

## صور الملكة زنوبيا في "تاريخ أوغسطين"

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### مُلخَص

يتناول هذه البحث سيرة الملكة زنوبيا في "تاريخ أوغسطين" وهذا العمل يظهر كيف قدم الرومان الملكة زنوبيا وفقاً لأهدافهم مما أدى إلى قراءات وإسقاطات مختلفة قام بها المؤلف لتناسب متطلبات زمنه أو للترويج لأفكاره. تُظهر هذه الصور المتعددة لسيرة الملكة زنوبيا، داخل نفس الكتاب، كيف يتلاعب المنتصر بالتاريخ. يهدف هذا البحث إلى توضيح هذه الإسقاطات المتعددة من خلال استخدام مفاهيم "الخطاب" "إرادة القوة" "والاستشراق". وفي هذا المجال نجد أن نظرية فوكو للخطاب تشرح كيف استمرت سيرة زنوبيا في التغيير بطريقة شكلها المجتمع وقيوده. في نظريته حول تطور الخطاب يقدم فوكو العديد من الطرق التي يقيد بها المجتمع تطور الأفكار الجديدة وكيف يتم الحفاظ على هذه الأفكار مقيدة بالأفكار القديمة.

"إرادة القوة" هو مفهوم طوره الفيلسوف الألماني فريدريك نيتشه تدعي أن كل ما هو موجود يمارس القوة ضد بعضه البعض. يمارس كل مؤلف إرادته في السلطة من خلال كتابة سيرة زنوبيا وإبراز جوانب معينة من حياتها أو من خلال اللغة التي يستخدمونها أثناء وصف الأحداث أو الأفعال في حياتها.

سيساعد مفهوم "الاستشراق" لإدوارد سعيد في فهم طريقة تصوير زنوبيا في الأعمال المدروسة. تعتبر زنوبيا، وهي ملكة شرقية، تهديداً ملموساً للإمبراطورية الرومانية. توضح أوصاف زنوبيا مدى تأثر الأدب الغربي بشدة بالتقسيم التعسفي بين الغرب والشرق وصولاً إلى زمن الرومان.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الملكة زنوبيا، تاريخ أوغسطين، نيتشه، فوكو، سعيد، الغرب، الشرق، إرادة القوة، الخطاب، الاستشراق، الأنوثة، الرجولة.

# The Projections of Queen Zenobia in the Historia Augusta

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## Abstract

This study examines the biography of queen Zenobia in *The Historia Augusta*. This work shows how Queen Zenobia was presented by the Romans in accordance with their aims. This leads to different readings and emphases done by the author of this work to fit the requirement of his or her time or to promote such ideas. These multiple projections of the biography of Queen Zenobia, within the same book, show how history is manipulated by the victor.

The study aims at clarifying these multiple projections by the use of concepts of discourse, the will to power, and Orientalism. Foucault's theory of discourse will explain how the biography of Zenobia kept on altering in a way that was shaped by society and its restrictions. In his theory about the development of discourse, Foucault presents many ways in which society restricts the development of new ideas and how these ideas are kept bound by the old ones.

The will to power is a concept developed by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. It claims that things which exists is exerting force against each other. Each author exercises their will to power by writing the biography of Zenobia and highlighting certain aspects of her life or by the language they use while describing events or actions in her life.

The concept of Orientalism by Edward Said will help in understanding the way Zenobia is portrayed in *The Historia Augusta*. Zenobia, an oriental queen, was considered a tangible threat to the Roman Empire. The descriptions of Zenobia show how heavily influenced Western literature was by the arbitrary division between the West and the East back in the times of the Romans.

**Keywords:** Queen Zenobia, *The Historia Augusta*, Nietzsche, Foucault, Said, West, East, power, discourse, Orientalism, femininity, masculinity.

*The Scriptorum of The Historia Augusta* or the *Historia Augusta*—possibly published in the late 4th century- deals with the biographies of Roman emperors, heirs, and usurpers from the year 117 till the year 284. *The Historia Augusta* not only describes what happened in that period but also gives insight into how the Romans viewed the people of the East and their views on women. The Roman age – like the Hellenistic age- was filled with a proliferation of fabrication like imagined biographies, inserting letters by statesmen and sages, writing exotic and Utopian romances, and erudite mystifications (Syme, *Emperors and Biographies: Studies in the Historia Augusta* 246). The author of the *Historia Augusta* does not differ from the writers of his age. His work “indulges in fabrication and scurrilous gossip, but it also uses third-century sources” (Andrade 193). The author tries to give legitimacy to his work through different techniques. He refers to other works and authors, mentions people considered reliable and famous to his readers, and describes past events through the lens of his time.

The *Historia Augusta* is the only historical book that extensively tells about Zenobia, and many contemporary characteristics attributed to her come from this depiction. In her book about Zenobia, Pat Southern states that “[h]istory is written by the victors, who combine righteous self-justification with a celebration of prowess, obliterating in the process the motives, aims, and ambitions of their enemies.” Southern adds that “[t]he Romans particularly disliked clever, martial women” (Southern 1), which explains how *The Historia Augusta* presents Zenobia. The *Historia Augusta* views and presents the Palmyrene queen as a strange anomaly due to how Romans viewed women. The Romans viewed women as weak creatures who could not manage a house without male supervision. However, the Palmyrenes had an opposing view of women, for the Palmyrenes Women were capable of governance (Andrade 193). The archeological discoveries gave a lot of insight

into what took place during that period, yet the information provided by the *Historia Augusta* and other Roman sources is still more commonly known to people who are not specialists in history or archeology.

