

Coins with power?

Imperial and local messages on the coinage of the usurpers of the second half of the third century (AD 253-285)

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From the end of the second century onwards, almost all 'legitimate' Roman emperors who managed to receive senatorial approval with all subsequent tributes¹ had started as a usurper contesting the power of the then reigning 'legitimate' Roman emperor. Yet, many usurpers did not succeed in becoming a 'legitimate' Roman emperor. About them not much is known. When literary sources do mention their usurpations, they are mostly reported in short anecdotes with many exaggerations and false information. In addition, of some only a few inscriptions have survived. However, in the second half of the third century, more precisely between AD 253 and 285, fifteen usurpers minted coins outside Rome: Uranius Antoninus, Macrinus Iunior, Quietus, Regalianus, Postumus, Aureolus, Laelian, Marius, Domitian II, Victorinus, Tetricus, Vaballathus, Saturninus, Bonosus, and Julianus.² Recent studies have convincingly demon-

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¹ Most significant were the *vota decennalia*, vows taken at the beginning of an emperor's reign. Furthermore, the Senate co-opted the newly emperor into several priestly colleges such as the Arval Brothers, and bestowed various political offices and titles on him.

² Their coinages are listed in the catalogues *Roman Imperial Coinage* vol. 4.C (1949) and 5.B (1968), but over the past years, studies on the coinage of some of these usurpers have been also published separately. The coinage of the Gallic usurpers Postumus, Laelian, Marius, Domitian II, Victorinus, and Tetricus is explored by several scholars: Lallemand & Thirion (1970), Drinkwater (1971; 1987), Schulte (1983), Schulski (1996), Weder (1997; 1998), Sondermann (2010), and Mairat (forthcoming). Baldus (1971; 1977; 1983 and 1990) dedicated several studies to Uranus' coinage. Recently, Göbl (2000) made a new survey of the coinages of Regalianus and the Macriani, and Estiot did the same for those of Saturninus (2002), Julianus (2010) and Proculus (2014). Estiot with Salaün (2004) and Abdy (2004) saved Domitian II's coins from oblivion, and Bland (2011) examined the coinage of Vaballathus and Zenobia. The genuineness of Amandus' types is much discussed and hence left out from this article.

strated that coinage was an ideal vehicle for communication aimed at specific audiences, such as the military or lower classes, through which an emperor could symbolically represent himself and his leadership.³ Usurpers acted the same way, producing coins to distribute among their troops and other supporters. By issuing coins carrying their portraits and titles, these usurpers contested the authority of the ‘legitimate’ Roman emperor as these portraits and legends symbolised a ruler’s power.⁴ Their coinage, therefore, is a valuable source for historians as it can bring forward new insights about the usurpers’ image, and subsequently, what they aspired during their leadership.

Except for the Gallic usurpers, whose coin messages have been explored abundantly by König (1981), Drinkwater (1987), and Bourne (2001), no comparative study has been made to analyse how these usurpers thought to legitimate their position. This article, therefore, will analyse how the usurpers between 253 and 285 represented themselves on their coins, how their coinage relate to the ones of the ‘legitimate’ Roman emperors, and to what audiences they addressed their messages. Such a study will transcend the individual coin specimens of the usurpers, and the question whether they are all genuine – which is often discussed – because it allows us to analyse broader patterns in the usurpers’ struggle to power.

On the one hand, one could hypothesise that a newly proclaimed imperial opponent wanted to represent himself as the new Roman emperor, contesting the power of the ‘legitimate’ emperor. Imitating the standard third-century types placed a usurper visually on par with the former emperors, suggesting a legitimate imperial succession. Furthermore, many imperial officers, especially those at the *limes*, were proud of Rome’s history and were filled with some kind of nostalgic *Romanitas*. Focussing on Rome, and on her roots and her ideals, might have been a good tactic for a usurper in order to gain support among the Roman military, but also among Roman citizens and its Senate, as most emperors, as well as usurpers, were far away from the capital.⁵ On the other hand, as a usurper’s power depended almost exclusively on his local support, such as the stationed army, provincial city officials, and local tribes, one could assume that the usurper also needed to send messages that expressed some kind of regional particularism. Such messages were not unique as several ‘legitimate’ third-century emperors, such as Septimius Severus (*Libero patri* coins) and

³ Most notable are the studies of Ehrhardt, 1984; Wallace-Hadrill, 1986; and Noreña, 2011. For coins targeting specific audiences see for instance Metcalf, 1993; Kemmers, 2006; and Buttrely, 2007.

⁴ Wallace-Hadrill, 1986: 69–71; Horster, 2007: 291–309. Cf. the anecdotes about the coinages of Perennis (Herodian 1.9.7–8) and Firmus (HA, *Thirty Tyrants* 2.1–4) attesting their imperial authority.

⁵ De Blois, 1976: 134. Gallienus’ Faleri types, for instance, referred to Gallienus’ Italian descent aiming to target his Pannonian officers; see Claes, 2013: 59–60.

Decius (Illyricum types), also made an appeal to local groups by disseminating regional messages on their coinage, but they suggest that the usurper wanted to create a stronger connection with a particular group among which he could affirm his power.

Analysing the usurpers' coin *types* proves the best tool to perform this study, firstly, because of the peculiar circumstances many usurpers' coin specimens have not survived, and secondly, because these are rarely found in coin hoards or as stray finds. Often (older) museum collections, auctions catalogues, and (former) private collections provide the usurpers' specimens, mostly without further data, such as the find spot or the archaeological context. This forms another reason for choosing to analyse the usurpers' types instead of the actual coin numbers found.⁶

In order to analyse how the usurpers represented their leadership, the coin types of each usurper have been collected in a database. This tool allowed this study to calculate the percentages of different messages in comparison to the total number of types of each usurper. Fifteen usurpers produced coins outside Rome in the second half of the third century, or more precisely between 253 and 285. Their types were either minted at a provincial mint, at an imperial mint in a province that they had seized or at a temporally improvised mint under control of the usurper. In a first stage, the types were collected using the catalogues *Roman Imperial Coinage* (RIC) and the *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum* (SNG). As the volumes dealing with the third century are outdated and need revising, all recent source material that has been published about the usurpers' coinages, as mentioned in footnote 2, has been included. By doing so, newly discovered types as well as the latest chronological studies are incorporated in the database. To explore the different messages used by the usurpers, their relation towards the coinage of the 'legitimate' emperors and subsequently the audiences they had to target, this study made a distinction between four categories of messages, which are listed below. In these categories the presence of Roman or regional elements is essential. Additionally, a distinction is made between types which depicted standard imperial types and innovative types.

1) The first category, named 'imperial types', consists of coin types that were in line with the former types of the third-century 'legitimate' emperors. In her study, Manders (2013) demonstrated that the standard ideological lines of the third-century emperors focused mainly on military themes, divine associations,

⁶ To compare the material with similar research standards, the coins are classified by one and the same coin type definition that I created in my dissertation *Kinship and Coins*, 2013. The primary rule is that every coin specimen defines a new type if one of the following data differs from another coin specimen: obverse or reverse legends (without reckoning abbreviations and spelling errors), the obverse or reverse image, the date or place of the issue or the denomination.

and the idea of the Roman Empire as an eternal power.⁷ Recently, studies have also shown that messages about the emperor's family, especially his potential successors, were broadcast abundantly in the third century. As the military preferred a dynastic imperial house over new usurpers, it is assumed in this article that messages referring to the imperial house and its successors are one of the more popular themes addressed to the soldiers.⁸ Of course, for the same reasons the Senate and the people of Rome favoured a dynastic succession.⁹ In addition, the Augustan title and other imperial titles, such as *caesar* or *imperator*, were also direct indicators that the usurper contested the position of the 'legitimate' emperor. Through this category, we can analyse how the usurpers tried to visualise themselves as 'legitimate' Roman emperors.

2) The second category collects all types that explicitly followed standard imperial types, such as the first category, but which depicted elements referring to the distant Roman past or to the concept of Rome as a global entity. In this article, this category will be named 'Romanness imperial types'. As mentioned before, many third-century Roman officers, but also the Senate and the Roman populace, seem to have romanticised the idea of Rome's great past and everything associated with it. By doing so, the usurpers' types could target a broad audience and could react directly to the coin messages of the 'legitimate' emperor, whose power they contested.¹⁰ Usurpers, for instance, could refer to the goddess Roma, the she-wolf, or to other explicit references of Romanness.

3) The third category 'local imperial types' contains all types which adopted former types of the third-century emperors referring to local elements. Messages targeting particular troops or referring to local deities, for instance, were issued regularly by several 'legitimate' emperors. Likewise, the types of the usurper could broadcast regional messages to strengthen his bond with a specific region in order to contest the power of the 'legitimate' emperor. Furthermore, a usurper could denote himself co-*augustus* on his coins with the legend *augg(g)*. On imperial coinage, the plural of *augustus* mostly referred to the joint reign of the 'legitimate' emperor with his sons, who had also been raised to the rank of *augustus*. The Augustan plural on a usurper's coinage did not aim to represent him as an alleged son of the 'legitimate' emperor, but as some kind of local imperial colleague, administering a particular region in the emperor's name. Types with the letters *augg(g)* therefore will be classified in this category.

⁷ Cf. Claes, 2013: 154–158; 170–178; 180; 214–221.

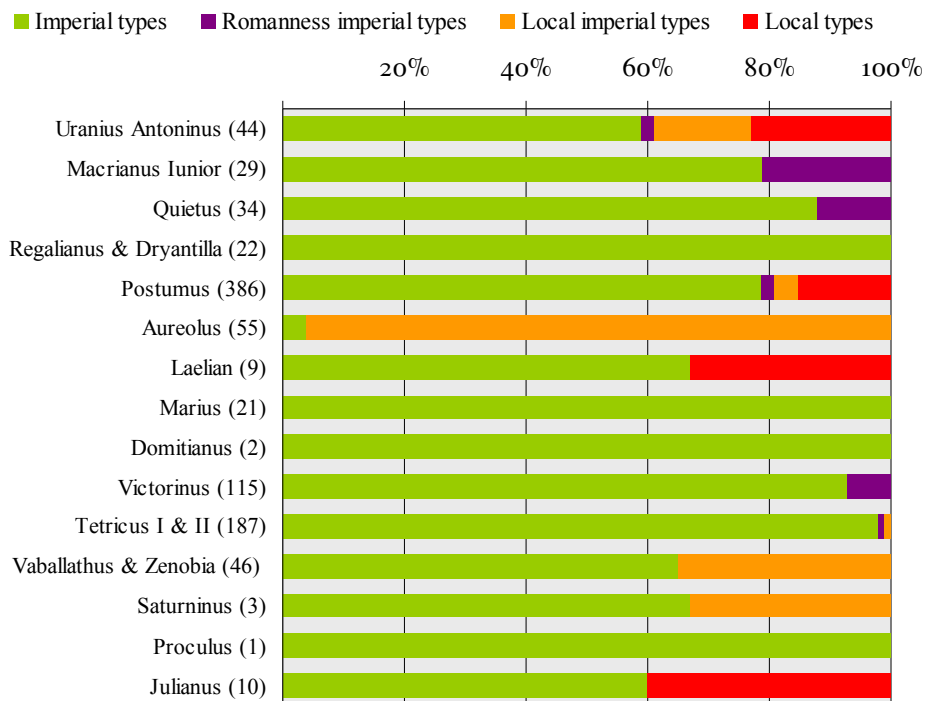
⁸ See, for instance, Mucianus who tried to persuade the Eastern troops to support Vespasian's imperial candidacy by mentioning that he had two mature sons to succeed him which would provide Rome a stable imperial house (cf. Tacitus, *Histories* 4.77.1).

⁹ Horster, 2007: 294–295; Claes, 2013.

¹⁰ More on counter-propaganda on Roman coinage, see Hekster & Manders, 2006: 135–144 and on the concept of *Roma aeterna*, see in particular Hedlund, 2008, chapter 4.

4) The last category, denoted as ‘local types’, collects all the types expressing a regional particularism with innovative local elements, being not inspired by former imperial types. Through images of regionally stationed military detachments, native gods or other specific hallmarks of a region, a usurper could target the stationed soldiers and the local inhabitants. Furthermore, some usurpers did not, or not always, use imperial titles on their coins. This absence could suggest that they saw themselves as temporary leaders proclaimed to deal with local problems, but they still needed money to pay soldiers and other supporters. By doing so, they did not, or not initially, aim to contest the position of the ‘legitimate’ emperor.

Of course, some types could disseminate messages of several categories. If so, those types are assigned to each of the categories involved. In addition, some usurpers could broadcast contradicting messages, hinting at a more complex communication system in which the usurper tried to target different audiences to gain support for his imperial aspirations. Graph 1 represents the propagation of one or more of the four categories on the usurper’s coinage in relation to the total number of types of each usurper:



Graph 1: Overview of the usurper’s coin messages following one of the four categories as discussed above

At first sight, the graph reveals no general pattern of increase, decrease, or continuity for one or more of the four categories. Yet, a closer look gives us three patterns in which different groups of usurpers distributed a similar representation. We will take a closer look at these.

