious from then on. But though we need not and cannot reject all idea of 'crisis', it has, I think, become clear that the still conventional view of the tetrarchic area as a time of recovery needs serious adjusting.

In the final analysis, then, I heartily agree with those scholars listed in the introduction who either divide the period from 249 to 324 into smaller units or turn it into one big timeframe altogether, rather than maintaining the boundary of 284.[353] And other than the thorough re-evaluation of the tetrarchic era argued for above, it may also be suggested to perform a similar analysis on other periods of supposed 'crisis' and 'recovery', as that could reveal similar tendencies towards a dichotomous way of thinking that does not account for processes of change and continuity that reveal a rather different picture.

[353] For the former option, see Potter (2004); for the latter option, see Christol (1997).

Appendix: Roman emperors, 249-324[354]

Emperors during the 'crisis'[355]

Emperor	Reign	Emperor	Reign
Philip Arabs	244-249	Aurelian	270-275
Decius	249-251	Tacitus	275-276
Trebonianus Gallus	251-253	Florian	276
Aemilian	253	Probus	276-282
Valerian	253-260	Carus	282-283
Gallienus	260-268	Numerian	283-284
Claudius II	268-270	Carinus	283-285
Quintillus	270		

Tetrarchic emperors[356]

Diocletian	284-305	Maximinus Daja	305-312
Maximian	285-305	Constantine	306-337
Constantius	293-306	Maxentius	306-312
Galerius	293-311	Licinius	308-324
Severus	305-307		

[354] For the full titulature of these emperors and a brief overview of their careers, see Kienast (1990).
[355] This list includes all the men who were acknowledged as *augustus* in Rome at one point or other during this timeframe. 'Reign' does not include periods in which men who would later become *augusti* were *caesares*.
[356] This includes all the men who were at one point or other part of the 'college of emperors'. Maxentius is also included, as he is simply too important to ignore; moreover, he controlled Rome and was initially allied with his father Maximian, who was a former tetrarch himself. The reigns given do include tenures as *caesares* in this case for the same reason as their exclusion from the 'crisis' list: to keep it intelligible.

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