Zenobia's biography in the *Historia Augusta* can be considered discourse on the association of power, gender, and ethnicity (Jones 221). It reflects as a conflict between the Romans and their colonies, the conflict between the West and the East, and between men and women. The third volume of the *Historia Augusta* contains the story of Zenobia, and in this volume, she is introduced in multiple chapters. She is introduced first in the chapter titled "The Two Gallieni," secondly in the chapter titled "The Thirty Pretenders" or "The Thirty Tyrants," and finally in the chapter titled "The Deified Aurelian." The author presents different versions of the Palmyrene queen depending on his aim and what he tries to deliver to the reader.

Thus, we cannot talk about Zenobia in The *Historia Augusta* without considering how the *Historia Augusta* presents Emperor Gallienus and Emperor Aurelian. The author first mentions Zenobia in the biography of Gallienus in the chapter titled "The Two Gallieni." The author in this chapter explicitly shows his animosity toward emperor Gallienus. The author's animosity to the emperor can be attributed to trying to magnify the role of the emperor Claudius II who succeeded Gallienus and to rule out Claudius' role in Gallienus' murder (Syvanne 26). The demonization of Emperor Gallienus by the author does not stop at the mere description of how unfit the emperor was. The author goes as far as employing and creating biographies to help with this aim. He uses explicit and implicit descriptions to cement the notion of how unfit and unsuitable he was as an emperor. Syme argues that the author of the *Historia Augusta* had written this work "with an express design of

political and religious propaganda” (Syme, *Historia Augusta Papers* 96).

The author of the *Historia Augusta* demonizes the emperor Gallienus by associating his characteristics with what the Romans perceived as inferior and uncivilized. The description of Gallienus shows how the Romans perceived other nations, especially the nations of the East. The Romans described the people of the Orient as “given to despotism, pomp, finery, luxury, effeminacy, weakness of character and faithlessness” (A. Watson 86). These views were not new to the Romans as they were already well-known by the time Zenobia came to power “gender had long been applied to East and West. This equation is unsurprising, as the Romans followed the ethnography of the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places* in seeing Eastern peoples as effeminate and corrupted by luxury” (Jones 228). With these characteristics in mind, the author describes Gallienus as an unfit ruler who relies upon others to fix his problems.

Moreover, Gallienus’ primary interests are lust, pleasure, and entertainment. The author goes as far as attributing the bad things happening in the Roman Empire to Gallienus. He says, “for there is nothing so quick to inspire evil men to daring and good men to the hope of good things as an evil emperor who is feared or a depraved one who is despised” (Magie 25). The author blames natural disasters on Gallienus, and according to him, even the gods were not happy with Gallienus “[a]ll these things, as I have frequently said, were done out of contempt for Gallienus, a man given over to luxury and ever ready, did he feel free from danger, for any disgraceful deed” (Magie 29). The description of Gallienus is similar to how the Romans described the Orientals. Edward Said focused on how these views came to existence in his book *Orientalism*: “neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability; each is made up of human effort,

partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other” (Said xii). Said argues that the division between the East and West is artificial and manufactured.

Furthermore, this division paved the way for the biased concept of “us” and “them” to manifest and take root. Said points out that Orientalism is not only an academic field of study that produced a manufactured and misguided representation of the Orient. Nevertheless, it also contributed to viewing the Orient as inferior, and this view justified the power and authority the West held over the East. That the author of the *Historia Augusta* mentions these views about the Orient and its inhabitants is not unexpected or out of the blue. The views resulted from interactions between the two regions and the shift in power in favor of the West. He employs these inherited misconceptions about the East to show the superiority of the West. He explicitly uses these views in the biography of Herodes, Odaenathus’ first son, to show the West’s superiority over the East by attributing the manly behavior to the West. The author describes Herodes as “the most effeminate of men, wholly oriental and given over to Grecian luxury, for he had embroidered tents and pavilions made out of cloth of gold and everything in the manner of the Persians” (Magie 107, 109). The author does not try to hide his contempt for anybody who does not meet his narrow criteria. The biography of Herodes is concise and filled with disapproval and condemnation. Said explains this kind of writing –in *Orientalism*- by drawing attention to how the West became dominant over the East by the relationship between knowledge/power:

ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied. To believe that the Orient was created or, as I call it, “Orientalized” —

and to believe that such things happen simply as a necessity of the imagination, is to be disingenuous. The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony. (Said 5)

