



## Summary :

Roman emperor (253-260 AD). He had been the leader of the Roman senate prior to his rise to the throne. He ordered the persecution of Christians and proceeded with economic measures which affected Asia Minor as well. He repeatedly faced the invasions of the Persian king Sapor I in Syria and Asia Minor, until he was taken captive and executed in 260 AD.

## Other Names

Publius Licinius Valerianus

## Date and Place of Birth

c. 190-200 AD

## Date and Place of Death

260 AD - Persia

## Main Role

Emperor

## 1. Biography

Publius Licinius Valerianus was born in the last decade of 2nd cent. AD.<sup>1</sup> He belonged to an old, senatorial family with Etruscan origins.<sup>2</sup> He was married to Egnatia Mariniana<sup>3</sup> who gave him [Publius Licinius Egnatius Gallienus](#). After her death (just before 253 AD) he remarried and acquired Licinius Valerianus II. The name of his second spouse is unidentified.

Valerian was one of the most respectable members of the **senate** when he was proclaimed emperor by his troops. As an emperor he struck inflationist coins in an attempt to deal with the strenuous economic situation, which is also related to the persecution of Christianity. Moreover, he campaigned against the Persians, who threatened the Eastern border and Asia Minor, but he was captured and died tragically in 260.

## 2. Valerian in the West

Valerian is first mentioned in the written sources in 238, as the leader of the senate (princeps senatus), at the time when the senate supported Gordian, who had dethroned Maximinus Thrax.<sup>4</sup> He held his post until 251. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of October in that year the emperor Decius, following a proposal by the senate, nominated him censor, a rank that he denied out of modesty.<sup>5</sup> Not much later he undertook the administration of the troops in Raetia and Noricum, after he was asked in 253 by the emperor Trebonianus Gallus for reinforcements from [Galatia](#) and Germania to Italy to quell the claimant of the throne Aemilianus. However, prior to Valerian's intervention, the imperial army killed the emperor and joined Aemilianus' force. Upon hearing the death of the legitimate emperor, Valerian's army proclaimed him emperor. When Valerian entered Italy, the rival legions killed Aemilianus and accepted Valerian's power. So did the senate upon his arrival in Rome.<sup>6</sup> In 253 Valerian, aiming at a more efficient governing of the empire, proposed his son Gallienus for co-regent, which was accepted by the senate.<sup>7</sup>

## 3. Valerian in the East



In the meanwhile, the [Goths](#) with their allies Borani launched heavy attacks upon Asia Minor during his reign. They seized and raided cities along the northern and western shores, while they reached inland up to northern [Cappadocia](#) and Galatia.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the greatest threat was the Persian raids lead by [Sapor I](#), which had already started a year prior to his ascend to the throne. Valerian campaigned against the Persians from 253/254 until 256. In his course to Syria he sacrificed to [Asclepius Aegaeus](#) in [Cilicia](#), while his donation to the city of [Mopsos](#) in the same region and the construction of a bridge over the river Pyramos for his troops to go across should also be dated in that period.<sup>9</sup>

Although the expedition was successful, when Valerian returned to Rome Sapor came back fiercely. He besieged and perhaps captured Antioch in Syria probably towards the end of 256. These developments obliged Valerian to transfer numerous troops from the West to the East in the following year. Additionally, Roman forces from all over Asia Minor were accumulated, creating an army of 70,000 men.<sup>10</sup> With this expedition Valerian achieved not only to repel the Persians from Syria, but also to propel himself towards [Samosata](#), thus controlling the border of Euphrates and the route to [Edessa](#) in Syria. These victories are propagandised by the phrases RESTITUT ORIENTIS (restorer of the East) and VICTORIA PART (Parthian victory) on the coins he struck. Nevertheless, his negligence and his hesitation, as well as the enfeeblement of the troops due to an epidemic, did not allow him to take full advantage of the Persian retreat.

