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THE *HISTORY* OF ZONARAS

FROM ALEXANDER SEVERUS TO THE
DEATH OF THEODOSIUS THE GREAT

TRANSLATION BY THOMAS M. BANCHICH AND EUGENE N. LANE
INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY BY THOMAS M. BANCHICH



THE *HISTORY* OF ZONARAS

While an exile from Constantinople, the twelfth-century Byzantine functionary and canonist John Zonaras culled earlier chronicles and histories to compose an account of events from creation to the reign of Alexius Comnenus. For topics where his sources are lost or appear elsewhere in more truncated form, his testimony and the identification of the texts on which he depends are of critical importance.

For his account of the first two centuries of the Principate, Zonaras employed now-lost portions of Cassius Dio. From the point where Dio's *History* ended, to the reign of Theodosius the Great (d. 395), he turned to other sources to produce a uniquely full historical narrative of the critical years 235–395, making Books XII.15–XIII.19 of the *Epitome* central to the study of both late Roman history and late Roman and Byzantine historiography.

This key section of the *Epitome*, together with Zonaras' *Prologue*, here appears in English for the first time, both complemented by a historical and historiographical commentary. A special feature of the latter is a first-ever English translation of a broad range of sources that illuminate Zonaras' account and the historiographical traditions it reflects. Among the authors whose newly translated works occupy a prominent place in the commentary are George Cedrenus, George the Monk, John of Antioch, Peter the Patrician, Symeon Magister, and Theodore Scutariotes. Specialized indices facilitate the use of the translations and commentary alike.

The result is an invaluable guide and stimulus to further research for scholars and students of the history and historiography of Rome and Byzantium.

Thomas M. Banchich is Professor of Classics and History at Canisius College, Buffalo, New York. His research interests include ancient philosophy, history, and historiography.

The late **Eugene N. Lane** was Professor of Classics at the University of Missouri, Columbia.

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general.⁵⁵ But he did not get around to doing any of the things he said, since there rose up against him Valerianus, who, commander of the forces beyond the Alps, when he had learned about Aemilianus, himself also became a usurper. After he had concentrated the forces under him, he hastened toward Rome. Then, in fact, those who served with Aemilianus, when they had recognized that they were no match in battle for the army of Valerianus, judging that it was not pious that Romans destroy and be destroyed by one another, that wars be joined between men of the same race, and otherwise reckoning, too, that Aemilianus was unworthy of the realm both as ignoble and groveling, and, to be sure, considering that [592] Valerianus was better suited for the rule because he would, for certain, assume affairs in a more authoritative fashion, killed Aemilianus, who had not yet reigned four months and was forty years of age. They submitted themselves to Valerianus and entrusted the empire of the Romans to him without a fight.⁵⁶

When, as has been said, Flavianus had been martyred under Decius, Cornelius received the pastoral office of Rome and, having been distinguished in this for three years, he measured out his lifespan. Lucius was elevated to the throne of the archpriesthood, and, before he had fulfilled his eighth year in the episcopacy of Rome, died. Stephanus succeeded to the office of the pastoral post, from whom there happens to be a directive not to baptize Christians who had converted from heresies, but to purify them by prayer through a laying on of hands. A letter of his about this to the holy martyr Cyprianus is recorded.⁵⁷ When Stephanus had gone to his rest after two years, Xystus occupied the archpriestly throne of Rome. Then, too, the heresy according to Sabellius was stirred up in Ptolemais of the Pentapolis.⁵⁸

Thus did matters stand with regard to the archpriests of Rome.

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Valerianus, when he had assumed the leadership of the Romans with Galienus, his son, also set in motion a most violent [593] persecution against Christians. Many became martyrs in various locations, performing feats of various types in behalf of their faith in Christ.⁵⁹ Then, too, when under him there was an uprising of the peoples, affairs were dire for the Romans. For the Scythians, crossing the Ister, once more enslaved the Thracian territory and besieged the illustrious city of Thessalonica, but nevertheless did not take it. They threw everyone into such great panic that the Athenians rebuilt their city's wall, which

had been dismantled from the times of Sulla, and the Peloponnesians built a wall across the Isthmus from sea to sea.⁶⁰

In addition, the Persians, too, with Sapor their king, overran Syria, ravaged Cappadocia, and were besieging Edessa. Valerianus was hesitating to meet the enemy. When he learned that the soldiers in Edessa had made a sally from the city, engaged the barbarians, and were killing many and taking much booty, he took heart and, having departed with the army that was with him, engaged the Persians. They, being more numerous, encircled the Romans, and many died and some also fled, and Valerianus, with those about him, was captured by the enemy and led off to Sapor. Since he had gained control of the sovereign, he thought that he was in control of everything. And being savage already, hereafter he became worse by far.⁶¹

That Valerianus was taken thus as a prisoner of war [594] by the Persians some record, while others say that Valerianus voluntarily went over to the Persians because, while he was living in Edessa, famine befell the soldiers, and from this they were roused to rebellion and sought to kill the emperor. But, because he feared the uprising of his soldiers, he fled to Sapor, lest he be destroyed by his own men, having betrayed to the enemy not only himself but, so far as it lay in his power, the Roman forces, as well. To be sure, the soldiers were not destroyed, but, when they learned of his treachery, they fled after a few of them had been killed.⁶² But whether the sovereign was taken by the Persians as a prisoner of war or whether he voluntarily put himself in their hands, he was treated ignominiously by Sapor.⁶³

