

The Sources on the Oriental Expeditions of Aurelian

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

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

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

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

¹ On the death of Odaenathus see Kaizer 2005.

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

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