The author's description of the dominance of the West was not highly explicit in the description of Zenobia and her husband Odaenathus in Gallienus' biography. He talks about Zenobia's ascension into power in the name of her two young sons after the assassination of her husband- Odaenathus, and his son, Herodes. He makes a comparison between her and Gallienus. He presents her as a capable ruler who surpassed Gallienus in her skills and courage "but surpassing in courage and skill not merely Gallienus, than whom any girl could have ruled more successfully, but also many an emperor" (Magie 45). To further cement his claims about Zenobia's superiority over the Roman emperor, the author talks about how she has defeated one of Gallienus' generals. Gallienus sent this general to fight the Persians to avenge the capture of Gallienus' father "an over-tardy vengeance for his father and, gathering an army with the help of the general Heraclianus ... on setting out against the Persians, [the general] was defeated by the Palmyrenes and lost all the troops he had gathered, for Zenobia was ruling Palmyra and most of the East with the vigour of a man" (Magie 45). The author presents this defeat as an outcome of Gallienus' inability to rule. However, Heraclianus was one of the assassins who killed the Roman emperor. He was sent to battle against Zenobia by Gallienus' successor Claudius who was also one of the people who assassinated Gallienus. These actions against Zenobia show that Romans' hostility predates Zenobia's military campaign against the Roman territories (Andrade 149). Throughout this chapter, the author describes the Palmyrene queen in specific



phrases. He uses “not in a feminine manner or the ways of a woman” and that Zenobia “was ruling ... with the vigour of a man”. These phrases further cement the notion of Gallienus’ shortcomings as a ruler and man by pointing out his effeminate nature.

The second description of Zenobia is in the chapter titled “The Thirty Pretenders” or “Thirty tyrants,” which contains the biographies of 33 people whom the book considers a threat to the Roman Empire directly or indirectly. Scholars believe that the author added this chapter to entertain his readers and add something familiar to them. After all, the original “Thirty Tyrants” was written about “the oligarchs in Athens after the Peloponnesian War. The biographies, packed with scandal and bloodshed”<sup>1</sup> (Sommer 211). The author uses allusion<sup>2</sup> to refer to other works written by near-contemporary authors who are known to his readers. Also, the events he mentioned in his book the *Historia Augusta* allude to specific ideas and characteristics. Allusion is employed to enhance the narrative, leading Syme to describe the book as “the most enigmatic work that Antiquity has transmitted” (Quoted in Roherbacher,4).

The author presents the readers with insight into Zenobia’s characteristics by talking about her in the biographies of her family members. As mentioned above, he also employs the biography of Odaenathus to serve the notions of Gallienus’ shortcomings. Thus, he presents Odaenathus as an example of how rulers should be. He describes Odaenathus as a ferocious warrior and a fearless hunter:

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<sup>1</sup> Thirty Tyrants (404-403 B.C.) Spartan imposed oligarchy that ruled Athens after the Peloponnesian War. Thirty commissioners were appointed to the oligarchy, which had an extremist’s conservative core, led by Critias. Their oppressive regime fostered a bloody purge, in which perhaps 1500 residents were killed. Many moderates fled the city; gathering a force, they returned to defeat the tyrants’ forces in a battle in a battle at Piraeus in 403. The 30 fled and were killed off over the next few were killed off over the next few years.

<sup>2</sup>A statement that refers to something without mentioning it directly.

he was fierce in warfare and ... ever famous for his memorable hunts ... as is the duty of a man, in taking lions and panthers ... lived in the woods and the mountains... Hardened by these he was able to bear the sun and the dust in the wars with the Persians. (Magie 107)

After talking about Odaenathus' prowess, the author ends this biography by commenting on Zenobia. He describes her nobility and beauty "his wife, too, was inured to hardship and in the opinion of many was held to be more brave than her husband, being, indeed, the noblest of all the women of the East, and, as Cornelius Capitolinus declares, the most beautiful" (Magie 107). Both Odaenathus and Zenobia are tools further to emphasize Gallienus as an unfit ruler and a failure. The author also includes Zenobia in the biography of Maeonius, who is, according to the author, the one who assassinated Odaenathus and his oldest son Herodes. In this biography, the author, who is "ruthlessly unreliable and welcoming to any scandal, is alone in implicating her" (Andrade 145), talks about how the Palmyrene queen conspired with Maeonius to kill her stepson to ensure her kids rule over the kingdom. Historians believe that the author is parroting the propaganda spread about Zenobia by the courts of both Claudius and Aurelian (Andrade 145).

The author also includes the biographies of Herodes - Odaenathus' first son, Maeonius. Odaenathus' cousin-and Herennianus and Timolaus, Odaenathus and Zenobia's children. The author's disapproving tone in Herodes' biography conforms with the Romans' image associated with the people of the Orient. Said notes this view as:

[the making] out of every observable detail a generalization and out of every generalization an immutable law about the Oriental nature, temperament,

mentality, custom, or type; and, above all, to transmute living reality into the stuff of texts, to possess (or think one possesses) actuality mainly because nothing in the Orient seems to resist one's powers. (Said 86)

The author also includes in the chapter "The Thirty Pretenders" the biographies of Zenobia's two sons – Herennianus and Timolaus, whom historians consider the "inventions of the author, who seldom hesitates when it comes to delivering a creative interpretation of history" (Sommer 150). He includes their biographies to highlight the difference between the West and East.