First, there are usurpers who followed the standard coin messages of the ‘legitimate’ Roman emperors, classified as categories 1 and 2. The usurpers Macrianus Iunior, Quietus, and Regalianus represented themselves in the same way as the ‘legitimate’ Licinian emperors, Valerian and Gallienus. They did so by imitating typical iconographic elements of the Licinian coinage. Likewise, the Gallic emperors Marius, Victorinus, and Tetricus followed the standard coin themes of the third-century emperors, while the Gallic counter-emperor Domitianus II imitated a type of the Gallic emperors. In addition, Proculus’ coins show a similar pattern.¹¹

A second pattern consists of the types noticed by a group of usurpers who seem to have been aware that their powers depended (partly) on local support, as discussed in category 4. Besides the usurper Julianus Sabinus, the Gallic emperors Postumus and Laelian distributed several types with regional messages, most likely in order to gain the support of local groups.

A last pattern is visible by some usurpers in the East and with Aureolus, who all issued types of category 1 and 3, sometimes also in combination with types of category 2 and 4. These usurpers disseminated ambiguous messages about their imperial powers. On the one hand, their coin types seem to propagate them as Roman emperors with their portraits bearing imperial titles, whereas on the other hand, their types focus on regional themes representing them as some kind of local vassals. On some of their coin types imperial titles are missing, but on others they denote themselves as *co-augusti* with the legend *augg(g)*.

Following these three patterns, this paper is divided into three parts, discussing successively the imperial, the regional, and the ambiguous messages of the various usurpers from 253 until 285. This analysis will bring new insights about the political and territorial aspirations of these usurpers.

1. ‘Imperial’ messages

Newly proclaimed imperial opponents could strengthen their authority by representing themselves in line with the public image of the ‘legitimate’ third-century emperors. Our graph shows that the majority of the usurpers who did produce coinage but did not manage to become ‘legitimate’ emperors, displayed mainly standard third-century themes of category 1: Macrianus Iunior, Quietus, Regalianus, Marius, Domitianus II, Victorinus, Tetricus, and Proculus. Some of

¹¹ For the genuineness of Proculus’ types, see Estiot, 2014. The same article demonstrates that Bonosus’ types are false.

them also issued a smaller number of traditional types of category 2 depicting Roman hallmarks, by which they may have reacted directly to the messages of the ‘legitimate’ Roman emperors. This section will explore chronologically how these usurpers tried to place themselves into an imperial tradition.

In the summer of 260, Valerian’s general Callistus succeeded together with Macrianus Senior to drive the Persians back across the Roman border.¹² Some weeks earlier, Macrianus Senior had been appointed Valerian’s *procurator arcae et praepositus annonae* in his Persian expedition which was interrupted abruptly by the emperor’s capture by Shapur I.¹³ Soon after the Persians had been repelled, the eastern provinces seem to have recognised Macrianus Senior’s sons as the new emperors: Titus Fulvius Macrianus Iunior and his brother Titus Fulvius Iunius Quietus.¹⁴ The continuous threat of the Persians must have hastened their decision. In addition, the absence of Gallienus, who showed no intention of coming to the east to rescue his father and to punish the Persians, must have disappointed the eastern troops and governors.¹⁵ While Quietus stayed in the east, Macrianus Iunior, joined by his father Macrianus Senior and many of Valerian’s former generals, travelled to the west to confront Gallienus’ troops. In Illyricum however, they were defeated by Gallienus’ generals Aureolus and Domitian (presumably the later Domitian II).¹⁶ Some time later, Quietus was forced to take refuge to Emesa – being chased by Odaenathus, who supported Gallienus – where he was eventually murdered by either his own troops or those of Odaenathus.¹⁷

¹² Anonymous Continuator of Dio *FHG* IV. 193; Syncellus 466, 15–23; Zonaras 12.23; de Blois, forthcoming: chapter 2. About the capture of Valerian, see ŠKZ, 19–37 and the sources quoted in Dögeon & Lieu, 1991: 58–65. The *HA* calls Callistus ‘Ballista’ which was most likely his nickname.

¹³ Petr. Patric., *Excerpta de sent.* 264, 159 Boissevain. Cf. *PIR*² F 549; Pflaum, 1960: 932.

¹⁴ Zonaras 12.23; *IGRR* 3.27. The circumstances around the proclamation are discussed see Potter, 2004: 639 and n. 182. From papyri evidence, their acception may be dated between 2 and 16 September 260; see Rathbone, 1986: 118–119.

¹⁵ Because the last Licinian issue of the mint of Samosata only included *aurei*, Göbl, 2000: 134–144 has tentatively suggested that the eastern provinces first awaited Gallienus to buy Valerian free with this gold.

¹⁶ *HA*, *Thirty Tyrants* 11.1–2; 12.12–14; 13.3; 13.7; 14.1; 15.4; *Gallienus* 1.6; 2.5–7; 3.1; 3.3; 7.3; Zonaras 12.24; Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 7.10.5; 8; 23.2. Cf. Alföldi, 1967: 351; Göbl, 2000: 62–63.

¹⁷ *HA*, *Thirty Tyrants* 12.4; *Gallienus* 3.2; 3.4; Zonaras 12.24. Cf. *Sibylline Oracles* 162–169 which refers to the ‘sun-sent lion’ (identified as Odaenathus) who defeated the ‘well-horned stag’ (identified as the Macriani); see Swain, 1992: 378–380. The end of their rule is situated between 30 October 261 and 29 March 262; see Rathbone, 1986: 199; Göbl, 2000: 62–63.



Fig. 1 – Quietus, *antoninianus*, Samosata, *RIC* v.B. *Quietus* 9, De Nederlandsche Bank RO-08530: *Roma aeterna* [actual size: 22 mm]



Fig. 2 – Gallienus sole reign, *antoninianus*, Asian mint, *RIC* v.A. *Gallienus* 655, De Nederlandsche Bank RE-08273: *Roma aeterna* [actual size: 21 mm]

Whilst they had Valerian's war treasure at their disposal, Macrianus Junior and Quietus seem to have usurped Valerian's Mint in Samosata, which produced their *aurei* and *antoniniani*.¹⁸ Their coinage was of good quality and style, or

¹⁸ Göbl, 2000: 143-144. *Contra* Škz, 26-27 who allegedly claims to have conquered Samosata (for more see Dongeon & Lieu, 1991: 365). The identification of Samosata is generally accepted nowadays. Before, Antioch (Mattingly, 1954: 53; 60; *RIC* v.B, 572) and Emesa (Alföldi, 1967, 60) had been suggested. However, some of Quietus' types could have been produced by another secondary Eastern mint, which continued to issue coins for Quietus after Samosata stopped producing coins for both brothers; see Göbl, 2000: 143-144 following Mattingly, 1954: 58-59.

at least it was not worse than that of Gallienus.¹⁹ Types referring to *Roma aeterna* and *spes publica* were adapted from the coins of Valerian and his family members, also issued at Samosata (figure 1 and 2).²⁰ The other types for the Macriani brothers followed the standard coin images of the third-century emperors, referring to *Apolo (sic) conservator*, *fortuna redux*, *Iupiter conservator*, *Mars propugnator*, and *victoria augustorum* (for Macrianus Iunior 79% and for Quietus 88% of category 1). Needless to say that Macrianus Senior as Valerian's former head of the treasure must have been familiar with the standard third-century coin images, in particular with the coin scenes of Valerian's coinage from Samosata. Of course, it is also (partly) possible that the mint workers of Samosata recaptured these familiar images for their own convenience. Yet, no sudden changes in the type output of the Macriani are noticeable which strongly points out that the imitation of the Licinian types was desirable to the Macriani brothers.²¹ Styled after Valerian, they were represented as the legitimate successors of him, as if the government of his lawful son and co-augustus Gallienus had been reduced to a *fait divers*. Furthermore, the adaptation of the *Roma aeterna* type (containing respectively 21% and 12% of their total coin types), symbolising the concept of an eternal Empire, suggests that the Macriani brothers saw themselves as the new 'legitimate' emperors, who could rule the Empire in a co-emperorship, like Valerian and Gallienus did.²² In addition, the production of *fortuna redux* coins demonstrates the strong confidence of the brothers in the outcome of Macrianus Iunior's battle against Gallienus.²³ Yet, in the end, Gallienus' troops proved to be stronger. In the background of these events, another usurper claimed power. Publius Gaius Regalianus had been governor of Pannonia Superior, a province that suffered a lot from the frequent raids of various barbarian groups. After Ingenius' failed usurpation at the Upper Danube²⁴, which was suppressed severely

¹⁹ In *P.Oxy* 12.1411 the *strategos* of the Oxyrhynchus *nome* ordered that the coinage of the Macriani had to be handled as if they were of Gallienus, which hints at the fineness of the coinage. Cf. Rathbone, 1996: 335–336.

²⁰ See for instance similar Licinian types of Samosata in Göbl, 2000: nos. 1678; 1689: *Roma aeterna*; no. 1695: *spes publica*. The imitation of the *spes publica* type is of particular interest, because this type was traditionally linked to the emperor's successor; see Claes, 2013: 163–178. It could, therefore, have aimed to visualise the Macriani brothers as the legitimate successors of Valerian.

²¹ For the decision-making at imperial mints and the independence of their mint workers see Wolters, 1999: 303–306 and Claes, 2014: 163–173.

²² *RIC* v.B. *Macrianus Iunior & Quietus*, 580–583, nos. 2; 9; 11; Göbl, 2000: nos. 1738–1740.

²³ *RIC* v.B. *Macrianus Iunior & Quietus*, 580–583, nos. 4; 7; Göbl, 2000: nos. 1730–1731. Cf. Mattingly, 1954: 61.

²⁴ HA, *Thirty Tyrants* 10.1–2. Ingenius was appointed *dux* of Valerian's armies sta-

by Gallienus, Regalianus was proclaimed emperor in 261. Regalianus' coinage, which is primarily found in Carnuntum and its surroundings, styles the usurper as a traditional third-century emperor. Most likely, the soldiers of *Legio XIV Gemina*, stationed at Carnuntum, supported Regalianus' case, hoping that he would improve the security at the Balkan *limes*.²⁵ Not much is known about the usurper, and even the way he met his death is discussed.²⁶ Generally accepted is Fritz's theory, which assumes that Regalianus was killed during a raid of invading Roxolani, a Sarmatian tribe.²⁷



Fig. 3 – Regalianus, *antoninianus*, Carnuntum, ~ RIC V.B. *Regalianus* 1, NAC AG (20/11/2007: Auction 42, Lot 172): *concordia augg.*

The type is an overstrike on a type of Maximianus Thrax [actual size: 23 mm]

A provisional mint at Carnuntum issued *antoniniani* for Regalianus and a woman, who was called Dyrantilla. Most likely, Dyrantilla was Regalianus' wife, which is suggested by one of Regalianus' reverse types on which he is shaking hands with a woman, a standard third-century marital coin scene (figure 3).²⁸

tioned at Sirmium and there he also was the guardian of Valerian's grandson Valerian Junior. Cf. Fritz, 1966; Göbl, 2000: 139; de Blois, forthcoming: chapter 2.

²⁵ The distribution of Regalianus' coins is concentrated around Carnuntum and Vindobona, with some individual finds found at Siscia and Mursa. Cf. Göbl, 1970: 13–16; 33–34; Găzdac, 2005: 492–495; 502.

²⁶ The HA (*Thirty Tyrants* 10.2) states that Regalianus was murdered by his own troops by consent of the Illyrian provincials who were afraid of Gallienus' harsh reprisals, whereas Eutropius (9.8) reports that the usurper was killed by Gallienus' troops.

²⁷ See for the detailed discussion Fritz, 1966: 58–63.

²⁸ Claes, 2013: 210–220.

Almost all types are overstrikes of former Severan *denarii*.²⁹ Through this clever profitable production, Regalianus may have been able to increase his money donatives.³⁰ Stylistically, however, the coin types are in a very rough style and the legends contain many spelling errors.³¹ Remarkably, the reverse dies of the overstrikes did not copy the images of the original reverses. Instead, most of their images, such as *concordia*, *Iuno regina*, *Oriens*, *pax aeterna*, *victoria* and *virtus*, are all imitations of coins of Gallienus and Salonina issued by the mints of Rome and Viminacium (100% of category 1).³² The choice for these imitations could come forward from the die cutters being familiar with these types, but we can also assume that the usurper ordered for these Gallienan images. Both arguments do not have to be mutually exclusive.³³ A lot of these images were accompanied by the letters *augg*, which seems to have been done intentional. The plural of *augustus* probably did not portray Regalianus as a co-*augustus* of Gallienus, but must have referred to Regalianus and Dryantilla, who bore the title of *augusta*. The legend of the former mentioned marital type, displaying the couple shaking hands, reads *concordia augg*, referring thus to Regalianus and Dryantilla together, from which we can deduce that the other *augustorum* legends referred to the couple as well. Although the organisation of an own mint was revolutionary, Regalianus' coin images were conservative, placing the usurper in a line of succession with Gallienus just as the coinage of the Macriani brothers did.

Likewise, the successors of Postumus, Marius, Victorinus, and Tetricus, the so-called Gallic usurpers, mainly issued types of category 1, following the traditional images of the third-century emperors (see graph 1).³⁴ Indeed, modern scholars, having explored other material as well, viewed the Gallic Empire as

²⁹ Besides Septimius Severus, Julia Domna, Caracalla, Geta, Macrinus, Julia Maesa, Elagabalus, and Alexander Severus, some unique overstrikes are also found on a type of Maximinus Thrax and of Pupienus.

³⁰ Regalianus was not the first to do this. Before, *denarii* were overstruck by Decius and Gallienus, most likely because of similar monetary reasons. See also Göbl, 1970: 31–32. One of my reviewers also rightly questioned whether the restriking of the *denarii*, being of high quality silver, into low silver quality *antoniniani* could have been a loss for Regalianus either. This interesting question requires more investigation.

