



Summary :

Roman Emperor. He reigned jointly with his father Valerian from 253 until Valerian was taken captive and died in 260 BC and then as an emperor until his murder. He faced many usurpers during his reign. He proceeded to military, administrative and monetary reforms. The latter affected the economic crisis of the empire, which influenced Asia Minor as well.

Other Names

Publius Licinius Egnatius Gallienus

Date and Place of Birth

218 AD

Main Role

Emperor

1. Biography

Publius Licinius Egnatius Gallienus¹ was born in 218. His father was [Publius Licinius Valerianus](#) and his mother Egnatia Mariniana, descending from old senatorial families of Rome. Licinius Valerianus II was his half-brother from a different mother. He married Cornelia Salonina,² who gave him three sons, Publius Licinius Cornelius Valerianus (known as Valerian II), Licinius Cornelius Saloninus Valerianus and Licinius Egnatius Marinianus.³ He reigned jointly with his father from 253, while he maintained power even after his father had been taken prisoner by the Persians and died in 260, having successfully dealt with usurpers in the East and the West.

He promoted military reforms creating a very flexible army, administrative reforms that generated great dissatisfaction in the upper class, and monetary reforms, which intensify the economic crisis of the empire. On the other hand, he supported artistic and intellectual creation and he adopted a lenient policy towards the Christians.

He was murdered between the 20th of August and the 16th of October 268 AD in Milan along with his brother Valerian, his spouse Salonina and his son Marinianus, following a plot which made Claudius II emperor. Claudius asked from the senate to deify his victim, so that he would gain people's favour.⁴

2. Gallienus as a military man

When Valerian ascended to the throne, aiming at a more effective governing, he appointed Gallienus not as **Cesar** but as **Augustus**, a proposal which was ratified by the **senate**.⁵ Furthermore, he assigned to his son the command of the western provinces of the empire.

Gallienus, during this joint reign (253-259), dealt successfully with the raids of the German tribes and revolts by the governors of the provinces.⁶ The decisive role not only in these campaigns but also in those that followed was played by an army corps for rapid intervention, which operated separately from the main army. Gallienus himself had established that corps which was based at Milan.⁷

2.1. The Persians - Turmoil in the East

In 259, after his father was captured by the Persian king [Sapor I](#), the government of the entire empire was handed over to him. Occupied with the rebels in the western part of the empire, he assigned the repulse of the Persian invasion that extended as far as



[Lycaonia](#)⁸ to his father's generals [Ballista](#) and [Macrianus I](#), who reorganized what was left of Valerian's army, as well as to the ruler of Palmyra [Odaenathus](#). Nevertheless, due to their action, the troops of the East proclaimed Macrianus II and Quietus, Macrianus' sons, emperors in 260. The new emperors were acknowledged in Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt.

Gallienus sent Aureolus, the commander of the cavalry, and Odaenathus, who defeated the usurpers in 261.⁹ Those victories against the Persians, gave Gallienus the titles Parthicus Maximus and Persicus Maximus. [Coinage](#) produced in various cities, like [Side](#) in [Pamphylia](#), propagandized the emperor's successes.¹⁰

2.2. The Gothic raids

In 268 Gallienus repelled the raids of the [Goths](#), who had invaded Greece and Asia Minor, ravaging [Mysia](#) ([Cyzicus](#) is also mentioned in the sources) and [Bithynia](#).¹¹ To commemorate the victories against them at land and sea he issued coins with representations of [Ares](#) or [Poseidon](#).¹²

3. Gallienus as a politician

3.1. Administrative reforms

His most important reform was the exclusion of senators from the higher military ranks, while he started to replace them in the political offices with [eques](#). This policy is also testified in the provinces of Asia Minor, such as [Pontus-Bithynia](#), [Cilicia](#), [Lycia-Pamphylia](#), whereas in the [Province of Asia](#) a [procurator](#) acted as a [proconsul](#).¹³

3.2. Economic policy

The continuation of his father's economic policy proved to be a disaster, especially the establishment of new imperial mints and the striking of inflationist coinage, tactics which were also followed by his successors. Thus, due to the increased imperial production, many small local mints closed down. During his reign, the 188 cities in Asia Minor which were issuing their own coins decreased to 122. In addition, immediately after his death, only the mint of Cyzicus, founded in the period of the co-regency¹⁴ survived and few others in Pisidia-Pamphylia, which were apparently less affected by the general economic situation. On the coins of Lyrbe, [Perge](#) and Side, apart from the eagle, symbol of the dynasty, the sun, symbol of god [Helios](#), is also depicted, as Gallienus wished to be identified with the god. He also promoted his cult together with his wife Salonina.¹⁵

The results of this disastrous policy were increased inflation, which affected the working class, and a decreased offer of loans due the sharp fall of interest rates. The number of land plots abandoned was so great, that when emperor [Aurelian](#) ascended to the throne two years after Gallienus, he demanded the payment of evading profits from the taxes of the abandoned regions.