The biography of Herennianus is simply about Zenobia. The author talks about how she ruled her kingdom in her children's names. Also, he describes how she presented them to the public dressed in purple just like the Roman emperors, and how she attended these public gatherings dressed as a man:

Zenobia seized the imperial power, holding the government longer than was meet for a woman. These boys she displayed clad in the purple robe of a Roman emperor and she brought them to public gatherings which she attended in the fashion of a man, holding up, among other examples, Dido and Semiramis, and Cleopatra, the founder of her family. (Magie 131)

Even though the biography of Herennianus is short, the author employs it to keep reminding the reader of why he includes Zenobia in the "Thirty Pretenders" chapter. He reminds the reader of the superiority of Roman costumes over the costumes of the Palmyrenes. Furthermore, he reminds the reader of the superiority of men over women by linking power to men. Thus, he has Zenobia dressed like a man when attending public gatherings. By linking her

with Dido, Semiramis, and Cleopatra, the author conjures their deeds and actions that made them famous. Dido, a queen who founded Carthage [modern-day Tunisia], according to Virgil's *Aeneid*, fell in love with Aeneas, whose descendants founded Rome. Dido committed suicide after Aeneas abandoned her. She, before her death, cursed the Trojans, which provided a mythical origin for the Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage. The Romans won the war and destroyed the city. Semiramis was married to an Assyrian king and ruled the kingdom after his death. During her role as a regent for her underage son, Semiramis waged wars against neighboring kingdoms.

The author treats the biography of Timolaus similarly to his brother's biography by using these biographies to show the superiority of the Romans. However, he states that Timolaus, unlike his brother Herennianus, was an eager student of Latin. Timolaus' eagerness made him one of Rome's greatest rhetorics:

which distinguished him from his brother, that is, that such was his eagerness for Roman studies that in a short time, it is said, he made good the statement of his teacher of letters, who had said that he was in truth able to make him the greatest of Latin rhetoricians. (Magie 133)

Zenobia's biography in "The Thirty Pretenders" is the longest in this chapter and one of only two women perceived as threats to and usurpers of the Roman throne. Her biography is also the longest among the biographies of her family members. The Palmyrene queen's biography does not follow a chronological order. The author does not provide information about her lineage, birth, or family, except for Zenobia's claim of being a descendant of "Cleopatras and the Ptolemies" (Magie 135). This lack of information about her life "may be explained by the author's lack

of information, which consequently led to a partly fictional biography-like piece of literature” (Burgersdijk 141). However, he does not fail to show the true purpose behind writing her biography. The author presents her to the readers as a capable and worthy leader, a usurper of the Roman throne, and a model of a virtuous yet typically flawed woman.

In her biography, the author’s primary focus is on trying to present the events and characteristics of Zenobia. This presentation benefits his narrative of the superiority of the Romans and the superiority of men over women. In other words, Zenobia’s biography in the *Historia Augusta* is a literary manifestation of “foreign versus Roman, East versus West, and feminine versus masculine” (Jones 3). First, the author does not give her any credit as a ruler that could be a threat to the Roman Empire. He attributes that to Gallienus’ failures. Even though, according to Roman laws, “Zenobia was a Roman citizen” (Andrade 43). The author of the *Historia Augusta* has no problem in calling her a foreigner to use it as a synonym for barbarian (Andrade 54) which is truly his purpose behind using the word “foreigner”:

Now all shame is exhausted, for in the weakened state of the commonwealth things came to such a pass that, while Gallienus conducted himself in the most evil fashion how, even women ruled most excellently foe, in fact, even a foreigner, Zenobia. (Magie 135).

The author restates that Zenobia was able to rule and be a threat to the Romans, due to Gallienus’ inadequacy as ruler and Claudius and Aurelian being busy defending Rome against the Goths. However, Aurelian, once done with his wars against the Goths, is able to defeat Zenobia and restore the order in the region under the authority of the Roman Empire:

this proud woman performed the functions of a monarch both while Gallienus was ruling and afterward when Claudius was busied with the war against the Goths, and in the end could scarcely be conquered by Aurelian himself, under whom she was led in triumph and submitted to the sway of Rome. (Magie 135)

Then the author of the *Historia Augusta* includes Aurelian's letter explaining why Aurelian captured Zenobia instead of killing her. However, he presents her as a capable queen in this letter, which contradicts the author's earlier statements in her biography. In this letter, the author through Aurelian explains how she was able to be a queen and maintain her throne. Furthermore, how she expanded her kingdom by conquering regions that were part of the Roman Empire. Aurelian says that she was a wise and unwavering leader. He continues by saying that she was braver than her husband – Odaenathus- and was the one who made his victory over the Persians possible "I might even say that it was her doing that Odaenathus defeated the Persians and, after putting Sapor to flight, advanced all the way to Ctesiphon" (Magie 137). Aurelian continued that she was a feared queen and no one in her region dared to move against her: "this woman inspired in the peoples of the East and also the Egyptians that neither Arabs nor Saracens nor Armenians ever moved against her" (Magie 137). Aurelian concluded this letter by giving his reasons for sparing Zenobia's life. He wrote, "[n]or would I have spared her life, had I not known that she did a great service to the Roman state when she preserved the imperial power in the East for herself, or for her children" (Magie 137). The author also includes a conversation between Zenobia and Aurelian after her defeat. The author has Zenobia say:"