³¹ Göbl, 2000: 139. Because of the typical style, Göbl has suggested that some local gem cutters may have produced Regalianus' dies.

³² See for instance Göbl, 2000: Roma no. 311: *concordia augustorum*; nos. 49; 75; 109; 142; 184: *Iuno regina*; nos. 227; 316: *Oriens augustorum*; nos. 608; 677: *pax aeterna*; nos. 30; 76; 112: *victoria augustorum*; nos. 38; 83; 119; 149: *virtus augustorum*; Viminacium nos. 828; 838: *virtus augustorum*; no. 851: *Iuno regina*.

³³ See footnote 21 for more on type selection of coins.

³⁴ Cf. Drinkwater, 1987: 175, who has noted that after Postumus “the issues of the Gallic mints became ever less interesting and informative.”

a continuation of the Roman Empire. The coinages of the mentioned usurpers will be discussed chronologically.³⁵ In addition, the standard coin types of the Gallic usurper Domitian II, who briefly usurped power after Victorinus' death, will be included here too.

Marius was proclaimed emperor after the death of Postumus.³⁶ His coinage is very militaristic with messages as *victoria augusti*, *concordia* and *fides militum*, but it follows the standard numismatic themes of the third-century emperors.³⁷ Marius' types did not include any regional message, nor did they refer to a particular victory or specific legion. This absence is remarkable since – as second leader of the Gallic provinces – he could have easily propagated an 'independent Gallic government', which by then had its own political institutions with consuls, a praetorian guard and maybe even a Senate. Yet, Marius' coinage did not. Probably his reign was too short in order to devise a well-thought propaganda line.³⁸ However, it is also possible that he felt himself more "an upholder of the Roman name" as the Gallic usurpers are described in the HA.³⁹ Of course, both arguments are not mutually exclusive. Likewise, the coinage of Marius' successor Victorinus focussed on standard third-century imperial messages, hinting again that Postumus' successors rather wanted to stress their Roman powers than their 'Gallic' leadership.⁴⁰ Victorinus strengthened this idea by the inclusion of 'legions' types among his type output (10% of category 1). This gold series honoured several Roman legions, of which 5% includes 'western' legions controlled by Victorinus, but another 5% celebrates 'non-western' legions that were not under Victorinus' power. This series, issued after Victorinus had suppressed the revolt in Autun⁴¹, celebrated five 'western' legions: Legio I *Minerva* (Bonn), II *Augusta* (Caerleon),

³⁵ It is still a matter of discussion whether Cologne or Trier was the main mint of the Gallic Empire; see for instance, Gricourt & Hollard, 2010: 129–204 and Mairat, forthcoming.

³⁶ HA, *Thirty Tyrants* 8.6–7; Eutropius 9.9; Aurelius Victor 33.9.

³⁷ Manders, 2012: chapter 1.

³⁸ Marius' copious coinage may suggest that he reigned longer than some days, as Eutropius and the HA report. On the other hand, one of the reviewers on this article has remarked that experimental archaeology has demonstrated that it is possible to produce enormous quantities of coins in just a week.

³⁹ HA *Thirty Tyrants* 5.5: "*adsertores nominis Romanis*." See also n. 74.

⁴⁰ Besides several standard military messages, virtues as *indulgentia*, *pietas*, *providentia*, and *salus* were propagated. Furthermore, Victorinus' coinage called for the divine patronage of popular third-century gods, such as Sol, Jupiter, Diana, Hercules, and Mars. Cf. Drinkwater, 1987: 165.

⁴¹ *Panegyrici latini* 5.4.2–3; 5.9; 8.2.5; 8.4.2–3; Ausonius, *Parentalia* 15.6.8–10. For more about this revolt, which was suppressed around the beginning of 271, see König, 1981: 148–157; Drinkwater, 1987: 106; 177–180.

XX *Valeria Victrix* (Chester), XXII *Primigenia* (Mainz), and in particular Legio XXX *Ulpia Victrix* (Cologne).⁴² The ‘non-western’ legions on Victorinus’ *aurei* were Legio II *Traiana* (Alexandria), III *Gallica* (Raphana), IIII *Flavia* (Singidunum), V *Macedonica* (Troesmis), X *Gemina* (Leon), X *Fretensis* (Jerusalem), XIII *Gemina* (Alba Iulia), and XIII *Gemina* (Petronell) (Figure 4).⁴³



Fig. 4 – Victorinus, *aureus*, Trier (?), RIC v.B. *Victorinus* 14, NAC AG (07/10/2009: Auction 52, Lot 563): Legio III *Gallica* [actual size: 19 mm]

Did Victorinus represent himself as a new Roman ‘legitimate’ emperor? His coinage, indeed, consisted also of types enhancing the concept of an eternal and global Roman Empire (7% of category 2), such as *Roma aeterna* and *defensor orbis*, all issued after the defeat of the rebellious town Autun, that had declared itself for Claudius II Gothicus.⁴⁴ Most likely therefore, Victorinus saw himself as a successful competitor of the ‘legitimate’ Roman emperor, and maybe he had aspirations to persuade other cities to desert the latter. This could tentatively suggest why Victorinus’ *aurei* included ‘non-western’ legions as well⁴⁵, but most likely there was another reason as Drinkwater has proposed.

⁴² RIC v.B. *Victorinus*, 388-389; 392; 395, nos. 11-12; 21-25; 52; 91; Schulte group 3a (December 269-January 271).

⁴³ RIC v.B. *Victorinus*, 388, nos. 13-19; Schulte group 3a (December 269-January 271).

⁴⁴ RIC v.B. *Victorinus*, 389, nos. 26-27; Schulte group 3a (December 269-January 271); RIC v.B. *Victorinus* 90; Schulte group 4 (March 271).

⁴⁵ Coinage of Victorinus, as well as of other Gallic emperors, circulated also outside the Gallic Empire, because it maintained higher standards than the coinage of the legitimate emperors. For this reason, the coin messages might have targeted non-western legions. However, the idea that Gallic usurpers would have issued coins for deliberate dissemination outside the borders of the Gallic Empire is probably too far-fetched.

Previously, around 260/261, a similar legionary series was produced by the Milanese mint under Gallienus, celebrating ‘non-western’ legions as well as ‘western’ legions, although these latter were already controlled by Postumus.⁴⁶ Most likely, some time before this series, detachments of the western legions had been removed by Gallienus to the Danube, a common third-century military practice.⁴⁷ These displacements could explain why Gallienus still honoured several ‘western’ legions that operated under Postumus, and maybe it was also a call to obey Gallienus again. Similarly, as Drinkwater has stated, ‘non-western’ military units could have served at the Rhine frontier, brought there by previous emperors, explaining their presence on Victorinus’ legionary series.⁴⁸ However, Drinkwater also observes the odd absence of two western legions, VIII *Augusta* (Strassbourg) and VI *Victrix* (York), and stresses the rarity of the *aurei* types overall. Accordingly, he states that no conclusions can be drawn on “matters as the degree of loyalty of the particular units, or their participation in the Autun campaign.”⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the legionary series seems obviously imitated from Gallienus, placing Victorinus into a Roman imperial tradition. As the series is issued in gold, it is likely that it served as donation to Victorinus’ officers after the Autun victory in 270. The series emphasised Victorinus’ status as victorious emperor who could symbolically compete with the ‘legitimate’ emperor, as the outcome of the Autun revolt had demonstrated.⁵⁰ In this way, the legionary series was a suitable message for Victorinus’ local supporters, and it could have been a warning for future deserters. To end, we may conclude that Victorinus’ coins, even more than those of Marius, propagated the usurper as a Roman imperial opponent rather than a regional leader. Victorinus’ violent death came unexpected, which may have triggered the imperial proclamation of Domitian II around the spring of 271. Although Domitian is never mentioned explicitly as a Gallic usurper in the sources, scholars have suggested that he may have been one of Gallienus’ generals, who to-

⁴⁶ *RIC* V. *Gallienus joint reign*, 92–97, 101, nos. 314–345; 345a; 346–369; 370–372; 417; Göbl, 2000: 106–108.

⁴⁷ De Blois, 1976: 31–32; Drinkwater, 1987: 116; 180–181. Cf. de Blois, forthcoming: chapter 2. A parallel of this practice is seen under Valerian, who ordered several military detachments stationed at the Rhine and Danube frontier to join him in the East to fight the Sassanids.

⁴⁸ Cf. Mattingly and Sydenham in *RIC* V.B, 382–385, following the hypothesis of Sir Oman and Blanchet.

⁴⁹ Drinkwater, 1971: 325–326; cf. 1987: 181.

⁵⁰ Cf. Elmer, 1941: 63; 69 who suggested that the legionary series were issued for an imperial triumph. For more on the revolt of Autun see also Nixon & Rodgers, 1994: 270–271, and references in nn. 21 and 22.

gether with Aureolus successfully defeated the Macriani.⁵¹ Domitian's types display a portrait in a style typically of the Colonian mint and an unusual Gallic reverse of *concordia militum* with a *patera* and a *cornucopia*, which is recaptured on Tetricus' reverses at Trier, but with the legend *concordia aug.*⁵² The type, therefore, hints at cooperation between the mint workers of the two main mints of the Gallic Empire, as Estiot & Salaün have argued.⁵³ Although the *concordia* reverse under discussion was unprecedented for the Gallic usurpers, it had previously been used by the mints of Rome and Viminacium under the co-regency of Valerian and Gallienus.⁵⁴ As Gallienus' former general, Domitian could have aspired even more than the other Gallic usurpers to place himself symbolically in line with the Licinian house. Yet, this is a highly tentative suggestion, as the type itself, broadcasting a common third-century military message, bore no further typical Licinian hallmarks.

Whether or not orchestrated by Victorinus' mother Victoria, the Gallic aristocrat Tetricus was proclaimed emperor in Aquitania.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, Domitian seems to have disappeared from the stage. Tetricus' coinage is a mix of common third-century coin images of the 'legitimate' emperors and the Gallic emperors, which represented his legal succession to Victorinus.⁵⁶ Only two gold types celebrated a regional event, referring with VICTORIA GERM to a campaign against German invaders at the beginning of Tetricus' reign (1% of category 3).⁵⁷ Thereafter, no specific regional types were produced anymore. The inclusion of one Roma *aeterna* type (1% of category 2) in 272 probably referenced to the 'legitimate' Roman emperorship, symbolising the eternity of Tetricus' em-

⁵¹ About Domitian as Gallienus' general: HA, *Gallienus* 2.6, *Thirty Tyrants* 12.4; 13.2 (Cf. Zonaras 12.24). Cf. Estiot & Salaün, 2004: 214–215, who date the usurpation in the beginning of 271 (Cf. *Epitome* 35.3).

⁵² RIC v.B. *Domitian* II, 590, no. 1. The find of a similar type in the Chalgrove II Hoard in 2003 proves more or less the genuineness of Domitian's type; see for more Abdy, 2004: 219–221 and Estiot & Salaün, 2004: 209–214. *Contra* Weder, 1997: 129–133.

⁵³ Estiot & Salaün, 2004: 207–208.

⁵⁴ See for instance, Göbl, 2000: Roma nos. 17; 19; Viminacium no. 805.

⁵⁵ HA, *Thirty Tyrants* 24.1; 25.1; Aurelius Victor 33.14; Eutropius 9.10; Drinkwater, 1987: 184–185. During the short interregnum between Victorinus and Tetricus, and maybe even later as well, silver coins were issued celebrating *divus* Victorinus. It is discussed whether these were either official products of the imperial centre or local imitations; for more see Schulzksi, 1996: 32–33; 133; 135. Previously, Drinkwater, 1987: 39; 184–185; 201 has stated that Victoria ordered the production of these consecration coins for distribution among the troops as 'accession bonus'.

⁵⁶ In their article, Estiot & Salaün, 2004: 212–214; 216 have demonstrated that Tetricus' first types were an adaptation of Domitian's *concordia* types, dating Domitian's usurpation before Tetricus' rule.

⁵⁷ RIC v.B. *Tetricus*, 405, no. 38; Schulte, 1981: nos. 1–2, who has dated this campaign around December 271. Cf. Drinkwater, 1987: 183; 185.

pire after his German campaigns.⁵⁸ At the end of 274, Aurelian's armies faced those of Tetricus at Châlons-sur-Marne. The report of Aurelius Victor and Eutropius on Tetricus' betrayal of his troops in return for refuge is most likely fictitious.⁵⁹ On the contrary, Tetricus' coinage suggests that the usurper was consolidating the dynastic right to rule for his family by emphasising the co-regency of his son Tetricus Iunior, who had been raised to the rank of Caesar in 273 (Figure 5).⁶⁰ Coins even suggest that some time later Tetricus II was elevated to the status of co-*augustus*.⁶¹



Fig. 5 – Tetricus, *antoninianus*, Trier, *RIC* v.B. *Tetricus II* 272, De Nederlandsche Bank RO-08871: *spes publica* [actual size: 18 mm]

Yet, on these types no specific regional claims were advertised, nor were any typical Gallic elements propagated. Therefore, the coinage stays obscure about the Tetrician territorial targets, representing Tetricus still as a standard third-century Roman emperor. Being on the eve of a fatal clash with Aurelius, this silence is remarkable. Yet, if we may believe ancient literary sources, Tetricus was pardoned after the battle and was even granted the government of an Italian region.⁶² Did his more *neutral* politics persuade Aurelian to trust him, or was Aurelian just merciful towards his enemies? Unfortunately, ancient sour-

⁵⁸ The first German campaign can be dated at the end of 271 and the second probably staged early in 272. *Contra* Elmer, 1941: 78, who has dated the second German campaign to an earlier date.