4. Gallienus's contribution to the arts

The emperor himself wrote poems,¹⁶ while he and his spouse supported the arts. Their friendship for Plotinus, the Neoplatonist philosopher, is testified and presumably they knew his student Porphyry as well. Gallienus had actually promised Plotinus to support him in founding a Platonic community in Campania in Italy, where the philosopher and his circle would live by the laws of Plato.¹⁷

His interest in the arts gave a fresh impetus, which is known in modern bibliography as the Gallienic Renaissance. Although it is characterised by a return to the artistic tendencies of the time of [Augustus](#), [Hadrian](#) and Severus Alexander, there is also a romantic tension which breaks with the past and seeks new ways of expression. These elements are reflected on the portraits and the sculptural decoration of the sarcophagi of the period from Asia Minor. The Greek character of the Gallienic Renaissance might have been associated with the Emperor's visit to Athens, where he became eponymous [archon](#), and was initiated to the Eleusinian Mysteries. Moreover, it has been suggested that the popularity of those tendencies in Rome was generated by artists who had migrated from



Greece and Asia Minor to Rome, after the sack of their lands by the Goths.

5. Gallienus and Christianity

His policy towards the Christians during his reign was different. He allowed free practice of the religion, returned part of the confiscated properties and he gave Christianity a legal status for the first time.¹⁸ It has been argued that Gallienus wanted to deal with the Christians adopting the neo-platonic theories¹⁹ rather than violent methods. This theory, however, has received strong criticism. It is most likely that he tolerated the Christians due to his indifference or in an effort to attract Christians from the regions controlled by the rebel and persecutor of the Christians, Macrianus. In addition, he was aiming at averting any pro-Persian tendencies. Moreover, any violent reaction would contradict the propagandised image of the emperor as just, tolerant, philanthropist, benefactor, brave and defender of the Empire.²⁰

6. Evaluation

6.1. Ancient literary sources

Gallienus is portrayed in the Latin literary tradition as an evil, cruel and frivolous emperor. His only positive feature is his ability as a strategist. This criticism derives mainly from the historiographers-biographers of the 4th century, who sought the reasons for the decline of the empire in the policies of the 3rd century emperors. The subversion of the social order, which began with the administrative and military reforms that allowed equites to rise to the higher ranks, thus replacing the senators, as well as the devaluation of the currency, which led to the crisis that lasted throughout the 4th century, were considered to be the two most important reasons for this crisis by writers who had either senatorial descent or continued a tradition of historiography that had roots in this class.

A further reason for this hostility is the effort of Aurelius Victor and the biographer of Gallienus, and his murderer and successor Claudius II, to praise the latter in *Historia Augusta*, as he was regarded by the writers of the 4th century and the Imperial propaganda, descendant of [Constantine the Great](#).²¹ Moreover, the "Gallienic propaganda", had the reverse effects. The brave, just, and benevolent Gallienus by portraying himself as favoured by [Heracles](#), [Hermes](#), [Apollo](#), [Artemis](#), Genii Populi Romani, [Zeus](#), [Hera](#), Poseidon and Helios²² or by comparing himself to them,²³ has only managed to appear as arrogant and eccentric.

The ancient Greek and Byzantine literary sources, on the other hand, confine in describing mere events, with the exception of [Malalas](#) who praises his physical appearance.

6.2. Modern Scholarship

Modern historiography, led by Homo and Alföldi, tended to rehabilitate his reputation, stressing his ability to deal successfully with the crisis in 259-261. Gallienus' measures are regarded as necessary to deal with this crisis, as well as the invasions. Moreover, his monetary policy is justifiable, considering the need to pay the troops, although it is still described as disastrous. The end of the prosecution of Christianity is interpreted as a political move or tolerance under the influences of Neoplatonic ideas. Finally, the Gallienic renaissance is defined, analysed and interpreted. However, Magie disagrees and characterises Gallienus' reign as a period of decline and chaos for the Asia Minor, while he implies that Gallienus was never popular to its inhabitants.²⁴

Gallienus was a capable military emperor who proceeded to reforms and actions he felt were necessary to face the crisis. Nevertheless, he had not planned a complete programme, nor had he realised their immediate or longterm consequences, for which, however, all the emperors of the period were responsible.