You, I know, are an emperor indeed, for you win victories, but Gallienus and Aureolus and the others I never regarded as emperors. Believing Victoria to be a woman like me, I desired to become a partner in the royal power, should the supply of lands permit. (Magie 141)

The author carries on by stating how she was led in chains through the streets of Rome:

She was led in triumph with such magnificence that the Roman people had never seen a more splendid parade. For, in the first place, she was adorned with gems so huge that she laboured under the weight of her ornaments; for it is said that this woman, courageous though she was, halted very frequently, saying that she could not endure the load of her gems. Furthermore, her feet were bound with shackles of gold and her hands with golden fetters, and even on her neck she wore a chain of gold, the weight of which was borne by a Persian buffoon. (Magie 141)

He concludes Zenobia's biography by saying that Aurelian spared her and her children. Furthermore, she was given a villa to spend the rest of her life in it:

she lived with children in the manner of a Roman matron on an estate that had been presented to her at Tibur, which even to this day is still called Zenobia, not far from the palace of Hadrian or from that place which bears the name of Concha. (Magie 141-143)

The third time the author talks about Zenobia is in the biography of Aurelian. The author treats the biography of Aurelian as if it were the biography of someone otherworldly. He starts the biography with a description of the occasion that led to writing Aurelian's biography. He begins by talking about meeting with a Roman counsel, Junius Tiberianus. After a brief conversation with the author, Junius shows his bewilderment when the author tells him that he only read about Aurelian in Greek, not Latin. Aurelian was a great ruler and was able to restore peace and stability to Rome "...Deified Aurelian, that most famous of princes, that most firm of rulers, who restored the whole world to the sway of Rome, be unknown to posterity? God prevent such madness!" (Magie 195).

The author then proceeds with Aurelian's biography. Aurelian was born in a humble place, and no one knows precisely where. The author makes light of this lack of information by saying that what is essential is knowing what he achieved, not where he was born: "the chief thing to be known is not in what place he was born, but how great he was in the State" (Magie 197-201).

The author uses the account of different writers when describing Aurelian's childhood. He also includes lists of "omens" that occurred to Aurelian, which foretold the future of Aurelian. The author also includes events of similar nature that occurred to Aurelian by the same unknown writer. For example, while Aurelian was in the Roman army, a purple cloak fell upon his shoulders, and he unknowingly rode the emperor's horse. The Persian emperor gave Aurelian a sacrificial saucer with the engraving of the sun god. Furthermore, he was given an elephant as a present (Magie 201-203). The author then talks about his characteristics as a man and leader. As a man, Aurelian was good to look upon for his physical appearance. Aurelian was tall, had strong muscles, and enjoyed wine and food, yet rarely indulged his passions (Magie



203). As a leader, he was disciplined like no other. Moreover, he was always ready to go into battles, for no one was faster than him in drawing a sword. His soldiers feared him greatly. Aurelian did not tolerate insolences and dealt with severe punishments quickly. The author carries on with this line of writing, i.e., writing about Aurelian's battles and victories, and including letters written by Aurelian or about Aurelian.

Regarding Zenobia's account in the biography of Aurelian, the author presents a different version of her. She is no longer the wise and courageous leader who may have been the reason behind the victories of her husband's battles. Nietzsche describes this shift as the will to power which is a "quanta of force the essence of which consists in wielding power over all other quanta of force, not that there is a 'principle', 'law' or 'order' involved" (Nietzsche 393). The author exercises his will to power over Zenobia as an Oriental and a woman. The description of biographies and events in the *Historia Augusta* serves the notion of the superiority of the Romans. The Romans dominate other nations and empires as nation and empire. They are the most sophisticated; their customs are refined; they are above everyone else. The author associates power and masculinity with the Romans by feminizing their supposed enemies. Nietzsche explains the necessity for power through existential purposes "[t]his world is the will to power- and nothing besides! And even you yourselves are this will to power- and nothing besides!" (Nietzsche 586) The author relies on pre-fixed notions regarding the superiority of the Romans. These notions were taken from the Greeks regarding the inferiority of other nations and women. The Romans had built upon these notions and made them their own. These notions were vital because they separated the Romans from other nations "the general rule of existence is the absolute defense of one's personal interest and the unlimited reign of the will to power" (Glosan xxi).

The archeological discoveries and the works of historians specialized in history of the region prove that Zenobia attacked lands under Rome's sway. Some historians believe that she did so to ensure the circumstances remained as they were between Rome and Palmyra after the assassination of the emperor Gallienus. However, neither Emperor Claudius nor his successor Aurelian accepted that arrangement (Andrade 173). The author states that after ensuring peace and order in Rome and the conflicting territories, Aurelian set his eyes on the eastern frontiers to bring them under the sway of Rome. Also, he talks about how Aurelian's leniency and wisdom when dealing with the people of these disputed territories made him more loved by them and ensured his victories. Then, he talks about Aurelian's battle against Zenobia near Emesa [modern-day Homs]. He describes the exhausted condition of the Roman soldiers and how they were almost defeated. And how the gods interfered by reversing the outcome of the battle in favor of Aurelian:

When Aurelian's horsemen, now exhausted, were on the point of breaking their ranks and turning their backs, suddenly by the power of a supernatural agency, as was afterwards made known, a divine form spread encouragement throughout the foot- soldiers and rallied even the horsemen. Zenobia and Zaba were put to flight, and a victory was won in full (Magie 245).

After acknowledging the help of the gods and paying them proper respect, Aurelian marched to Palmyra. On his way, he was met with hardship and hostility by the inhabitants of Syria. He was wounded by an arrow while besieging Palmyra "his army met with a hostile reception from the brigands of Syria, and after suffering many mishaps he incurred great danger during the siege, being even

wounded by an arrow” (Magie 245). The author then includes a letter by Aurelian addressed to Mucapor- an unknown figure-expressing how brutal the war against Zenobia is. This letter “focalize[s] the narrative through Aurelian and Zenobia, who present competing models for the correlation of power and gender” (Jones 224). In this letter, he says that he is not only battling Zenobia, but he must also be battling a man because she is a baser enemy “as if Zenobia alone and with her own forces only were fighting against me, and yet, as a matter of fact, there is as great a force of the enemy as if I had to make war against a man, while she, because of her fear and her sense of guilt, is a much baser foe” (Magie 247). The mentioned letter describes how well-prepared the Palmyra people were for battle. Aurelian says Zenobia is ruling the Palmyrene kingdom on behalf of her son Vaballathus. Here the author provides factual information about her son, he does not bring up the fictional two sons. The letter provides Aurelian’s perception of Zenobia as a woman fighting to escape her punishment and concludes his letter by stating his belief that the gods will come to the aid of the Romans. “She fears like a woman, and fights as one who fears punishment. I believe, however, that the gods will truly bring aid to the Roman commonwealth, for they have never failed our endeavors” (Magie 247). Describing her as a lesser opponent based on her gender makes Aurelian feel as if he is being “rob[bed] of the glory he feels he deserves for defeating an army as well-prepared and well-supplied as the Palmyrenes, with their ample stores of weapons and sophisticated engines of war that can hurl fire” (Jones 225). The author also talks about how Aurelian felt exhausted and frustrated with how the war was going. Therefore, he wrote to Zenobia: “[f]rom Aurelian, Emperor of the Roman world and recoverer of the East, to Zenobia and all others who are bound to her by alliance in war” (Magie 247). In this letter, he commands her to surrender along with everything she owns to spare her life:

You should have done of your own free will what I now command in my letter. For I bid you surrender, promising that your lives shall be spared, and with the condition that you, Zenobia, together with your children shall dwell wherever I, acting in accordance with the wish of the most noble senate, shall appoint a place. Your jewels, your gold, your silver, your silks, your horses, your camels, you shall all hand over to the Roman treasury. As for the people of Palmyra, their rights shall be preserved (Magie 249)

This letter also shows how the only ones punished were Zenobia and her children. The lives and rights of the Palmyrene people were preserved. However, Zenobia and her possessions were seized by the Romans. This letter, much to the previous one, “shows us the tension between gender identity and political authority ... perhaps implying that punishment of Zenobia as an individual was a higher priority for Aurelian than subjugating Palmyra as a whole” (Jones 226).

The author then includes Zenobia’s reply to Aurelian’s letter. He, in this letter, diminishes her as a capable and legitimate threat to the Romans. Furthermore, restating the superiority of men over women through the letter she wrote as a reply to Aurelian:

From Zenobia, Queen of the East, to Aurelian Augustus. None save yourself has ever demanded by letter what you now demand. Whatever must be accomplished in matters of war must be done by valour alone. You demand my surrender as though you were not aware that Cleopatra preferred to die a Queen

rather than remain alive, however, high her rank. We shall not lack reinforcements from Persia, which we are even now expecting. On our side are the Saracens, on our side, too, the Armenians. The brigands of Syria have defeated your army, Aurelian. What more need be said? If those forces, then, which we are expecting from every side, shall arrive, you will, of a surety, lay aside that arrogance with which you now command my surrender, as though victorious on every side. (Magie 249)

The letter presents her as a lesser enemy and a vain woman who refuses to stop the war and save her people. However, it also shows -indirectly- her defiance of gender roles imposed on her by the author through Aurelian. First, she criticized Aurelian because he demanded boldly her surrender by letter. She continued by saying that deeds and courage determine the outcomes of wars. Second, by talking about Cleopatra, Zenobia conjured not only a figure known for her defiance of Rome. But also, a figure who chose to kill herself rather than be captured by the Romans. Zenobia's letter is also one of the pieces of evidence of the manufactured differences between the West and the East. (Jones 227-228). The author then talks about how Aurelian became enraged by Zenobia's letter. That he gathered his soldiers and besieged Palmyra, intercepted her reinforcements, and made them go back on their deal with her. Thus, with great effort, he defeated her and later captured her after her failed escape attempt. The author concludes the story of Zenobia in Aurelian's biography by saying that Aurelian decided to save her life to show her to the Roman people after killing Zenobia's advisers and generals:

Aurelian, however, deeming it improper that a woman should be put to death,

killed many who had advised her to begin and prepare and wage the war, but the woman he saved for his triumph, wishing to show her to the eyes of the Roman people. (Magie 253)

Also, the author describes the scene in which Zenobia was part of Aurelian's victory parade. He says that she was in a charoite she had explicitly built to enter Rome as a queen. Even though she entered Rome riding the charoite, she did so as a defeated captive.

Zenobia's role in the *Historia Augusta* was not limited to her being a representative of the East and a tangible threat to the Roman Empire and its perspectives on other non-Romans and women. However, her other role is her characteristics as a woman. The author gives a lengthy description of her characteristics as a woman. However, he presents her in a Roman way. His description of her heavily relies on Juvenal's satire 6. In this satire, Juvenal tries to dissuade a friend from marriage because the women in Rome are not faithful. Juvenal's satire 6 is a general attack on women (Watson and Watson 8). The traits Juvenal described in his satire are about women's sexual morals, how they dressed, bragging about their ancestors, knowing literature and speaking multiple languages, and their masculine activities such as fighting and wearing helmets (Burgersdijk 141-142). However, the author uses these descriptions to present a positive picture of Zenobia as a successful warrior-queen (Burgersdijk 142). His description of Zenobia is not simply a description of a victorious queen but also serves as a comparison between Roman mannerisms and culture and the Persians. Said identifies this act as the "idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures." (Said 7) The author starts by talking about how she viewed marriage. Marriage for Zenobia was a means only to procreate "once she had lain with him, she would refrain until the time of menstruation to see if she were pregnant ; if not, she would

again grant him an opportunity of begetting children” (Magie 139). As if the author wants to emphasize the point that she is a counterpart to the women described by Juvenal (Burgersdijk 143). He then describes the duality in her characteristics by talking about what she does in the manners of both Romans and Persians. He compares these two mannerisms and shows the superiority of the Roman ones. “[I]n the manner of the Persians that she received worship and in the manner of the Persian kings that she banqueted ; but it was in the manner of a Roman emperor that she came forth to public assemblies, wearing a helmet and girt with a purple fillet” (Magie 139). This passage also indicates that Zenobia -familiar with these two cultures- favored the Romans over the Persians regarding how she presented herself to her soldiers and people.

The author also describes her physical appearance:

Her face was dark and of a swarthy hue,  
her eyes were black and powerful  
beyond the usual wont, her spirit  
divinely great, and her beauty  
incredible. So white were her teeth that  
many thought that she had pearls in  
place of teeth. Her voice was clear and  
like that of a man (Magie 139).

The ideal beauty in Roman times consisted of smooth skin, white teeth, and big eyes. The author makes use of the examples Juvenal attributed to unattractive women. “Let three wrinkles make their appearance; let her skin become dry and flabby; let their teeth turn black, and her eyes lose their lustre” (Burgersdijk 144). The author gives Zenobia an appearance familiar to his readers and what the Romans considered attractive.

After presenting the readers with the physical description of Zenobia, the author describes how she holds herself in front of her soldiers. He also gives an account of how she treats them, how she acts in times of war, and the way she deals with her neighboring

kingdom and tribes. However positive these descriptions may seem; the author does not fail in pointing out how unnatural these acts are for a woman:

Her sternness, when necessity demanded, was that of a tyrant, her clemency, when her sense of right called for it, that of a good emperor. Generous with prudence, she conserved her treasures beyond the wont of women. She made use of a carriage, and rarely of a woman's coach, but more often she rode a horse; it is said, moreover, that frequently she walked with her foot-soldiers for three or four miles. She hunted with the eagerness of a Spaniard. She often drank with her generals, though at other times she refrained, and she drank, too, with the Persians and the Armenians, but only for the purpose of getting the better of them. At her banquets she used vessels of gold and jewels, and she even used those that had been Cleopatra's (Magie 139).

Then he shifts back to describing the length she went through to ensure her virtue. She only had eunuch old men and very few girls. This description is not only made to praise her virtue but also as a means to discredit the men of her region "[i]t depicts men of the Near East as emasculated. Zenobia, manly as ever, dominates them" (Sommer 74). The author also adds how she valued knowledge and education, for she had her children learn Latin. She spoke Greek and Egyptian and knew the history of her region. These descriptions of Zenobia's physical appearances and characteristics serve the author's primary purpose in showing the superiority of the West over the East and men over women.



Foucault explains this shift of presentation in Zenobia's character in his essay "The Order of Discourse," in which he says that:

in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose rule is to ward off its power and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality (Foucault 52).

The author puts himself in a self-contradictory position in which he gives a contradictory role to Zenobia -as mentioned earlier- she is a strong and capable ruler compared to Gallienus. However, compared to Aurelian, she ruled simply because the Roman emperor was busy with other wars on different frontiers. The author uses what Foucault designates as the external procedures of exclusion: "the forbidden speech; the division madness; and the will to truth" (Foucault 55). What Foucault means by the forbidden speech is that a set of rules controls the speech. Not just anybody has the right to speak, nor anybody can talk about anything at any given time; this reveals how desire and power are connected in discourse (Foucault 52). Foucault further explains the need to control discourse by saying:

There is nothing surprising about that, since, as psychoanalysis has shown, discourse is not simply that which manifests (or hides) desire- it is also the object of desire; and since history constantly teaches us, discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is

struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized. (Foucault 52-3)

The forbidden speech is found when the author has Zenobia speaking to cement the notion of Aurelian's superiority over her as a ruler. Furthermore, he alludes to women's inferiority by having her speak as a vain and irrational woman.