⁵⁹ Aurelius Victor 35.3-5; Eutropius 9.13; cf. *Panegyrici latini* 5.1.3; König, 1981: 177-179.

⁶⁰ In addition, several inscriptions mention Tetricus Iunior as Tetricus' *caesar*.

⁶¹ *RIC* v. *Tetricus* 417-418, nos. 206; 212; 214; Schulte, 1983: nos. 57; 59; Schulzki, 1996: no. 1.

⁶² *HA Aurelian* 39.1; Aurelius Victor 35.5; cf. Eutropius 9.13.

ces provide us with no further clues. Yet, the reopening of the former imperial mint of Lyon – which also became the new centre of the western administration – and the closure of the Gallic mints at Trier and Cologne were a clear sign that the ‘Gallic’ Empire was again part of Aurelian’s ‘Roman’ Empire.⁶³

The last usurpers coining standard third-century themes were Bonosus and Proculus. Several ancient sources report about their imperial proclamation in Cologne around 280.⁶⁴ Their coinage is highly remarkable and in some cases even unique. Yet, the genuineness of their types is highly controversial.⁶⁵ Recently, Estiot made a historical survey of several coin types attributed to these two usurpers. Her article concludes that only two radiated ‘imitations’ portraying Proculus seem to be genuine. Both were produced by the same pair of dies. The reverse proclaimed Augustan Victory, depicting Victoria holding a *patera* and a long sceptre.⁶⁶ In the beginning of 280, the legitimate emperor Probus was occupied in the East⁶⁷, and most likely, his absence, together with the tension caused by the barbarians at the Rhine *limes*, triggered the imperial proclamation of the two officers. Not surprisingly, Proculus’ type alluded to a prospective victory over the barbarians and maybe also over Probus, by which Proculus’ coinage followed the common third-century imperial coinage where *victoria augusta* was one of the regular themes.

To sum up, the discussed usurpers all tried to strengthen their imperial authority by adopting standard third-century coin imagery. Through these standard images, they could easily put themselves into an imperial line of succession as many previous third-century emperors had done before. Especially the ones proclaimed emperor between 260 and 269 styled themselves as the legal successors of the Licinian house, copying former Licinian types. Being far away from Rome and its Senate, the standard imperial themes represented the imperial proclamation of these usurpers as something self-evident. Maybe this was a suitable message for the military legions who supported their case. Likewise, the coinage of the Gallic successors after Postumus displayed predominantly standard third-century messages. This is remarkable as they ruled a region which already for a decade had an own government with Gallic emperors, consuls, a kind of Gallic Senate and an own Praetorian Guard. In particular the

⁶³ Drinkwater, 1987: 40–43; 91; 107; 131; 147; 183–185 and n. 170. Cf. Schulte, 1981: 68–69.

⁶⁴ Aurelius Victor 37.3; Eutropius 9.7; *Epitome* 32.2; HA *Probus* 18.4–5; Orosius, *Historiae* 7.24.3. In addition, the HA (*Proculus & Bonosus* 13.1) reports that Proculus was proclaimed by the people of Lyon, because they were afraid of the ‘legitimate’ emperor.

⁶⁵ See for instance *RIC* V.B, 579; Mabbott, 1955: 1078.

⁶⁶ Estiot, 2014: 205–241.

⁶⁷ HA, *Probus* 9.2; 17.2; 6; Zosimus, 1.71.1.

legionary series under Victorinus was a clear attempt to place himself in a Licinian, or at least imperial, tradition. Most likely, these Gallic usurpers considered themselves the real upholders of the Roman name rather than regional Gallic leaders. This could also explain why the defeated Tetricus was easily admitted into the Italian government after the Gallic Empire was added again to the Roman commonwealth.

2. Regional communication

A usurper's choice to depict regional references without numismatic precedents must have been well-considered as this was not a standard practice in the third century.⁶⁸ For three usurpers, the graph shows rather high percentages of local types of category 4: Postumus 15%, Laelian 33%, and Julianus Sabinus 40%. Local support, in particular of the military, was of utmost importance for usurpers. Yet, too much focus on a particular regional group could have obstructed the recognition of their powers by the rest of the Roman world. Of course, it may be that these usurpers rather aimed to stay local leaders. The following discussion, therefore, will examine the possible goals behind the local types of the three mentioned usurpers. This will be done chronologically.

After ambushing a group of plundering barbarians on their way back home, the general Postumus distributed the booty among his troops. Gallienus' son Saloninus, instigated by his praetorian prefect Silvanus, ordered to deliver the booty to him, which outraged the military, resulting in the imperial proclamation of Postumus.⁶⁹ Postumus' first success was besieging Saloninus' residence in Cologne.⁷⁰ After the latter's death, Postumus held imperial power in Gallia (with the exception of Gallia Narbonensis), the Germaniae, and Rhaetia. Not much later, Hispania and Britannia followed. Almost 15% of Postumus' types referred to local elements (category 4), and another 4% imitated former local types of the 'legitimate' third-century emperors (category 3). Most of these local types were issued at the beginning of Postumus' reign, suggesting that Postumus initially aimed to consolidate his power base regionally.

⁶⁸ In her study, Manders, 2012, 24–25 has demonstrated that geographical messages on the third-century coinage amounted to less than 5%, which makes the presence of the regional messages here quite significant. Later, expressions of regional particularism increased in the fourth century, see for example Wardman, 1983: 220–237.

⁶⁹ HA *Gallienus* 19.1; *Thirty Tyrants* 9.1–9; Aurelius Victor 32–33. The last types of Cologne styled Saloninus as *augustus*, see *RIC* v.B. *Saloninus* 123, no. 1 and Göbl, 2000: Köln no. 916. Drinkwater, 1987: 167, has suggested that these belated Augustan types were most likely a last attempt of the pro-Gallienus wing to emphasise Saloninus' imperial authority.

⁷⁰ *AE* 1993.1231; de Blois, 1976: 24; Potter, 2004: 252–253; 256–257.



Fig. 6 – Postumus, *antoninianus*, Trier (?), *RIC* v.B. *Postumus* 38/9 ~ Schulzki no. 88a, De Nederlandsche Bank RO-08650: *salus provinciarum* [actual size: 22 mm]

Among Postumus' first coin issues the welfare of the provinces was propagated with the legend *salus provinciarum* (1.5%).⁷¹ With the personification of the Rhine underneath this legend, the types envisioned the Rhine provinces in particular (figure 6). Schulte has argued that the types were issued to create the feeling of a united Gallia, but in my opinion this is too far-fetched.⁷² Postumus' proclamation must be placed into the larger historical context: the Rhine provinces and their stationed armies feared for their security by the hostile Franks and Alamanni, and therefore looked for a strong local leader, who in contrast with the frequently absent Roman emperor could handle their affairs directly.⁷³ The *salus provinciarum* type, therefore, can be interpreted as a message of hope and a promise of Postumus to deal with the barbarian invaders for "the salvation of the Rhine provinces". Other types in the beginning of Postumus' reign reflect the usurper's protective policy over Gaul as well (0.5% of category 3). First, some types celebrated a victory over German tribes, emphasising Postumus' success in securing the Gallic hinterland.⁷⁴

⁷¹ *RIC* v.B. *Postumus* 340; 344, nos. 38; 87; Schulte, 1983: no. 2; Schulzki, 1996: 9; nos. 87a-c; 88a-c; Weder, 1997: 110.

⁷² Schulte, 1983: 27. Ancient sources, for example, do not speak of a united Gallic Empire. Only Eutropius 9.9 talks about the Gallic usurpers accepting the leadership over Gaul (*Galliarum accepit imperium*).

⁷³ As mentioned before, the HA, *Thirty Tyrants* 5.5, denoted the Gallic usurpers as the 'adsertores nominis Romanis'. In addition, the HA, *Thirty Tyrants* 3.6 reports that Postumus was beloved by the people of Gaul, 'because he had repelled the Germans and had restored the Roman Empire to its former security'. Cf. Drinkwater, 1987: 22; 24-27; 89.

⁷⁴ *RIC* v.B. *Postumus* 337; 344-345, nos. 14-15; 91; 97; Schulzki, 1996: nos. 98-99; Weder, 1997: 111.



Fig. 7 – Postumus, *antoninianus*, Trier, *RIC* V.B. *Postumus* 73, private collection of M.Bloemendal: *laetitia* [actual size: 22 mm]

Second, some boat types with the legend *laetitia* announced a prospering joy through the Rhine defence system (4.5% of category 4; figure 7).⁷⁵ Boat types were not uncommon for Roman coinage, but traditionally the boats depicted were accustomed to travelling overseas.⁷⁶ Curiously, Postumus' types depict patrol vessels, recognisable at their bended sternpost at the rear, a rowing apparatus and the absence of a naval ram. These vessels were employed for the surveillance over the Rhine.⁷⁷ In sum, the types discussed represented Postumus as a protector of Gaul. Most likely, this message was targeted at the stationed troops in order to support Postumus' case. Furthermore, the absence of urban defences in the Gallic hinterland made Gaul, and subsequently Spain, very vulnerable to barbarian invaders.⁷⁸ The message of Postumus as local defender, therefore, must also have appealed to the Gallic population and its elite. This last group also seated in Postumus' new institutions, such as the so-called Gallic Senate, and they would certainly have hungered for peace in the region.

⁷⁵ *RIC* V.B. *Postumus* 338; 343; 349-350; 354; 357; nos. 26; 73; 142-148; 207-209; 249; Schulte, 1983: no. 23; Schulzki, 1996: no. 41. These types were issued around mid 261. *Contra* Elmer, 1941: 39; Schulte, 1983: 30; Gricourt & Hollard, 2010: 142-143 who have argued that the boat represented the annexation of Britain to the Gallic Empire.

⁷⁶ See for instance, *RIC* II. *Hadrian* 364; 431, nos. 209; 706; *RIC* III. *Marcus Aurelius* 334; 337, nos. 1513; 1550; *RIC* IV.B. *Elagabalus* 42, no. 188.

⁷⁷ For the reconstruction of such patrol vessel see boat *Mainz 3* in the Museum of Ancient Seafaring in Mainz. Mainz operated as the harbour of these vessels on the Rhine. Cf. Höckmann, 1993: 125-135.

⁷⁸ Drinkwater, 1987: 218; 230-238; 249. Around 260, some barbarian groups even reached Spain, destroying Tarragona; see Aurelius Victor 33.3; Eutropius 9.8.



Fig. 8 – Postumus, *antoninianus*, Trier, *RIC* v.B. Postumus 64, De Nederlandsche Bank KAW-02670: Hercules *deusoniensis* [actual size: 22 mm]

Around the same time, some unique types of the Batavian deities Hercules *magusanus* and Hercules *deusoniensis*, and for the local goddess Minerva *fautrix* appeared (6.5% of category 4).⁷⁹ These deities must have appealed to a more military public. Most illustrative is Hercules *magusanus*, whose cult had its origin in the *Insula Batavorum*.⁸⁰ Several inscriptions demonstrate how Hercules *magusanus* was worshipped intensively by soldiers of all kind in the Batavian region, and honorary dedications are also found elsewhere at the German *limes* and at a fort at the Antonine Wall.⁸¹ The military connection with Hercules *deusoniensis* is somewhat less obvious as no direct sources link the deity to an actual sanctuary at Diessen – this settlement in the Batavian ter-

⁷⁹ Hercules *deusoniensis*: *RIC* v.B. Postumus 338; 342; 345; 348-349; 353; 356; 365; nos. 20-22; 64-66; 98-99; 130-134; 137; 200-202; 247; 343; Schulte, 1983: nos. 3-5; 37; 77; 154; Schulzki, 1996: nos. 25-26; Hercules *magusanus*: *RIC* v.B. Postumus 342; 349, nos. 68; 139; Schulzki, 1996: no. 30; Minerva *fautrix*: *RIC* v.B. Postumus 339; 343; 350; 354; nos. 29; 74; 150; 210; Schulte, 1983: nos. 41-42; Schulzki, 1996: no. 44.

⁸⁰ It is possible that *magusanus* meant in old German 'young (and strong) man'; see Roymans & Derks, 1994.