Regarding Asia Minor, Gallienus cannot be held responsible for the destructive raids of the Persians and the Goths, in contrast to his father. However, he is credited with the successful confrontation of the [Gothic raids](#) towards the end of his reign. The argument that he did not react immediately to free his father, aiming at autocracy, although not improbable, has been stated rather uncritically. It should be clarified that the time span between Valerian's capture and his death was only few months, when Gallienus could not leave Rome to



the disposal of the ambitious governors of the western provinces, who troubled him until they had eventually murdered him.

His economic policy, the demands of the rival armies during the rebellions and the various raids led many Asia Minor cities to decline. However, there is evidence that there were certain cities which continued to flourish with or without the emperor's help. Thus, the cities of Pamphylia and Pisidia were not affected by the economic crisis, as they were issuing their own coins after his death.

Furthermore, certain cities of Pamphylia acquired the title [neokoria](#) during Gallienus' reign. During Valerian and Gallienus' reign, with the exception of [Caracalla's](#) time, is the period when most titles of neokoria are given to cities of Asia Minor.²⁵ In addition, cities like [Ankara](#) in [Galatia](#), [Aphrodisias](#) in [Caria](#) and [Tarsus](#), organised important festivals, some of them with funding by the emperor and his family, while in [Pergamon](#), an agonothetes had the means to fund the festival of [Asclepius](#) himself. Cyzicus, with the new imperial mint, thrives, while in [Nicaea](#) the destroyed by the Goths walls are being repaired.²⁶ Hence, generalisations for Gallienus' time as "a period of decline and chaos" are misleading.

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1. His name appears in certain ancient Greek sources with one 'I' (Porph., *Plot.* 12), whereas with double in others (Zos. 1.37-41). The spelling with the double 'I' is preferable as it is recorded in the Latin written sources (SHA, *Gal.*) and on the coins he issued himself.
 2. She had been identified with Pipa or Pipara, the daughter of Attalus, chief of the German tribe Markomani, Boerden, W., *Some Minor Roman Historians* (Leiden 1972), p. 80. However, these are probably two different persons. Pipa was Gallienus' concubine, while Cornelia his legal spouse, most likely from Bithynia, and her full name was Cornelia Salonina Chrysogoni. SHA, *Gal.* 21.3.; Aur. Vict., *Caes.* 33.6.; Jones, A.H.M. - Martindale, J.R. - Morris, J., *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire I* (Cambridge 1971), p. 799.
 3. SHA, *Val.* 8; *Gal.* 14.9-11; *PIR III*, p. 75, no. 39, V1, p. 33-36, 45, 62, no. 183, 184, 198, 257.
 4. Zos. 1.39.41; SHA, *Gal.* 14-15; Eutropios 9.11. Malalas 12.27, on the contrary, reports that he died from illness. Saunders, R.T., "Who murdered Gallienus?", *Athichthon* 26 (1992), p. 80-94. For the date of death cf. Rea, J.R., *The Corn Dole in Oxyrhynchus and Kindred Documents* (The Oxyrhynchus Papyri 40, London 1972), p. 19, 25, n. 2, no. 2.892-2.940.
 5. Eutropios 9.7-8.
 6. Zos. 1. 30; Aur. Vict., *Caes.* 33; SHA, *Tyr. Trig.* 9-10. During the operations his son Poplius Licinius Cornellius Valerianus was killed near the Danube, while at the revolt in Galatia his other son Saloninus died: SHA, *Tyr. Trig.* 3. König, I., *Die gallischen Usurpatoren von Postumus bis Tetricus* (Vestigia, Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte 31, Munich 1981), p. 43-51; Drinkwater, J. F., *The Gallic Empire. Separatism and Continuity in the North. Western Provinces of the Roman Empire A.D. 260-274* (Stuttgart 1987), p. 23-26.
 7. Potter, D.S., *Prophesy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire. A Historical Commentary on the Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle* (Oxford 1990), p. 49, n. 141, p. 83, n. 49 (with bibliography).
 8. *Res gestae divi Saporis* 26-33; Malalas I.12.26.
 9. SHA, *Tyr. Trig.* 12-15. On Auriolus cf. *PIR I*, no. 1.672, and Jones, A.H.M. - Martindale, J.R. - Morris, J., *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire I* (Cambridge 1971), p. 138.
 10. Nollé, J., "'Oriens Augusti'. Kaiserpanegyrik und Perserkriegspropaganda und Münzen der Stadt Side in Pamphylien unter Valerian und Gallienus 253-268", *JNG* 36 (1986), p. 136-142, pl. 19.13-14.
 11. Gallienus had given orders to Cleodamus and Athenaeus from Byzantium to see to the repairs of the walls of the cities as soon as he heard that the invaders had passed Danube, SHA, *Gal.* 13.6