The second external procedure, the division between reason and madness, rejects "the power of uttering a hidden truth, of telling the future, of seeing in all naivety what the others' wisdom cannot perceive" (Foucault 53). In other words, the complete rejection of anything uttered that does not comply with what is known and considered sane and socially acceptable. The author rectifies the damage done by Zenobia, which is perceived as madness in his time, by emphasizing her defeat and how she was led to Rome.

The third external procedure, the will to truth, separates the arbitrary truth from the arbitrary falsehood supported by any society and its institutions (Foucault 56). Foucault stresses the importance of the will to truth, for not only the other previous sets are strongly connected to it but also incorporated by it "what is at stake in the will to truth, in the will to utter this 'true' discourse, if not desire and power?" (Foucault 55). Zenobia's biography in *The Historia Augusta* is a testimony to the length the author takes to cement the notions of the superiority of the Romans and the superiority of men over women. Zenobia is a direct threat to what the author perceives as truths.

Not only does the author use the external procedure of exclusion, but also the internal procedures of exclusion. Foucault's internal procedures of exclusion are "commentary; the author; disciplines; and the rarefication of the speaking subject" (S. Mills 58). The main concern of these procedures is also to form and

control the narrative of discourse and to authorize who has the right to speak (S. Mills 58-59). Commentary, in some texts, is commenting on what is previously has been written; nothing new is added to the text. Foucault says:

There is in all societies, with great consistency, a kind of gradation among discourses: those which are said in the ordinary course of days and exchanges, and which vanish as they have been pronounced; and those which give a rise to a certain number of speech acts which takes them up, transform them or speak of them, in short, those discourse which, over and above their formulation, are said indefinitely, remain said, and are to be said again. (Foucault 57)

Commenting on any work gives it an appeal and contributes to the work's popularity and versatility. Furthermore, it contributes to revealing other meanings of any work. Foucault says, "the commentary must say for the first time what had, nonetheless, already been said, and must tirelessly repeat what had, however, never been said" (Foucault 58). The author talks about Zenobia's male-like behavior and includes what is already regarded as the truth about the East, its people, and women. He invents events and characters and adds information to serve the superiority of the Romans. In the end, Zenobia lost, and the lands were restored under the sway of Rome.

The second internal procedure of exclusion is the author, who plays a different role from commentary when it comes to limiting a text. The compulsive need to know everything about the author and connect their work into a unit limits the development of the way we perceive any text. Foucault's term "author" means not the

individual or individuals who produced the text. Foucault perceives the author as a "... grouping of discourse, conceived as the unit and the origin of their meanings, as the focus of their coherence" (Foucault 58). In other words, they are giving unity or specific meaning to a group of multiple texts based on authorship and traditions. The author of the *Historia Augusta* uses allusions, forgery, and invention in his writing, all to cement Roman's perception of other nations and women.

The third procedure of internal exclusion is disciplines, of which Foucault says, "[it is] a principle which is itself relative and mobile; which permits construction, but within narrow confines" (Foucault 59). A discipline limits a discourse because it limits what can be considered possible knowledge in a particular subject area (S. Mills 60). Discipline allows anyone to contribute to a text as long as they conform to the set of methods, objects, and propositions without considering the contributor's personality. The author's presentation of the East and Zenobia as inferior is a testimony to the circulation of these notions without caring about their origin or legitimacy.

The final procedure of internal exclusion is the rarefication of the speaking subject. It is about controlling the unpredictability of discourse through a set of rules. First, these rules determine who has the right and the authority to speak. Secondly, the speech will be conducted by gestures, signs, and behavior that must accompany words. Finally, fixing the supposed or imposed efficacy of words, their effect on the audience, and the limits of their constraining values (Foucault 59). The author has Zenobia speaking twice in the *Historia Augusta*. The first time she speaks to Aurelian is after her defeat and capture by him. She – as the author intends- serves her purpose in admitting the superiority of the Romans over the Eastern and men over women. The second time Zenobia speaks is through a letter composed by herself to Aurelian. In this letter, the author has her presenting herself in contrast to her characteristics in the

biography of Gallienus and her biography. The author presents her as vain and prideful.

In short, if we put aside all the forgery and inventions the author made in the story of Zenobia. In *The Historia Augusta*, Zenobia manifests the conflict between the West and the East and between men and women. Her biography also presents how victory and power shape concepts. Her story in *The Historia Augusta* is a reaffirmation of the inherited concepts concerning the superiority of the West and men and the inferiority of the East and women. Thus, her life is “constituted by the meanings and representations generated by human signifying practices, and the relations of power and its consequences that are inherent in such representations” (Parker 7).

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