⁸¹ Cult places for Hercules *magusanus* are found in Empel, Kessel, Elst, and perhaps Krefeld-Elfrath. Honorary inscriptions for the deity were erected at Houten, Waardenburg, Ruimel, Westkappele, Elten, Utrecht, Tongeren, Xanten, Bonn, Cologne and Mumrills, see for instance *AE* 1959, 134; 1971, 282; 1977, 539-540; 570; 702; 704; 1990, 740; 1994, 1282; 1284; *CIL* XIII 8010; 8492; 8610; 8705; 8771; 8777; 10027-212a-d; *RIB* 2140. Some inscriptions hail the deity also in Pannonia (*CIL* III 13391); Dacia (*AE* 1995, 1290); and even Rome (*CIL* VI 31162).

ritory is traditionally linked with his name⁸² – or any other place. It is believed that Postumus, who was likely of Batavian origin, felt a personal connection.⁸³ If so, Hercules *deusoniensis* acted as a symbol for Postumus' (Batavian?) soldiers, who needed help in battle and beyond (Figure 8). Finally, Minerva *fautrix*, 'the patroness', can be identified as a regional goddess, appealing either to the soldiers of Legio I *Minerva* if we may believe Carson⁸⁴ or to the inhabitants of the harbour city Regentium (South England) which would symbolise Postumus' bond with Britain, as Schulte has argued.⁸⁵ Of course, it is possible that the dual message was created on purpose, as both were advantageous messages for Postumus. Although we cannot exclude the possibility that other groups have venerated the three local deities as well, they were powerful messages of Gallic regionalism towards the troops at the Rhine *limes*, and maybe even Britain. Together with Postumus' Rhine defence messages, they hint at an intensive regional advertisement of the Rhine provinces at the beginning of Postumus' reign, targeting the troops who defended this territory. As mentioned above, these messages created a hopeful perspective for the military, but also for the hinterland and the Gallic elite: Postumus was a leader who was engaged with the frequently raided Rhine *limes* and who would bring security and prosperity. In the same early years of Postumus' reign, two types also referred to Roma *aeterna* (1% of category 2).⁸⁶ Traditionally, these types symbolised an uninterrupted prosperous future for Rome, endorsed by the goddess Roma 'the eternal'. Most likely, the types expressed a similar hope for a long and prosperous continuation of the present situation under Postumus.⁸⁷ Yet, they could also hint at an ambition of Postumus to become 'legitimate' Roman emperor or they could appeal to certain groups who hoped that Postumus once would succeed Gallienus.⁸⁸

⁸² Hieronymi Chron., *A.Abr.* 2389; Stolte, 1957: 76–86; Drinkwater, 1987: 162. Other places linked with Hercules *deusoniensis* are Doesburg (near Arnhem), Deutz (near Cologne), and Duisburg.

⁸³ Elmer, 1941: 31; Stolte, 1957: 76–86; Drinkwater, 1987: 162–163.

⁸⁴ Carson, 1953: 271, who has argued that this legion supported Postumus' coup in 259.

⁸⁵ Schulte, 1983: 32 n. 103. In Regentium (present Chichester), Minerva was venerated together with Neptune, who is at the same time depicted on Postumus' coinage as Neptunus *comes* (*RIC* v.B. *Postumus* 339, 343, 354, nos. 30; 76; 214–217; Schulte, 1983: nos. 32–35; Schulzksi, 1996: no. 46–47). However, no inscriptions for Minerva *fautrix* are found in Britain or Gaul. Cf. Elmer, 1941: 33 has stated that the type symbolised the annexation of Britain.

⁸⁶ These types were issued in 261 and again in 263.

⁸⁷ Cf. Schulte, 1983: 34.

⁸⁸ Cf. König, 1981: 53–57, followed by Drinkwater, 1987: 34–35, who have argued that a lobby wanted Postumus to succeed Gallienus as 'legitimate' emperor.

After 263, the emphasis on the Rhine defences and local deities diminished, and Postumus' coinage styled the usurper as a common third-century emperor, who enjoyed the support of several divine *comites* and *conservatores*, such as Jupiter, Hercules, Mars, Mercury, Diana, Sol, and Serapis.⁸⁹ A special series in 268 symbolising Hercules' works appeared in Postumus' *corpus* as well. These types probably featured in the celebration of Postumus' *decennalia*, displaying the usurper symbolically as a glorious Hercules who dealt with each task in his ten years reign.⁹⁰ In the same year, however, Postumus' *antoniniani* were heavily debased in a moment's notice, which may have been caused by the continuous *stipendia* and *donativa* flowing to the troops.⁹¹ New types, such as *restitutor Galliarum* (2% of category 3) and *restitutor orbis* (0.5% of category 4), appeared to strengthen Postumus' image as saviour of Gaul, and they also styled him as saviour of the world, which could hint to the 'legitimate' emperorship.⁹² Yet, shortly after the production of these types, Aureolus, who had chosen Postumus' side, did not receive any support of Postumus during Gallienus' siege of Milan. This battle, however, could have been the ultimate push to eliminate the 'legitimate' emperor Gallienus. However, Postumus did not cross the Alps.⁹³ The deterioration of the *antoniniani* as well as the conservative politics of Postumus may have triggered Laelian's uprising at Mainz at the beginning of 269.⁹⁴ Postumus was able to defeat his disloyal general, and a new type *pacator orbis* (0.5% of category 2) may have promised a change in his politics.⁹⁵ Yet, the propagation of this message must have been very marginal. In the end, all came too late as the ancient sources report that Postumus was murdered after having refused his men to loot Mogontiacum (present Mainz).⁹⁶

⁸⁹ Cf. Carson, 1953: 267–269; Drinkwater, 1987: 171–173. The unique *internuntius deorum*-type, referring to the peaceful negotiations between Postumus and Gallienus, can be situated here; for more on this type see Carson, 1953: 259–271.

⁹⁰ Cf. Bastien, 1958: 62–68. Hercules *deusoniensis* is also included. Cf. Gricourt & Hollard, 2010: 139–142, who have suggested that this series was used as a *donativum*.

⁹¹ For more about this deterioration see Drinkwater, 1987: 32; 155; 200. Gricourt & Hollard, 2010: 151–152 have also demonstrated that a lot of these deteriorated coins were produced by a temporary *moneta comitatensis* in the South-East of Gaul.

⁹² *Restitutor Galliarum*: RIC v.B. Postumus 343; 350; 355; nos. 82; 157–159; 223–225; Schulzki, 1996: nos. 71–74; *restitutor orbis*: RIC v.B. Postumus 363, no. 324; Schulzki, 1996: nos. 75–76; *pacator orbis*: RIC v.B. Postumus 362, no. 317; Schulzki, 1996: no. 50. Cf. Gricourt & Hollard, 2010: 149.

⁹³ See *infra* and Gricourt & Hollard, 2010: 143–146. A successful military campaign against German invaders might have increased Laelian's popularity; see HA, *Thirty Tyrants* 5.4.

⁹⁴ See *infra*.

⁹⁵ RIC v.B. Postumus 362, no. 317; Schulzki, 1996: no. 50; Gricourt & Hollard, 2010: 149–150 have also suggested that a type depicting Castor may have celebrated the death of Aureolus.

⁹⁶ Aurelius Victor 33.8; Eutropius 9.9.

Laelian was proclaimed emperor against Postumus by the 22nd Legio *Primitiva* at Mogontiacum. Laelian's revolt was an immanent danger for Postumus as the former had been the legion's commander. He may even have been the governor of Germania Superior.⁹⁷ Under Laelian, two kinds of unique regional types were issued, representing together almost 33% of all his types.⁹⁸ The first type depicted *virtus*, holding a spear and a military standard with the letters XXX (22%).⁹⁹ Appealing to the courage and strength of the legions with *virtus militum*, we could suggest that the message was addressed to the soldiers of Legio XXX Ulpia *Victrix*, who were stationed at Xanten. Whether the types were actually meant for distribution among the soldiers of the 30th legion is not known, but it seems unlikely. More likely is that a detachment of Legio XXX was temporally based in Mainz and thus under Laelian's supervision, as Gricourt & Hollard have suggested.¹⁰⁰ A second type propagated prosperous times under Laelian with the legend *temporum felicitas* and the personification of the province Hispania (11%).¹⁰¹ Around the same time, several Spanish cities had started to choose the side of Claudius II, suggesting a decreasing popularity of Postumus in this province, therefore making it an attractive partner for Laelian.¹⁰² Furthermore, Laelian's *nomen gentile* Ulpian suggests that his roots lay in Spain, which made Laelian's choice to address the Spanish provincials even more obvious.¹⁰³ In addition, his *nomen* associated Laelian with the famous emperor Trajan, from which the 30th legion had received the honorary title *Ulpia Victorix*.¹⁰⁴ A lot of elements indicate that Laelian tried to target the 30th legion; yet it appears that these soldiers stayed loyal to Postumus. Of course, it is possible that these theories are too far-fetched and that Laelian just used his

⁹⁷ If Laelian was the governor of Germania Superior, then he was also the commander of Legio VIII *Augusta* in Strasbourg. Cf. Gricourt & Hollard, 2010: 172–174.

⁹⁸ Most likely, Laelian's coinage was produced by an improvised *moneta comitatensis* at Mainz. Cf. Giljam, 1982: 18. Others, such as Besly & Bland 1983: 58; 64 and Drinkwater, 1987: 143 have suggested that if Laelian's realm of power stretched out to Cologne, he might have transferred the mint masters of Postumus' secondary mint to Mainz. Cf. Gricourt & Hollard, 2010: 176 who have argued that this suggestion cannot be ruled out.

⁹⁹ *RIC V.B. Laelian* 372–373, nos. 2–4; 10; Schulte, 1983: no. 5.

¹⁰⁰ Gricourt & Hollard, 2010: 174–177 and n. 199.

¹⁰¹ *RIC V.B. Laelian* 372, no. 1; Schulte, 1996: nos. 1–4.

¹⁰² Spain, eventually, would choose the side of the 'legitimate' emperor Claudius II Gothicus.

¹⁰³ Gricourt & Hollard, 2010: 177–179. *Contra* Schulte, 1983: 48–50, who has argued that Laelian started his revolt in Spain, after which he received the help of Legio XXX to capture Cologne and its mint.

¹⁰⁴ König 1981: 135. Giljam, 1982: 15–16 has also suggested that Laelian was related to Trajan, but there is no further evidence for such kinship link.

Ulpian *nomen* as a kind of symbol of imperial predestination in order to persuade the military to support him.¹⁰⁵ Eventually, Laelian was killed by Postumus' troops during the siege of Mainz.

None of the other Gallic usurpers issued local types in the way Postumus and Laelian did. Fifteen years later, a usurper at the Danube *limes*, Julianus Sabinus, dedicated 40% of his total types to local messages (category 4).¹⁰⁶ Julianus, who most likely was *corrector* of Venetia¹⁰⁷, proclaimed himself emperor around December 284.¹⁰⁸ Quickly, he seems to have expanded his powers over the region of Illyricum, where he even took over the imperial mint of Siscia. We are not informed which legions supported his imperial proclamation.



Fig. 9 – Julianus Sabinus, *antoninianus*, Siscia, RIC v.B. *Julianus* 4, De Nederlandsche Bank RO-09838: *Pannoniae* [actual size: 23 mm]

Yet, Julianus' regional types do give us a hint. They display two females, holding a military standard in their hand, while bringing a military salute.¹⁰⁹ The women are accompanied by the legend *Pannoniae aug*, addressing the two

¹⁰⁵ König, 1981: 134–135.

¹⁰⁶ Sources name two usurpers, Julianus Sabinus (Aurelius Victor 39.10) and Marcus Aurelius Julianus (*Epitome* 38.6; Zosimus 1.73; and Julianus' re-examined medallion in Estiot, 2010: 397–399). As they usurped power at the same moment and operated in the same area, Estiot, 2010: 398–399 has stated – and I follow her fully here – that they may have been one and the same usurper.

¹⁰⁷ However, the position of Julianus is also debated, see for this debate again Estiot, 2010: 402–405. Yet, it is obvious from the literary sources that he was not a military officer, but probably practised an administrative or juridical office; see Aurelius Victor 39.10. Zosimus (1.73.1) reports that Sabinus Julianus was the *praefectus praetorio*, but this is unlikely as Aurelius Aristobulus fulfilled this position under Carinus; see Aurelius Victor 39.14 and Estiot, 2010: 402.

¹⁰⁸ Gricourt, 2000: 42–43; Hedlund, 2008: 179–180.

¹⁰⁹ RIC v.B. *Julianus Sabinus* 593, no. 4.

provinces of Pannonia: Pannonia Superior and Inferior (Figure 9). Together, these provinces counted four legions. Most likely, the types appealed to one or more of the Pannonian legions that supported Julianus. Moreover, it is possible that these types were distributed as *donativa* among the soldiers who were loyal to him. Like Postumus and Laelian, Julianus seems to have focussed on his local support in the first place. Whether he aspired to be more than a local leader is not known. Estiot has argued that Julianus' Pannonian types also ideologically placed him in line with the so-called 'Illyrian emperors', which is a plausible suggestion.¹¹⁰ This imperial line had started with Trajan Decius, who had also issued types for the provinces of Pannonia, and was followed by several of his Illyrian successors.¹¹¹ The line of the Illyrian emperors had been interrupted by Carus and his sons Carinus and Numerian, who originated from Gallia Narbonensis. This may have made Julianus' status attractive as continuator of this Illyrian line.¹¹² If Julianus indeed had tried to place himself on par with the Illyrian emperors, this would be a clear example of how a usurper used his regional background in his struggle for imperial power.¹¹³ Around the beginning of 285, Julianus' usurpation was ended by Carinus and his troops.

In sum, all three usurpers discussed, Postumus, Laelian, and Julianus, issued types in significant percentages representing regional elements, mainly targeting a military public. Of course, the military at the *limes* were emperor makers, but could also be emperor breakers. Usurpers, therefore, had to appease their troops at all times. Coin messages could be one way to persuade the legions to choose their side. Laelian and Julianus did this quite literally with types addressing local military attachments directly, such as Legio XXX *Ulpia Victrix* and the Pannonian legions. Unfortunately, their reigns are too short to draw further conclusions. As such, it is not known whether their regional messages were just temporary in order to get the support of these soldiers, or whether they saw themselves as local leaders. Postumus' coinage focussed more on the secured Rhine defences and on military gods, messages that must have ad-

¹¹⁰ Estiot, 2010: 399; 404–405; 411. Cf. de Blois, 1976: 55 who also has stressed the Illyrian imperial line.