12. SHA, *Gal.* 13.6-9; CAH XII, p. 147-149 (A. Alföldi); Salamon, M., "The Chronology of Gothic Incursions into Asia Minor in the Third Cent. A.D.", *Eos* 59 (1971), p. 109-139; De Blois, L., *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus* (Leiden 1977), p. 106, 108. Webb, P.H., *Roman Imperial Coinage* 1, p. 17, 184, no. 603, argues that the coin was struck in the Province of Asia-perhaps in Cyzicus- and dates it to 265. Robertson, A.S., *Roman Imperial Coins in the Hunter Coin Cabinet University of Glasgow. IV: Valerian I to Allectus* (Oxford 1978), p. 58, no. 198, pl.16, on the other hand, dates it to 267 and speculates its issue in the mint of Antioch.
13. Aur. Vict., *Caes.* 33.33-34; Bersanetti, G.M., "Un governatore equestre della Licia-Panfilia", *Aevum* 19:1 - 2 (1945), p. 384-390; Magie, D., *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the End of the Third Century after Christ* (Princeton 1950), p. 711.
14. In the past Smyrna, Ephesus and Cyzicus had been suggested: De Blois, L., *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus* (Leiden 1977), p. 93, n. 1. Modern bibliography has concluded in favour of Cyzicus, 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. Callu, J. - P., *La politique monétaire des empereurs romains de 238 a 311* (Paris 1969), p. 478-482; Magie, D., *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the End of the Third Century after Christ* (Princeton 1950), p. 639, 682, 712-713, 1502, n. 25, p. 1550, n. 38, p. 1572, n. 38. Gallienus-Helios: SHA, *Gal.* 16.4 and 18.2.4. For the coins of Side and the symbolisms cf. Nolle, J., "'Oriens Augusti'. Kaiserpanegyrik und Perserkriegspropaganda und Munzen der Stadt Side in Pamphylien unter Valerian und Gallienus 253-268", *JNG* 36(1986), pp. 127-136, pl.18.1-2, 18.14-15, 19.1, 19.4-5.
16. SHA, *Gal.* 11.
17. Porph., *Plot.* 7 and 12. Ferri, S., "Plotino e l' arte del terzo secolo", *CA* 1 (1936), pp. 166-171. The effect of Plotinus in the art of the period have risen many discussions.
18. Eus., *Hist. Eccl.* 7.13; Keresztes, P., "The Peace of Gallienus", *WS* 9 (1975), pp. 174 -185; Sage, M.M., "The Persecution of Valerian and the Peace of Gallienus", *WS* 12 (1983), p. 137 -159.
19. Alföldi, A., *Studien zur Geschichte der Weltkrise des dritten Jahrhunderts n.Chr.* (Darmstadt 1967), pp. 241-257.
20. Manarasi, A., *L' impero Romano e il Cristianesimo* (Rome 1914), pp. 407-408; De Blois, L., *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus* (Leiden 1977), p. 181-193.
21. This tradition also included the testimonies that the troops proceeded to Gallienus' damnatio memoriae, although this action lies entirely in the responsibility of the senate, as well as that Claudius II did not participate in the conspiracy against him, but he was named emperor by Gallienus himself at his death-bed: SHA, *Gal.* 14.3, 15, *Claud.* 1.1, 13.1-4; Aur. Vict., *Caes.* 33.27-34; Magie, D., *The Scriptores Historiae Augustae III* (Loeb, London- Cambridge Massachusetts 1932, rep. 1954), p. 46, n. 2, p. 48, n. 2, p. 152, n. 1, p. 178, n. 1; Lieu, N.C. - Montserrat, D. (ed.), *From Constantine to Julian. Pagan and Byzantine Views. A Source History* (London - New York 1996), p. 68-70, 75; Syme, R., *The Historia Augusta. A Call of Clarity* (Antiquitas 4.8. Beiträge zur Historia Augusta Forschung, Bonn 1971), pp. 39-44 (for Aurelius Victor) and 57-61 (for the descent of Constantine the Great).
22. It has been argued that Gallienus tried to propagandises that the gods were the protectors of the state from raids and usurpers. What is more, he wanted to distract the people's attention from the real problems by a series of festivals honouring those deities: Weigel, R., "Gallienus 'Animal Series' Coins and Roman Religion", *NumChron* 150 (1990), p. 135-143. Cf. de Blois, L., *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus* (Leiden 1977), pp. 161-169. For the celebrations for the ten years of his reign cf. SHA, *Gal* 8.9. Merten, E.W., *Zwei Herrscherfeste in der Historia Augusta. Untersuchungen zu den pompae der Kaiser Gallienus und Aurelianus* (Antiquitas 4.5, Beiträge zur Historia Augusta Forschung, Bonn 1968), pp. 1-100.
23. De Blois, L., *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus* (Leiden 1977), pp. 148-157.



24. One of his arguments are the honorary decrees and the votive offerings of the cities of Asia Minor to the emperor and his family (Komana in Cappadocia, Comve), which are dated prior to Macrianus and his sons' revolt. However, some other evidence from Pompeiopolis of Galatia, Sagalassos, Angyra of Galatia and Meiron or Meirion katoikia cannot be dated in this period: Magie, D., *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the End of the Third Century after Christ* (Princeton 1950), p. 709, 1570, n. 33.
25. Cf. Price, S.R.F., *Rituals and Power. The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge 1984).
26. Magie, D., *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the End of the Third Century after Christ* (Princeton 1950), p. 712, 1572, n. 37. The repair works were completed in the reign of Claudius II (268 - 270 AD). *IK* 9, verses 11-12; Winter, E., *Staatliche Baupolitik und Baufursorge in den romischen Provinzen der Kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien* (Asia Minor Studies 20, Bonn 1996), p. 92, 136, 165, n. 1495, p. 359, no. 150. Other cities in Asia Minor as well repaired their walls after the Gothic invasion, but it is unclear whether this took place during Gallienus' reign or later: cf. Winter, E., *Staatliche Baupolitik und Baufursorge in den romischen Provinzen der Kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien* (Asia Minor Studies 20, Bonn 1996), p. 136.

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Glossary :

	archon Term that designates a governor in general. When it is not used in a technical sense, it denotes members of the aristocracy, high officers of the byzantine empire and it is even used for independent princes.
	Augustus A title initially given to Octavian in 27 BC, a few years after his victory over Mark Anthony in Actium. In Greek the epithet means "Honoured". Eventually, the title was used to complement the names of the Roman emperors.
	caesar In the Roman Empire the title of Caesar was given to the Emperor. From the reign of Diocletian (284-305) on this title was conferred on the young co-emperor. This was also the highest title on the hierarchy of the Byzantine court. In the 8th c. the title of Caesar was usually given to the successor of the throne. In the late 11th c. this office was downgraded and from the 14th c. on it was mainly conferred on foreign princes.
	equestrians, the (equites) The lowest class of Roman aristocracy, whose economic wealth derived mainly from civil professions (bankers, publicans, merchants), yet without



political privileges. The Roman Republican period was marked by their strives against the senators. The equestrians were won over mainly by leaders who desired to promote a monarchic type of government pushing aside the Senate.

 [gerousia \(senate\)](#)

The council of elders in Greek cities of Asia Minor. The members were chosen from the wealthy and leading families of the city.

 [proconsul, -lis](#)

A quite high ranking official, *vir spectabilis* according to the rank of the senate, who was inequable only to the *Domestikos* of the *Scholae* and to the *Magister Militum per Orientem*. The proconsul usually served as a governor of the Imperial provinces (i.e. in Asia Minor the provinces of Asia and Cappadocia). The office was demoted from the 9th century onwards and the term was in use until the 12th century meaning a dignity.

 [procurator](#)

Administrator of a roman Province deriving from the class of equites. He was controlled directly by the Emperor and his legati Augusti pro praetore.

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