The Persians, attacking the cities with complete impunity, took both Antioch on the Orontes and, of the cities of Cilicia, the very renowned Tarsus, and Caesarea in Cappadocia.⁶⁴ When they had collected a multitude of captives, they did not provide them rations, except the tiniest amount in order for them to stay alive, neither did they allow them to partake of enough water to quench their thirst, but once a day their guards drove them to water just like cattle. Caesarea, being very populous—for it is said that about 400,000 men dwell in it—they did not take—those in it having nobly resisted their enemies and being commanded by a certain Demosthenes, a man brave and intelligent—before a man who had been taken prisoner, [595] a physician, unable to endure the insults leveled at him, suggested a certain spot by which the Persians entered in the night and killed everyone. In fact, their general, Demosthenes, after he had been encircled by many Persians who had been ordered to take him alive, mounted his horse, grasped his naked sword, and flung himself into

the midst of the enemy. After he lay many low, he escaped from the city and managed to get away.⁶⁵ With matters having befallen the Persians thus, they dispersed through the entire eastern territory subject to the Romans and plundered it with impunity.

Now then, the Romans who had fled, so it is said, appointed a certain Callistus as their general. When he had observed the Persians dispersing and recklessly attacking the territories because they did not think that anyone would oppose them, he quickly attacked them, wrought a massive slaughter of the barbarians, and captured the concubines of Sapor, together with much wealth. So he, greatly pained by these things, turned hastily homeward, bringing along Valerianus, who ended his life in Persia, reviled and mocked as a captive.⁶⁶

Not only did Callistus then excel against the Persians, but so did a certain Palmyrene man called Odenathus, who, allying himself with the Romans, destroyed many of the Persians, attacking them as they were returning via the Euphrates territory. Galienus, rewarding him for his generalship, appointed him General of the East.⁶⁷

[596] Moreover, among the dead of the Persian army who were being stripped, women, too, are said to have been found who had been dispatched and equipped in the fashion of men. Some women of this sort were also taken alive by the Romans.⁶⁸ Sapor, on his return, when he happened upon a deep ravine which his baggage train was unable to cross, commanded that captives be slain and tossed into the ravine in order that, once its depth had been filled with the dead bodies, their baggage train thus cross. And it is so recorded that he crossed the ravine.⁶⁹

Thus were the affairs of Valerianus. Xystus was the leader of the church of the Romans, and of the church of the Antiochenes, Demetrianus, having succeeded Flavianus, and of the church of Jerusalem, Hymenaeus, Mazabanes having died, and Dionysius was in charge of the church in Alexandria.⁷⁰

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After Valerianus, Galienus, his son, assumed the leadership of the Romans.⁷¹ His father, campaigning against the Persians, left him in the West to resist those lying in wait in Italy and those plundering Thrace. Attacking the Alamanni, who were about 300,000 strong, around Mediolanum, he was victorious with 10,000. Then, too, he proceeded against the Aerouli, a Scytho-Gothic race, and prevailed. He also warred against the Franks.⁷²

they were encamped in a gully, and the Persians, when they observed this, by means of a trench diverted toward the gully the river flowing nearby. But Carus charged the Persians, met with success, and routed them. He returned toward Rome leading a multitude of captives and much booty.¹¹² Then, when the people of the Sarmatians rebelled, he engaged them too, was victorious, and brought the people into line.¹¹³ He was a Gaul by ancestry, but brave and accomplished in matters of warfare. The account of his death has been variously composed by those who have done historical research. Some say that, having campaigned against the Huns, he was killed there. Others say that he was encamped by the River Tigris and that there, in the place where his army had thrown up a palisade, his tent was struck by lightning, and they record that, along with it, he too was destroyed.¹¹⁴

When his lifetime had expired, whether in this or another way, Numerianus, his son, survived in the camp as sole sovereign. He immediately campaigned against the Persians. When war had erupted and the Persians had gotten the upper hand and the Romans had turned tail, some record that he was captured in flight, that the hide was stripped from his body in the fashion of a wineskin, and that he perished thus. But others have written that, while returning from Persia, he developed ophthalmia and was murdered by his own father-in-law, Prefect of the Camp, who, having coveted his sovereignty, nevertheless he did not gain it. For the army [612] chose Diocletian sovereign, since he was there at the time and had exhibited many acts of courage against the Persians.¹¹⁵

Carinus, of course, the other of Carus' sons, living in Rome, presented a menace to the Romans, since he had become brutal, cruel, and vindictive. He was killed by Diocletian, who had come to Rome. The duration of their reign did not, all told, come to three years.¹¹⁶

In these times, Manes, the thrice-accursed, slunk from the Persians into the habitable world about us and spewed forth in this his own venom, from which, up to the present, the Manichaeans name did not vanish. It was he who at one time used to dub himself Paraclete and Holy Spirit—He in whom the spirit of evil manifestly dwelt!—and at another was calling himself Christ—He! The one appointed by the demons to their service!—and brought with him twelve disciples—communicants and preachers of his nonsense, which he used to concoct from many godless dogmas of now extinguished heresies!¹¹⁷

Now then, when Dionysius, the one tending the faithful in Rome, had completed nine years in this office and had given way, Felix