¹¹¹ Decius was the first to produced Illyrian/Pannonian types: *RIC* V.A. *Decius* 121–124; 134–136, nos. 3–5; 9; 15–18; 20–26; 38–41; 103–105; 116–119; 124. The emperors Claudius Gothicus and Aurelian produced similar messages celebrating the Pannonian legions: *RIC* V.A. *Claudius II Gothicus* 216, nos. 60–61; *RIC* V.A. *Aurelian* 278, no. 113.

¹¹² Estiot, 2010: 411.

¹¹³ Curiously, around the end of 284 and the beginning of 285 several *consecratio* types for Carus were produced in subsequent issues by different mints, indicating Carinus' attempts to emphasise his legitimate imperial succession. For more see Hedlund, 2008: 180 and Claes, 2013: 74–76.

dressed the stationed troops at the Rhine *limes*, but they may also have appealed to the population in the hinterland, and in particular to the Gallic elite. For Postumus, these messages will have helped to formalise and strengthen his ‘Gallic’ leadership. After some years, his local types however diminished and his coinage only followed standard third-century themes. Although Postumus reigned for almost ten years over the Gallic provinces, this shift suggests that Postumus was not propagating the creation of a separate Gallic Empire, but saw himself as the upholder of the Roman name.

3. Usurpers or loyal vassals?

Four usurpers issued types with ambiguous messages: Aureolus, Uranius, Vaballathus, and Saturninus. Due to the marginal and vague references in literary sources, and sometimes even the total lack of them, modern scholars often perceive these usurpers as direct rivals to the imperial throne. Yet, the messages on their coins hint that their intentions might have been less radical. Besides the production of standard third-century coins on which they styled themselves as *augusti* (category 1), they also issued types representing themselves as co-*augusti* of the ‘legitimate’ emperor and they even produced coins in the latter’s name (category 3). Yet, on other types, their imperial titles were missing and focussed solely on regional references (category 4). The coinages of the four usurpers might thus reveal more about their political intentions, conjecturing that these could have gradually grown. First, we will discuss Aureolus’ coinage, and thereafter, we explore the coinage of the three eastern usurpers. Marcus Aelius Aureolus was Gallienus’ *dux equitum*. As imperial *comitatus*, commanding Gallienus’ cavalry troops, he successfully defeated the usurpers Ingenuus and the Macriani. After these events, he seems to have attempted to become emperor, but failed and was pardoned by Gallienus.¹¹⁴ Around 266/267, he again betrayed Gallienus by usurping Milan, then the basis of Gallienus’ cavalry force.¹¹⁵ Moreover, Aureolus supported Postumus. All Aureolus’ types except one were issued in the name of Postumus (96% of category 3).¹¹⁶ The reverses all honoured the Milanese cavalry, emphasising its loyalty, concord,

¹¹⁴ HA, *Thirty Tyrants* 11.3; 12.2; Zosimus 1.41.

¹¹⁵ Alföldi, 1967: 8ff; de Blois, 1976: 26–30; Estiot, 2004: 216; de Blois, forthcoming, chapter 2. Around the summer of 260, the region between Milan and Raetia became a military zone situated between Postumus’ Gallic Empire and Gallienus’ Roman Empire. Elmer, 1941: 40, followed by Drinkwater, 1987: 146, noted that the large output of Aureolus’ types suggests that the usurper must have held Milan for some months at least.

¹¹⁶ The *communis opinio* assumes that Aureolus acted independently without having an agreement with Postumus, thinking that Gallienus’ enemies would have been his friends. Cf. Drinkwater, 1987: 30; 33; 145–146.

and strength. It is fascinating to see how Aureolus used the coinage of Milan as a tool of authority, showing the stationed cavalry which leader he supported – Postumus – and subsequently, which leader they had to obey. Not only the loss of Milan, which operated as military hub between Italy and the *limes*, but also the desertion of one of his best generals must have hit Gallienus very hard. Some months later, in September 268, Gallienus decided to besiege Milan.¹¹⁷ For unknown reasons, Aureolus did not receive any help from Postumus. Most likely, the Gallic emperor was occupied, dealing with a Germanic invasion or with turmoil in his entourage. However, Postumus' lack of support could also have been in line with his conservative policy, as helping Aureolus might be seen as a direct assault to the 'legitimate' emperor.¹¹⁸ The type, issued in name of Aureolus solely, might therefore be interpreted as a sign of utmost despair.¹¹⁹ On the obverse, Aureolus is entitled *augustus*; on the reverse, a familiar *equites* scene is repeated. Zosimus and Zonaras have reported that Aureolus proclaimed himself emperor in Milan in a last effort to survive, and his Augustan type might be issued as a means to testify and emphasise that imperial authority.¹²⁰ However, Aureolus' coin is also often identified as a fake from which no further conclusions can be drawn.¹²¹ The one thing sure is that Aureolus was defeated by the troops of the 'legitimate' emperor, then Claudius II Gothicus, who had succeeded Gallienus after he became deadly injured during the siege.¹²² The coinage clearly shows how Aureolus in his growing aspirations for power gambled between the support of the 'legitimate' emperor and of the Gallic usurper, only to loose both.

In the East, the political aspirations of three usurpers, Uranius, Vaballathus, and Saturninus, balanced between emperorship and imperial clientship.

Lucius Iulius Aurelius Sulpicius Severus Uranius Antoninus of Emesa is best known from his coins which were found in Emesa and its proximity.¹²³ Literary sources do mention an Uranius, but they are very vague about his ambitions

¹¹⁷ HA, *Gallienus* 7.1; 14.6–9; Zosimus 1.40.1; de Blois, forthcoming: chapter 2. For more on the numismatic evidence for Aureolus' reign see Gricourt & Hollard, 2010: 145–147.

¹¹⁸ As mentioned above, Postumus seems not to have aspired to make a bid on the Roman throne. Cf. Drinkwater, 1987: 27; 30–31; 33.

¹¹⁹ *RIC* V.B. *Aureolus* 590, no. 1.

¹²⁰ A similar action is seen by Saloninus when Cologne was besieged by Postumus.

¹²¹ Mabbott, 1956: 49–51; Drinkwater, 1987: 146. *Contra* *RIC* V.B., 577.

¹²² Zosimus 1.41; Zonaras 12.26; *AE* 1994.168; Gricourt & Hollard, 2010: 148–149.

¹²³ The distribution of his coinage suggests that his power reached over Emesa and not over the territory of Syria, as some scholars have stated. Cf. the Khan el-abdé hoard and see also Seyrig, 1958: 53. Note, however, that a lot of Uranius' coin specimens are known from auction sales; see for example Seyrig, 1958: 52–53.

and actions, and moreover, they contradict each other as to when he lived.¹²⁴ The later Byzantine chronicler John Malalas wrote in his *Chronographia* about a Persian attack on the city of Emesa in 253 which was successfully warded off by diplomatic intervention of the Emesan priest of Aphrodite, Sampsigeramus.¹²⁵ There are several strong arguments to identify Uranius as this Sampsigeramus. His name, for instance, referred to Aphrodite *Urania*. This was a Carthaginian celestial love goddess, who was imported from Emesa where she was venerated as Astroarche, one of El-Gebal's consorts. Via her, Sampsigeramus was linked to Emesa and its city cult.¹²⁶ El-Gebal's cult was maintained by a family of priest kings of which the clan of Julia Domna was the most prominent. Uranius' Greek and Latin names are similar to the ones of the Emesani dynasty, and his family names, Aurelius, Severus, and Antoninus, styled him as a relative of the former Severan imperial family.¹²⁷



Figure 10 – Uranius, *aureus*, Emesa, RIC v.c. *Uranius 2*: NAC AG (24/03/2010: Auction 54, Lot 559): El-Gebal's carriage [actual size: 21 mm]

Finally, Uranius' coinage also offers indications to favour his identification as Sampsigeramus of Emesa. As such, El-Gebal's temple and conical stone at Emesa were depicted on some of his tetradrachms and his *aurei* (23% of category 4; figure 10).¹²⁸ Furthermore, a lion type, bearing a radiated crown, may

¹²⁴ *Epitome* 24; Zosimus 1.11.2; Polemius Silvius, *Chronica Minora* 1, p. 521.

¹²⁵ Malalas, *Chronographia* 12.296-297.

¹²⁶ Herodian 5.6.3-5; *SEG* 4.164. Cf. Sullivan, 1978: 928-930; Icks, 2011: 32-37; 48-54; 107-115 and references.

¹²⁷ Baldus, 1971: 236-250; Sullivan, 1978: 930 n. 87.

¹²⁸ El-Gebal's temple and stone: Baldus, 1971: nos. 30-45a; 47-48; 53-54; 84-87; RIC IV.C. *Uranius Antoninus* 205-206, nos. 1-2; 8; Delbrück, 1948: 22-23.

be perceived as a reference to the sun, referring again to El-Gebal's cult.¹²⁹ The discussed coin messages link Uranius unmistakably to Emesa, and who else in Emesa other than a high placed official, such as a member or descendent of the royal Emesani family, could produce coins?¹³⁰

In addition, we can date Uranius' leadership starting in the middle of the summer of 253 and lasting until the beginning of 254¹³¹, with help of the stylistic developments on his *aurei* and with the Seleucian year 565 on his tetradrachms.¹³² As is well known, the year 253 was marked with internal political problems in the West where four emperors subsequently contested each other: Trebonianus Gallus, Aemilian, Silbannacus, and eventually Valerian.¹³³ In the same year, the troops of the Persian king Shapur I burst through the Roman *limes* at Chalcis, plundering the countryside and destroying Antiochia.¹³⁴ The increasing pressure of the Persians in 253 at the eastern *limes* may have accelerated Uranius' leadership as he could bring security, and thus stability, in the area. With the political troubles going on in the West, Uranius' influence might have grown without being noticed by Rome. And even if they knew of Uranius' actions, Rome might have been relieved as he dealt with the Persians successfully, forcing them to withdraw.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, when the newly proclaimed Valerian marched eastwards to confront the Persians, Uranius disappeared from the political scene.¹³⁶

Uranius' status as leader is unclear. Was he another usurper who wanted to rule the Empire, such as Aemilian, Silbannacus, and Valerian, or did he act as

¹²⁹ Potter, 1990: 326–327. Most likely, the recapture of a former lion-type of Caracalla had to strengthen his link with the Severan dynasty as well. *RIC IV.C. Uranius Antoninus* 205, no. 6; Baldus, 1971: 129–130. Caracalla's type is dated to 216. Baldus, 1971: 128–135 states that the radiated lion refers to Uranius' effort to be a new Alexander the Great, like Caracalla did, but this theory is most likely too far-fetched.

¹³⁰ Castritius, 1974: 594 has suggested that a golden treasure was stored in El-Gebal's temple, which could have been used for Uranius' coinage. However, we have to remark that Castritius does not believe that Sampsigeramus is Uranius.

¹³¹ Baldus, 1971: 124–127.

¹³² The Seleucian year 565 dates from 1 October 253 to 30 September 254.

¹³³ No literary sources mention Silbannacus. His existence is only known by some coin types from Rome, where he seems to have been proclaimed emperor against Aemilian and Valerian. For more see Estiot, 1996: 107–115.

¹³⁴ Malalas, *Chronographia* 12.296; Rostovtzeff, 1943/44: 30–60; Kettenhoven, 1982: 65. See also the inscriptions in Dongeon & Lieu, 1991: 53–55. This Persian attack is not discussed in Honigman & Maricq, 1953.

¹³⁵ Malalas, *Chronographia* 12.296–297. Cf. Potter, 1990: 48–49, 325–327.

¹³⁶ *SEG* 17.528. Valerian seems to have stayed in the east until the beginning of 255. For more on the date and duration of Valerian's stay see the excursus in Kettenhoven, 1982: 90–96. *Contra* Göbl, 2000: 133, who has assigned 255 as Valerian's year of arrival.

a loyal deputy of the Roman emperor? The idea to allow a local chieftain to rule a particular region in name of the Roman emperor was as old as the Principate itself, and even in the Republican era this practice existed.¹³⁷ Previously, the political situation in the third century had triggered the creation of the office of *rector Orientis* (later also denoted *corrector totius Orientis* or *dux Orientis*), who was in charge of the government in the eastern provinces in name of the emperor.¹³⁸ Priscus, brother of the emperor Philip the Arab, was the first to be appointed.¹³⁹ He held this position until 249 when Iotapianus' rebellion against his corrupt and oppressive rule seems to have ended his government.¹⁴⁰ The new office may have developed the idea of an eastern imperial deputy of the Roman emperor as the Roman Empire faced many problems and barbarian invasions in the third century, making the government of the Empire more complex for a sole ruler who could not be everywhere at the same time to deal with problems directly. The institution of an eastern deputy emperor could facilitate local decision-making.¹⁴¹

As mentioned above, Uranius' coinage is a source that can give more information about his political ambitions and intentions. From his surviving coins, we know that he issued both 'imperial', provincial as well as city coinage. His provincial tetradrachms and city coins bear the titles of *Αὐτοκράτορ* and *Σεβαστό*, suggesting that he considered himself an emperor. Yet, his nomenclature on the 'imperial' *aurei* and *denarii* did not refer to any imperial title, such as *imperator* or *augustus*.¹⁴² From Baldus' detailed study, we know that Uranius' tetradrachms and city coins were minted later than Uranius' first 'im-

¹³⁷ In general, such vassal states had to forfeit their foreign policy and had to pay a formal tribute to Rome in exchange for autonomy. For Rome, it was an easy way to control these mighty cities or kingdoms without having to conquer them.