Thus, Sapor I returned and in 259 conquered Antioch by treachery, sacked the city and finally burnt it.<sup>11</sup> Then he headed to Edessa, forcing Valerian to haste for the city's defence. Valerian, however, was obliged to proceed to negotiations as his army was weak. Sapor managed to capture him by deceit in 260,<sup>12</sup> probably with the conspiracy of [Macrianus I](#), who was responsible for the finances and the provisions of the expedition.

According to different sources, Macrianus responsibility lies in the fact that he denied to negotiate the release of the emperor, because he was aiming at the usurpation of the throne by his sons, which he actually achieved temporarily. Macrianus I and the head of the Imperial guard Vallistas succeeded in reorganizing the army and along with [Odaenathus](#), king of Palmyra, defended Syria and Asia Minor from the Persian raids. Valerian was humiliated by Sapor I, who used him as a footstool every time he wanted to mount his horse. Valerian died in the same year, when the Persian king had him skinned alive.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4. Economic and religious policy

Valerian was the first emperor who had to face an economic crisis in the Roman Empire. The necessity to meet the army's requirements led him to strike inflationist currency and to establish new [mints](#), such as Cyzicus.<sup>14</sup> The persecution of the Christians is also interpreted as a result of the crisis, as it began in the end of July-beginning of August in 257 and was terminated when Valerian was captured and died in 260. In the East, Macrianus I and his sons continued for a further year.

The reasons for the persecution were:<sup>15</sup> a) the failures in the Eastern front (Sapor I had conquered Antioch in Syria), b) the necessity for unity in the empire; Valerian considered the Christians to be responsible for the lack of unity, c) the economic crisis, due to which the properties of the Christians were confiscated, d) the desire of the emperors in the 3rd century AD to have their power, often disputed by usurpers, acknowledged by everyone. The emperors aimed at imposing their authority through [imperial cult](#), which was denied by the Christians. After Valerian's death, Gallienus followed in the West, as well as in the East when Macrianus I and his sons died, different tactics towards the Christians. However, he continued the economic policy of his father, with devastating consequences for Asia Minor in general.



## 5. Assessment

Ancient literature treats Valerian in a contradictory way. In *Historia Augusta*, where there is a fragmentary account of his biography, he is highly appreciated as a member of the senate. On the contrary, the Christian writers accuse him for their persecution and view his tragic death as divine retribution.<sup>16</sup> Modern scholarship is mainly concerned with the chronological problems of that period and with reconstructing his life. In addition, it focuses more on narrating the events rather than appraising his reign and personality.

Nevertheless, it seems that Valerian, even if his life had been a fabrication, was a very capable and therefore respectable member of the senate. This justifies the fact that he had been the leader for such a long period. For these reasons, as well as for his military skills, he became immediately acceptable as an emperor both by the army and by the senate. Besides, his interest for the region may be proved by other actions, such as his donation to Cilician Mompsos, the festivals to his honour<sup>17</sup> and the fact that the greatest number of [Neokoriae](#) since the period of [Caracalla](#) were preserved or recovered by the cities in Asia Minor.<sup>18</sup> However, all these clues do not suffice to draw a full picture. The prolific personality of his son outshone him. It could possibly be said that the one thing left behind by Valerian- apart from his tragic death which caused many problems in Asia Minor- was Gallienus.

