

Duncan B. Campbell, *Phantom Horsemen: Exploding the Myth of the Emperor Gallienus' Battle Cavalry*, Bocca della Verità, Glasgow 2025, 177 pp. + 16 figs b/w; ISBN 979-8315-05783-3

The third century CE, and particularly the period from the death of Emperor Severus Alexander to the assumption of power by Diocletian, is widely considered by scholars to be a time of profound crisis for the Roman Empire. This crisis manifested itself in the weakness of imperial authority, the growth of the army's political significance, the weakening of the state's political and economic structures, and threats to its security from numerous external enemies. While scholars are largely in agreement regarding the difficult situation of the Roman state during this period, our knowledge of the events that filled it and the actions of contemporary emperors is quite limited, because sources describing this difficult period are few and, moreover, most often inconsistent and unreliable. Many of them were produced in Constantinople during the medieval period and are the result of compilations of various earlier works. The low reliability of these sources means that reconstructions of events based on them and their evaluation can sometimes differ significantly from one another. The figure of Emperor Gallienus and the reforms attributed to him may serve as an example.

Ancient authors present this emperor in a rather unfavorable light, which is usually attributed to their tendentiousness. Scholars have repeatedly attempted to rehabilitate him, if only because they attribute to him authorship of reforms that were meant to strengthen the army. The most important reforms are considered to be: making cavalry the main strike force of the army by increasing the number of its units and thus ensuring greater mobility; accelerating the military career path for soldiers; and replacing senators in high military positions with equestrians. Scholars studying the history of Rome in the third century CE believe that Gallienus was indeed the author of these reforms. In his most recent book, D. B. Campbell demonstrates that this conviction rests on very uncertain foundations.

The subject of D. B. Campbell's research is to establish in which source Gallienus was identified as the author of the aforementioned reforms, who formulated this hypothesis and under what circumstances, and what transformations it underwent in historiography over time.

In the first chapter (*A much maligned emperor*, pp. 1–16), the author presents the views and opinions of scholars concerning Gallienus, beginning with E. Gibbon through the second half of the nineteenth century. In the subsequent eight chapters, he analyzes detailed issues related to the character and function of the reforms attributed to this ruler.


The author's findings indicate that the first scholar to attribute to Gallienus the introduction of equestrians into administration and the broader-scale use of cavalry was the

German scholar Hermann Schiller (*An idiosyncratic chronicler*, pp. 17–25). He based his conclusions regarding the growing importance of equestrians on the account of Aurelius Victor, while his assertion about the increased role of cavalry in Gallienus's army was derived from the vague account of George Cedrenus, an unreliable and little-known twelfth-century Byzantine author (pp. 21–25). His *Compendium of Histories* is a compilation of works by several earlier authors who did not always understand Roman realities. Importantly, Schiller did not verify the value of this account, nor did any of the scholars who cited it. According to D. B. Campbell, the next scholar who played an important role in creating the image of Gallienus as the initiator of the creation of numerous cavalry units in the Roman army was Emil Ritterling (*A speculative theory*, pp. 30–39). Analyzing the *Notitia Dignitatum*, he concluded that the unit *equites Dalmatae* mentioned therein must have been formed around the mid-third century, and thus its creator was most probably Gallienus (pp. 31–33; cf. 38–39). This hypothesis gained the approval of A. von Domaszewski (pp. 34–37), W. Liebenam (pp. 37–38), and E. Lammert (p. 38). As a result, E. Ritterling's supposition that Gallienus made cavalry one of the main elements of the Roman army became a certainty for German scholars, on the basis of which they developed their own theories and interpretations. The opinion that Gallienus was a great reformer was also shared by the French scholar L. Homo (*A dynamic ruler*, pp. 47–66), while R. Grosse, who dealt primarily with the history of Byzantium, in his *Römische Militärgeschichte von Gallienus bis zum Beginn der byzantinischen Themenverfassung* (Berlin 1920), attributed to Gallienus no fewer than five major reforms: the removal of senators from military positions and their replacement with equestrians; the separation of administrative and military offices; the transformation of the equestrian order by admitting soldiers even from the lowest military ranks; the creation of the college of *protectores*; and the reform of cavalry by removing it from the structure of legions and creating a large corps of "battle cavalry" (*A military reformer?*, pp. 76–87). Another scholar who contributed to consolidating the opinion of Gallienus as a military reformer, as well as enriching the discussion of the reforms attributed to him with new elements, was A. Alföldi, who was the first to introduce numismatic evidence into the discussion of Gallienus's achievements. Based on this evidence, he also reconstructed events from this emperor's times related to the use of cavalry and the role of Mediolanum as a mint striking coins celebrating cavalry (*A misidentified mint*, pp. 95–107). He also devoted much attention to the role of Aureolus as the chief commander of cavalry. In his picture of the Gallienic period, A. Alföldi utilized the concepts of A. Domaszewski and R. Grosse. This picture proved so suggestive that several generations of scholars could not resist its charm (*A cavalry army?*, pp. 111–122). A separate chapter is devoted to the question of the rank of the position that Aureolus was supposed to hold (*Commander of all the cavalry*, pp. 126–138). In it, the author presents critical opinions of scholars who challenge certain elements of the picture of Gallienus's reforms repeated in historiography, especially those attributing to cavalry an excessive role as a strike force, or those concerning the rank and significance of Aureolus's position. He also demonstrates that the *equites Dalmatae* unit, whose establishment E. Ritterling attributed to Gallienus, is in fact another name for the well-known units of the imperial mounted guard (*equites singulares Augusti*) established by Trajan (*Trustworthy cavalry*, pp. 144–153).

In presenting the views of the above-mentioned scholars, as well as those who developed their own theories on their foundation, the author verifies and critically analyzes them based on sources, demonstrating their shortcomings. He draws attention to the fact that some of their conclusions were built on erroneous readings of accounts or their misunderstanding. The conviction of earlier and most contemporary scholars about the great significance of Gallienus's reforms has meant—as the author repeatedly emphasizes—that many of the changes and achievements in Roman military affairs attributed to him already existed during his reign, having been implemented during the Severan period, and some even during the second century CE. There is no doubt that the uncritical use by H. Schiller of Cedrenus's mention and E. Ritterling's hypothesis played a key role in creating the vision of Gallienus's military reforms, especially regarding his creation of a cavalry army. They became the seed of a scholarly myth that was propagated and developed by successive generations of scholars.

In his book, D. B. Campbell has shown the circumstances under which the myth of Gallienus's military reforms was born and how it took shape over time, reaching its present form. Thanks to his thorough knowledge of sources and the history of Roman military affairs, he has subjected this myth to criticism, undermining the significance attributed to it in historiography. The author's erudition and substantive arguments in support of his position deserve great recognition. Moreover, the clear language of this work makes it a pleasure to read.

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