¹³⁸ The *opinio communis* is divided into two extremes. The first states that the *rector Orientis* was some kind of supra-provincial officer (Peachin, 1996: 176–177; Verwaert, 2006: 132–137), whereas the other half believes that it was merely a honorary title (see for instance, Körner, 2002: 54, who perceives the office of *rector Orientis* rather as an honorary title with some “Kompetenzen”). This article accepts the first opinion, focussing on the existence of such supra-provincial office, but it does not aim to give a full analysis of which tasks and responsibilities this office included.

¹³⁹ Priscus was governor of the *provincia* Mesopotamia, but as *rector Orientis* he also exercised power over the governors of the other eastern provinces. Cf. *PIR*² I 488; Pflaum, 1960: 831–839, no. 324a.

¹⁴⁰ Zosimus 1.20.2; *Sibylline Oracles* 11 (13).59–63; Körner, 2002: 277–281; Potter, 2004: 239. Iotapianus also issued some coins in his name: *RIC* IV.C. *Iotapianus* 105, nos. 1; 2c; 3.

¹⁴¹ Estiot, 2002: 237; Potter, 2004: 239; 275.

¹⁴² *RIC* IV.C. 204; Baldus, 1971: 27; 48–49; 65–66; 137–143; 1990: 29–33.

perial' issues.¹⁴³ As only his provincial and city coins bear imperial titles, we can suppose that Uranius was entitling himself *augustus* only in a latter stage of his leadership. Other clues hint a similar cautiousness in Uranius' disclosure of his leadership status. Firstly, half of the reverses of the *aurei* referred to virtues or actions of an *augustus*, such as *conservator augusti* and *victoria augusti*, but these Augustan legends could also have represented the 'legitimate' emperor. Secondly, one *aureus* reverse reads *saeculares augg* by a column with the inscription COS I. The type itself was an adaptation of one of Philippus Arabs' *saeculares* types on which the inscription of the column read COS III (2% of category 3).¹⁴⁴ The type thus was no fabrication of an Uranius' obverse die linked with a former imperial reverse die, but it represented a new type, designed for Uranius.¹⁴⁵ The *augg* legend on the type might indicate that Uranius saw himself as a sort of co-*augustus* of the reigning emperor in the East. Two other features of Uranius' coinage are also remarkable. They strengthen the idea that initially he did not intend to overthrow the Roman emperor. First of all, Uranius' coinage lacks imperial silver coins, the *antoniniani*, which were one of the main means to pay Roman soldiers.¹⁴⁶ One could ask whether Uranius could have aimed to persuade the Roman armies in the East to support his case without producing *antoniniani*. The absence of *antoniniani* may therefore indicate that Uranius was not raising an eastern military power.¹⁴⁷ Secondly, Uranius' 'imperial' coin images did not follow the ideological lines of many other third-century emperors¹⁴⁸, whose coinages mainly disseminated messages about military issues, divine associations, and the idea of Roma as eternal power.¹⁴⁹ Although some types referred to Roma *aeterna* and displayed

¹⁴³ Baldus, 1971: 124–126. Uranius' first two issues of 'imperial' types were produced respectively in July–August 253 and August–September 253. The first provincial and city coins were minted simultaneously with the third issue of 'imperial' types in October–November 253. Cf. Baldus, 1975: 443–484; 1977: 69–74; 1983: 29–39; 1990: 29–34.

¹⁴⁴ *RIC IV.C. Philippus Arabs* 71, nos. 24a; b; c.

¹⁴⁵ The style of the type differs from Philippus' type. The letters 'A' and 'R' for instance are totally different, resembling a 'N' and a 'P'.

¹⁴⁶ Duncan-Jones, 1990: 106–117.

¹⁴⁷ Malalas, *Chronographia* 12.296–297 also reports that Sampsigeramus controlled a group of countrymen with slings, indicating that he did not receive the support of a trained Roman army.

¹⁴⁸ The images on Uranius' provincial and city coins are traditional to provincial iconography. The city coins always display an eagle and the provincial coins display El-Gabal's temple, a dromedary, and Tyche.

¹⁴⁹ In her book, Manders demonstrated that the types of the third-century emperors focussed on military themes (22.5%), divine associations (21.8%), and the idea of Roma as eternal power, a category she denoted as the '*saeculum aureum*' ideal (19.2%); see Manders, 2012: 24–25.

Minerva *victrix* and Victory with a laurel wreath¹⁵⁰, most types bear local images. Several types referred to *fortuna redux* and *fecunditas*, both personified by Fortuna (11% of category 3).¹⁵¹ This Fortuna figure could be identified as Tyche, a reference to the city goddess of Emesa. Baldus' chronological study of Uranius' coinage has demonstrated that these types had been produced around the New Year of 254, suggesting that this may have been money meant to distribute among prominent Emesan people. These Tyche types were issued on *aurei*, but also on some rare *denarii*, suggesting that these were no ordinary coins for daily or military transactions.¹⁵² Furthermore, as we mentioned above, another group of types referred to the local cult of El-Gabal, a message only suitable for an Emesan audience.¹⁵³ The ambiguous coinage of Uranius does not uniformly represent him as an imperial opponent, but merely as a local leader with political aspirations of becoming a sort of co-*augustus*.

This analysis indicates that Uranius was a relative of the Emesani dynasty and we may even suggest that he was Sampsigeramus, mentioned by Malalas.¹⁵⁴ His imperial aspirations – if he had those – were most likely tempered when Valerian travelled to the East. Malalas reports that the Licini gave several privileges to Antioch and Emesa. Antioch, as we have mentioned above, had been destroyed by the Persian attacks, but not so Emesa. Moreover, Malalas reported that Gallienus built a temple in Emesa and suspended its taxes for four years.¹⁵⁵ These actions seem to imply that Uranius and his supporters in Emesa were thanked for their services.

Secondly, we discuss Vaballathus of Palmyra. His father, Odaenathus, was a very powerful man and became a loyal deputy of the Licinian emperors.¹⁵⁶ After having successfully driven back Shapur's troops behind the Roman *limes*,

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Delbrück, 1948: 25; Baldus, 1971: nos. 46; 49–52; 55–56; 90–91; *RIC IV.C. Uranius* 205–206; nos. 5 and 9.

¹⁵¹ Baldus, 1971: nos. 27; 57–67; 68–83; *RIC IV.C. Uranius* 205, nos. 3–4; Delbrück, 1948: 23.

¹⁵² Baldus, 1990: 29–33, esp. 33. The *antoninianus* was introduced under Caracalla, replacing slowly the *denarius* of higher standard. By the middle of the third century, *antoniniani* had replaced *denarii* as silver money.

¹⁵³ Baldus, 1971: nos. 30–45a; 47–48; 53–54; 84–87; *RIC IV.C. Uranius* 205–206, nos. 1–2; 8; Delbrück, 1948: 22–23.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Kettenhofen, 1982: 70–71; Swain, 1996: 375–376. *Contra* Castritius, 1974: 594–595.

¹⁵⁵ Malalas, *Chronographia* 12.298.

¹⁵⁶ Inscriptions indicate that Odaenathus became a Roman senator before 250 and he was denoted 'chief of Palmyra': *CISem.* II 3944; 4202; Gawlikowski, 1985: 257 no. 13; Long, 1996: 60–61. See also the inscriptions quoted in Dodgeon & Lieu, 1991: 68–69. Later inscriptions indicate that he held the office of *legatus consularis* in Syria: *N.S.I.* no. 126; *CISem.* II 3945 = *IGRR* II 1031. For more on Odaenathus' life and career see Potter, 1990: 381–394 and Hartmann, 2001: 65–128.

he also successfully eliminated the usurper Quietus.¹⁵⁷ Unlike his father, Gallienus understood the advantage of a good vassal in those unstable times, and he bestowed several titles on Odaenathus.¹⁵⁸ While Odaenathus controlled the East in name of Gallienus, the emperor was able to repel several barbarian invasions of the Alamanni and the Goths, to eliminate different usurpers, such as Macrianus Iunior and Aureolus, and to fight others, like Postumus. In a way, we could state that Odaenathus was a Priscus, who assisted his brother in managing part of the Empire.

In 267, Odaenathus died together with his son Herodianus in unknown circumstances.¹⁵⁹ His third son, Vaballathus, succeeded his position, assisted by his mother Zenobia. Several titles were bestowed on the boy, first *corrector totius Orientis* and *rex regum*, and some years later he was also hailed as *vir clarissimus*, *imperator* and *dux Romanorum*. A few years later, Vaballathus' political ambitions had obviously increased. In the autumn of 270, he conquered, together with his mother, most of Asia Minor, Palestine, Libanon, and the northeast of the Arabian Peninsula. He also seized Egypt, killing the Egyptian governor Probus.¹⁶⁰ As a result, the newly proclaimed emperor Aurelian had to be cautious with the Palmyrenes, as they could block the grain supply to Rome.¹⁶¹ Shortly after, the Alexandrian provincial mint started to issue tetradrachms with Aurelian's portrait and that of Vaballathus. Aurelian's portrait was flanked with his regnal year A (6.5% of category 3).¹⁶² Maybe Vaballathus – who, most likely, was assisted by his councils given his young age – felt insecure because of his rebellious actions, and wanted to flatter Aurelian with

¹⁵⁷ Several literary sources and inscriptions quote Odaenathus' actions against the Marciani and Shapur; see Kettenhoven, 1982: 104–105; 109; Dongeon & Lieu, 1991: 71–77. Cf. Hartmann, 2001: 141–217; de Blois, forthcoming: chapter 2. Later, Odaenathus also led several campaigns during which he liberated Edessa and reconquered Nisibis and Carrhae. He even launched an offensive on the Persian capital Ctesiphon, but failed twice to seize it. Cf. *N.S.I.* nos. 127–129; Kettenhofen, 1982: 97–110; 122–126.

¹⁵⁸ From 262, Odaenathus was entitled *dux Romanorum*, *imperator*, *corrector totius Orientis*, and *rex regum*.

¹⁵⁹ For a detailed discussion on the murder of Odaenathus and his son see Hartmann, 2001: 218–230.

¹⁶⁰ HA, *Claudius* 11.1–2; Zosimus 1.44; Zonaras 12.28; Malalas, *Chronographia* 12, 299. Further on these conquests see Hartmann, 2001: 259–300; 332–351; Bowerstock, 2003: 130–134.

¹⁶¹ Price, 1973: 83–84.

¹⁶² Bland, 2011: 142 and nos. 31–34; cf. Price, 1973: 81; 83; 85; Long, 1996: 64–71. In addition, the papyri *SB* 14.11589 and *P.Oxy* 2921 show similar dates. Cf. Rathbone, 1986: 123. Likewise, some bronze medallions display Aurelianus and Vaballathus together, which could have celebrated a cooperation. For more about these, see Milne, 1971: appendix.

these types, representing himself as the emperor's subordinate. A similar feature is seen at the Antiochian mint in the spring of 271.¹⁶³ The mint produced a series of *antoniniani* with the portraits of Vaballathus and Aurelian (28% of category 3). Vaballathus' titles of *vir clarissimus*, *imperator*, and *dux Romanorum* were included in his legend while Aurelian was denoted as *augustus*. The mint signs were written underneath the portrait of Aurelian. From this we may assume that the Antiochian mint was under control of Vaballathus, issuing coins for him and the Roman emperor.¹⁶⁴ The depiction of Aurelian on the reverse shows Aurelian as Vaballathus' equal rather than Vaballathus as Aurelian's subordinate. Half of these types portrayed Vaballathus with a diadem, maybe referring to him as Aurelian's eastern colleague, as the diadem was a particular crown worn by eastern kings.¹⁶⁵ In the beginning of 272, Vaballathus' new coin issues demonstrated how his imperial aspirations had grown. The Alexandrian mint issued tetradrachms for Aurelian and Vaballathus, referring to Aurelian's first regnal year and Vaballathus' fourth, referring to the latter's accession to the Palmyrene throne in 267/268 (Figure 11).



Fig. 11 – Vaballathus, *tetradrachm*, Alexandria, Bland no. 35, De Nederlandsche Bank GR-09659: Aurelian, regnal year 1 together with Vaballathus, regnal year 4 [actual size: 20.5 mm]

¹⁶³ Huvelin, 1990: 251–271 has asserted that Zenobia already controlled the Antiochian mint under Claudius. The absence of Quintillus' coinage at the Antiochian mint, he explains as Zenobia's choice in not supporting his case. *Contra* Bland, 2011: 241.

¹⁶⁴ Bland, 2011: 141–142. In his thorough research on the Palmyrian Empire, Hartmann only quotes the Antiochian coinage without any further argumentation or conclusions; see Hartmann, 2001: 356–357.

¹⁶⁵ Long, 1996: 64–71; Bland, 2011: 143. Potter, 2004: 274, however, has suggested that Aurelian's portrait needed to symbolise the economic reliability of these coins. Of course, both suggestions do not have to be mutually exclusive.