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1. In *SHA*, Val. 5, it is cited that he was 60 years old when he became an emperor. However, since this source is not reliable, this piece of information should not be taken for granted.
  2. Aur. Vict., *Caes.* 32.
  3. She was from a senatorial family. Deified in 253/4. PIR IJJ E39- Felletti Maj, B.M., *Iconografia romana imperiale da Severo Alessandro a M. Aurelio Carino* (Roma 1958), p. 219. She was worshipped along with Zeus in the kome of Astrinon in Isauria, Bean, G. - Mitford, T.B., *Sites old and new in Rough Cilicia* (TAM Ergänzungsband 3, Wien 1970), pp. 132-133, no 126.
  4. *SHA*, Gord. 9.7-8; Zosim. *Hist.* 1.14.
  5. This honour might be a repetitive motif in *Historia Augusta*, Syme, R., *Emperors and Biography. Studies in the Historia Augusta* (Oxford 1971), p. 215.
  6. Zosim. *Hist.* 1.28-1.29; Orosius 7.22.1; Eutropius 9.7; Aur. Vict., *Caes.* 32.
  7. Eutropius 9.7-8.
  8. Salamon, M., "The Chronology of Gothic incursions into Asia Minor in the third cent. A.D. ", *Eos* 59 (1971), p. 109-139.
  9. Weiss, P., "Ein Altar für Gordian III, die älteren Gordianae und die Severer aus Aigeai (Kilikien)", *Chiron* 12 (1982), p. 198-199; Pekary, T., "Kaiser Valerians Brückenbau bei Mopsos in Kilikien", *Bonner Historia-Augusta-Colloquium 1964/1965* (Antiquitas 4.3, Bonn 1966), p. 139-141.
  10. *Res gestae divi Saporis* 23-24.
  11. Zosim. *Hist.* 1.36; Downey, G., *A History of Antioch* (Princeton 1961), pp. 255, 587-595.
  12. *Res gestae divi Saporis* 24-25; Zonar. 12, 23.
  13. Lactantius, *De mort.* 5.



14. Callu, J.-P., *La politique monétaire des empereurs romains de 238 a 311* (Paris 1969), p. 478-482; De Blois, L., *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus* (Leiden 1977), p. 14, 87-91. For the mint of Cyzicus see Carson, R.A.G., "The Hama Hoard and the Eastern Mints of Valerian and Gallienus ", *Berytus* 17 (1968), p. 123-142; Elks, K.J.J., "The Eastern Mints of Valerian and Gallienus. The Evidence of Two New Hoards from Western Turkey ", *NumChron* 15 (1975), p. 91-109; Besly, E. - Bland, R., *The Cunetio Treasure: Roman Coinage of the Third Century A.D.* (London 1983), p. 40-41.
15. Sage, M.M., "The persecution of Valerian and the Peace of Gallienus", *WS* 12 (1983), p. 137-159.
16. Lactantius, *De mort.* 5; Orosius 7. 22. In the past it had been suggested that the Christians were responsible for his fragmentary biography but this has now been rejected. See Syme, R., *Emperors and Biography. Studies in the Historia Augusta* (Oxford 1971), p.199.
17. Valerian/Gallienus, Severus and Dionysius festivals in Nicaea, see Waddington, W.H. - Babelon, E. - Reinach, T., *Recueil general des monnaies grecques d'Asie Mineure I.3* (Paris 1904-1912), p. 508, n. 854.
18. Price, S.R.F., *Rituals and Power: the Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge 1984).


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## Webliography :

 Valerian

<http://www.roman-emperors.org/gallval.htm>

## Glossary :

 senate, the

The top political body of the Roman state. During the early Republic, it was represented by the council of the consuls, the top archons of the roman state. Later on, its power and responsibilities increased. As a result, it became the main governmental body of Rome. However, during the Imperial period, the responsibilities of the senate were restricted.

## Chronological Table

c. 190-200 AD: Birth of Valerian.

238 AD: Valerian becomes princeps senatus

251 AD: He is proclaimed censor by emperor Decius.

253 AD: Commander of the army in Raetia and Noricum. He was asked by the emperor Trebonianus Gallus for reinforcements from Galatia and Germania to Italy to quell the claimant of the throne Aemilianus. After the emperor's death he succeeds him.

253/254-256 AD: Valerian campaigns against the Persians in Asia Minor.

256 AD: Sapor I besieges and captures Antioch in Syria.

257 AD: Valerian assembles troops of 70,000 men to expel the Persians from Syria. In addition, he advances towards Syria and Euphrates.

259 AD: Sapor I returns and conquers Antioch. Valerian is obliged to negotiate.

260 AD: Sapor I captures Valerian by deceit and tortures him to death.