In this way, they indicated his seniority over Aurelian (8.5% of category 1).¹⁶⁶ From March 272 onwards, the Antiochian mint also started to produce a new series of *antoniniani* dedicated solely to Vaballathus and his mother Zenobia, who were denoted as *augustus* and *augusta* (39% of category 1). This series clearly reveals Vaballathus' imperial aspirations. The types followed the scope of standard third-century images, including the virtue of *virtus* and *aequitas* and deities as Jupiter *stator*, Hercules, Victoria, and Venus¹⁶⁷, placing Vaballathus on par with the 'legitimate' Roman emperors. We could say that Palmyra's former status as a client state in the Roman Empire, which Vaballathus' father had so carefully built up, had vanished. Furthermore, one of Antioch's eight *officinae* was responsible for Zenobia's coinage (Figure 12).



Figure 12 – Vaballathus, *antoninianus*, Antioch, *RIC* v.B. *Zenobia* 1 ~ Bland nos. 29/30, De Nederlandsche Bank RO-09271: Zenobia [actual size: 19 mm]

Zenobia's presence on the Antiochian coins was similar to the presence of Gallienus' wife Salonina and Aurelian's wife Severina.¹⁶⁸ Bland has suggested that Zenobia's coin advertisement was small because she wanted to draw attention particularly to her son. However, his suggestion ignores the fact that she was Vaballathus' mother and not his wife. After Alexander Severus' reign, mothers were no longer included in the emperor's coinage program, which makes Zenobia's presence on Vaballathus' coins unique.¹⁶⁹ In addition, Juno *Regina*

¹⁶⁶ Bland, 2011: 142 and nos. 35–44; Hartmann, 2001: 358–359. Similar regnal years are found on papyri; see for instance *P.Oxy* 1264.20–27 and citations in Rathbone, 1986: 123–124 and Hartmann, 2001: 359–364.

¹⁶⁷ In the third century, however, Venus was traditionally represented on the coinage of female imperial members see Claes, 2013: 210–220; 230–232.

¹⁶⁸ Bland, 2011: 146; Claes, 2013: 217–221.

¹⁶⁹ Claes, 2013: 110–112; 210–220.

was depicted on Zenobia's coins, a common coin image for imperial empresses. Most likely, this type referred to her status as the right hand of Vaballathus, as Juno was for Jupiter.¹⁷⁰

Literary sources report that Aurelian was not amused with the political aspirations of Vaballathus and his mother, and in the spring of 272, he launched a campaign against them.¹⁷¹ Realising that all was lost, Zenobia fled to Persia, but on her way was captured by some of Aurelian's horsemen.¹⁷² The sources are silent about Vaballathus' fate. Zosimus reports that he was taken together with his mother to Rome as Aurelian's booty, and most likely died on that journey, or maybe before.¹⁷³ Soon after the Palmyrene leaders were defeated, Egypt was recaptured by Aurelian's fleet commander Probus.¹⁷⁴ In the East, Aurelian installed his trustee Marcellinus as *dux Orientis*. Most likely, the office had to replace the loss of the loyal vassal state in order to minister these eastern provinces directly.¹⁷⁵

The last usurper whose coin types spread ambiguous messages about his political intentions was Saturninus. Being a long-time friend of the emperor Probus, he refused the imperial purple offered to him by the Alexandrians, after which Probus entrusted him with the government of Syria.¹⁷⁶ Literary sources claim that Saturninus soon changed his mind and proclaimed himself emperor rivalling Probus, but the coinage of Antioch shows us a more cautious Saturninus.¹⁷⁷ Around the beginning of 280, the mint of Antioch produced *aurei* in name of Probus with his portrait on the obverse, and a Victoria in *biga* on the reverse.

¹⁷⁰ Claes, 2013: 200-202; 206; 216. In addition, the author of the HA (*Aurelian* 27.2) reports that Zenobia calls herself *regina Orientis*; however, this title is not found on her coinage.

¹⁷¹ HA, *Aurelian* 22.1-24; Zosimus 1.50.1; Syncellus 470.1-2. The armies met at Immae near Antioch, and a second battle was fought outside Emesa. Thereafter, Palmyra was besieged by Aurelian. Ṭabari's *Universal History* and some Arabian graffiti of the time suggest that Aurelian might have had the support of the Arabian Tanūkh confederation. Cf. Zosimus 1.54.2; Bowerstock, 2003: 130-134.

¹⁷² HA, *Aurelian* 22-31; *Thirty Tyrants* 30.3-4; 23-27; Zosimus 1.50-60. Eutropius 9.13.2, Hieronymi Chron. s.a. 273, p. 222.15-22; Orosius, *Historiae* 23.4; Malalas, *Chronographia* 12.300; Zonaras 12.27. Cf. Burgersdijk, 2006: 148-149; Hartmann, 2001: 364-394. An alternative version comes from Ṭabari 1, 625 and 627, who states that the Tanūkh troops alone conquered Palmyra and murdered Zenobia. Cf. Bowerstock, 2003: 134 and n. 46.

¹⁷³ Zosimus 1.59.1.

¹⁷⁴ HA, *Probus* 9.5. Papyri and Alexandrian tetradrachms show that Aurelian took full control of Egypt around June 272; see Rathbone, 1986: 124.

¹⁷⁵ *PIR* I² m 137; Zosimus 1.60.1-2; Estiot, 2002: 237. Marcellinus was also prefect of Mesopotamia.

¹⁷⁶ HA, *Saturinus* 7; 9; 11.1-3; Zosimos 1.66; Zonaras 12.29.

¹⁷⁷ HA, *Saturinus* 6.5; 11.1; *Probus* 18.4; Zosimos 1.66; Zonaras 12.29.

Yet, the reverse legend had changed into *victoria augg*, hinting at two *augusti*. Most likely, Saturninus controlled the mint of Antioch, and through these particular types, he might have tried to represent himself as an eastern colleague of the ‘legitimate’ Roman emperor.¹⁷⁸ Before, as we have discussed above, something similar was done under the Palmyrene chieftain Vaballathus at the Antiochian mint.¹⁷⁹ In addition, Saturninus may have been eager to be appointed *dux Orientis*, an office that seems to have been vacant after Probus became emperor.¹⁸⁰ Some months after the release of the *victoria augg* types, an issue in name of Saturninus appeared. His portrait with his legend and imperial titles were on the obverse, while on the reverse Venus, walking with a laurel wreath and the legend *victoria aug* were shown. There is no evidence that Probus recognised Saturninus as an eastern co-regent, but this issue suggests that Saturninus’ ambitions had grown gradually. Antiochian types for Probus alone appear again around the autumn of 280, suggesting that Saturninus’ revolt ended quickly.¹⁸¹

To conclude, the coinage of the discussed usurpers did not initially represent them as full *augusti*. Instead, they styled themselves as local leaders without referring to any imperial title, or they referred to themselves as co-*augusti* of the reigning emperor. Their ambiguous representations suggest that they considered themselves (temporary) crisis managers who acted as imperial deputies of the Roman emperor, or in the case of Aureolus, of the Gallic emperor. Strengthened by this belief, they administered a particular region directly, although, except for Vaballathus, they did not receive any formal recognition of their powers. In the East, this kind of local chieftainship may have inspired the formalisation of the office of the *rector Orientis* or vice versa. This imperial delegate, introduced under Philip the Arab, was responsible for the government of all eastern provinces, enabling the emperor to be engaged elsewhere. Gallienus seems to have seen the advantages of a local chieftainship and he officially bestowed the title of *corrector totius Orientis* on the Palmyrene leaders Odeanathus and Vaballathus, although the latter misused the emperor’s confidence. Later, the usurper Saturninus may have been eager to be appointed as eastern governor, as this position was most likely vacant, but he never got it.

¹⁷⁸ Pomeroy, 1969: 54–56. Estiot demonstrated that Saturninus’ coinage was produced by the mint of Antioch, and not by Alexandria; see Estiot, 2002: 225–236; 239–241.

¹⁷⁹ See above for the shared portraits of Vaballathus and the emperor Aurelian. Cf. Estiot, 2002: 232.

¹⁸⁰ Before, Probus held the office of *dux Orientis* under Tacitus: HA, *Probus* 7.4; Estiot, 2002: 237.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Estiot, 2002: 230–236. The HA, *Saturninus* 11 states that Saturninus was murdered by unsatisfied soldiers of Probus, although the latter pardoned him. Yet, no other sources are known to confirm this.

Being in power for a while, the coinage of all usurpers discussed changed, entitling them as *augusti* and adopting standard imperial images. These messages must have strengthened their authority among their supporters, but they also assaulted the ‘legitimate’ emperor, who eliminated them quickly after the appearance of ‘imperial’ messages. Only Uranius may have been pardoned by Valerian.

4. Conclusions

While facing an internal institutional crisis and suffering external pressure on the borders, the third century counted many usurpers between 253 and 285. They did not receive any senatorial approval, nor could they persuade all Roman legions to choose their side or ever mint in Rome. In their struggle for sole power, their coinages adopted standard imperial messages of the ‘legitimate’ third-century emperors – here classified as category 1 – which was a way to place themselves into an imperial line, and thus to strengthen their imperial authority. Especially, Regalianus and the Macriani brothers used this strategy by styling themselves after the Licinian emperors, respectively in a childish and in a proficient way. However, neither of them managed to succeed the Licinian dynasty. Likewise, the Gallic successors of Postumus represented themselves as the upholders of the Roman name, bearing imperial titles and celebrating their imperial offices without referring to a kind of Gallic state. The ‘imperial’ messages of all these usurpers hint that imperial legitimacy was not bound to Rome and its Senate anymore, but was linked in the first place to the usurper himself. Yet, not all usurpers followed the standard third-century messages of the ‘legitimate’ emperors. Usurpers’ coinages could also display regional images whose familiar elements had to appeal to local supporters. Such regional types referred mostly to local military events, soldier gods or stationed troops, which hints a close relation between the usurper’s power and the local military support. In the scope of the standard third-century coin themes, military messages were always abundantly present, suggesting that the military was an important agency in the emperor’s power basis. The local military communication supports this argument even more as the local troops were the direct usurpers’ makers, but also their breakers. However, it remains obscure whether these usurpers also considered themselves solely regional leaders, or that they, after having acquired the support of the local troops, aimed to achieve global emperorship. Postumus’ types, for instance, show the Gallic usurper initially as the regional defender of the Rhine border and its hinterland. Later his representations portray him more as ‘Roman’ emperor, although he never directly confronted Gallienus, nor sent help to Aureolus. The coin types of Laelian and Julianus Sabinus also conveyed several messages, which clearly had to target the stationed military. Yet, we can only conjecture about their further leadership intentions. Finally,

not all usurpers' coins carried imperial titles and sometimes represented them explicitly as local co-*augusti*. Furthermore, many types of these usurpers also bore local images. The types were targeted at their local supporters, but they also suggest that these usurpers considered themselves loyal vassals rather than imperial opponents. In the east, the new office of *rector Orientis* and the vassal status of the Palmyrene leaders may have inspired usurpers to assume the reins of government of the eastern provinces. Moreover, the presence of a strong regional leader was also encouraged by the stationed military, the local elite and the eastern inhabitants who suffered from the frequent Persian raids. While pending for imperial approval, the usurpers got more ambitious and declared themselves *augusti*, but this last action generally triggered the end of their leadership.

This article may therefore conclude that no general pattern existed in the coin communication of the usurpers discussed. Yet, it has demonstrated that in the later third century military support, and in particular local reinforcements, remained an important agency to address in acquiring (imperial) authority. Moreover, expressions of regional particularism developed as another significant factor in the representation of power, suggesting that a successful emperor needed to reckon with regional aspirations. Finally, we may tentatively suggest that the rise of these local leaders can be perceived as one of the first stages of a growing supra-provincialism that will eventually result in the tetrarch division of the Roman Empire.

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Abbreviations

AE: L'année épigraphique

CIL: Mommsen, Th. *et al.* (red.) (1853–2003) *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (Berlin)

CISem: Renan, E. *et al.* (1881–1951) *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum* (Paris)

HA: Historia Augusta

IGRR: Cagnat, R. (1906) *Inscriptiones Graecae ad res romanas pertinentes* (Paris)

ILS: Dessau, H. (red.) (1892–1916) *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*. Vols. 1–3 (Berlin)

IMEM: Blois, de L., Hekster, O.J. & *et al.* (red.) (2001–2012) *Proceedings of the Workshops of the International Network Impact of Empire (Roman Empire c.200 BC – AD 476)*. Vols. 1–16 (Boston-Leiden)

JNG: Jahrbuch für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte

JRS: Journal of Roman Studies

NC: Numismatic Chronicle

N.S.I.: Croce, G.A. (1903) *A text-book of North-Semitic Inscriptions* (Oxford)

PIR: *Prosopographia Imperii Romani*. 2nd Edition (1933–2011) (Berlin)

P.Oxy: The Oxyrhynchus Papyri (1898–2010). *The Egypt Exploration Society in Graeco-Roman Memoirs* (London)

QT: Quaderni ticinesi di numismatica et antichità classiche

RIC: Sutherland, C.H.V. *et al.* (red.) (1924–2007) *Roman Imperial Coinage*. Vols. 1–10 (London)

RIN: Rivista italiana di numismatica e scienze affini

RN: Revue Numismatique

SB: Preisigke, F. *et al.* (red.) (1915–2003) *Sammelbuch Griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten*. Vols. 1–23 (Berlin-Leipzig-Strassbourg-Wiesbaden)

SEG: Chaniotis, A. *et al.* (red.) (1923–1995) *Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum* (Amsterdam-Leiden)

ŠKZ: Šābuhr's inscription on the Ka'be-ye Zartošt or the *res gestae divi Shapori*

SNR: Schweizerische numismatische Rundschau

ZPE: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik