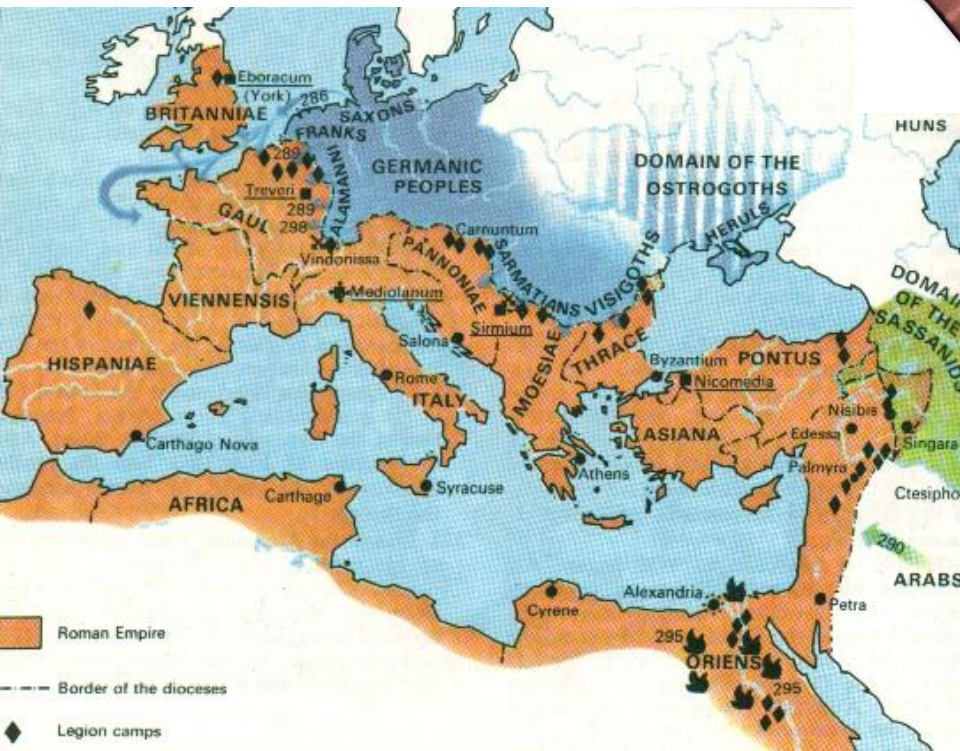




Lecture 29. A Third Century Crisis?

AD 235-284

- “The Third-Century-Crisis”
- “Military Anarchy”
- “Imperial Crisis”

*Why? Was this a global crisis?

AD 235-284: Traits and Events

- Period of political instability. Division of the empire. Regionalism
- Rapid (and violent) turnover of emperors
- Continuous wars and invasions
- Continuous internal conflicts and civil wars
- Monetary collapse
- Plague of Cyprian (from 251). High mortality

Third century, timeline

235-38: Maximin

238: Gordian I

238: Gordian II

238: Pupienus

238: Balbinus

238-44: Gordian III

244-49: Philipp "Arabs"

249-51: Decius

251: Hostilian

251-53: Gallus

253: Aemilian

253-59: Valerian

259-68: Gallienus

268-70: Claudius II

270: Quintillus

270-75: Aurelian

275-76: Tacitus

276: Florian

276-82: Probus

282-83: Carus

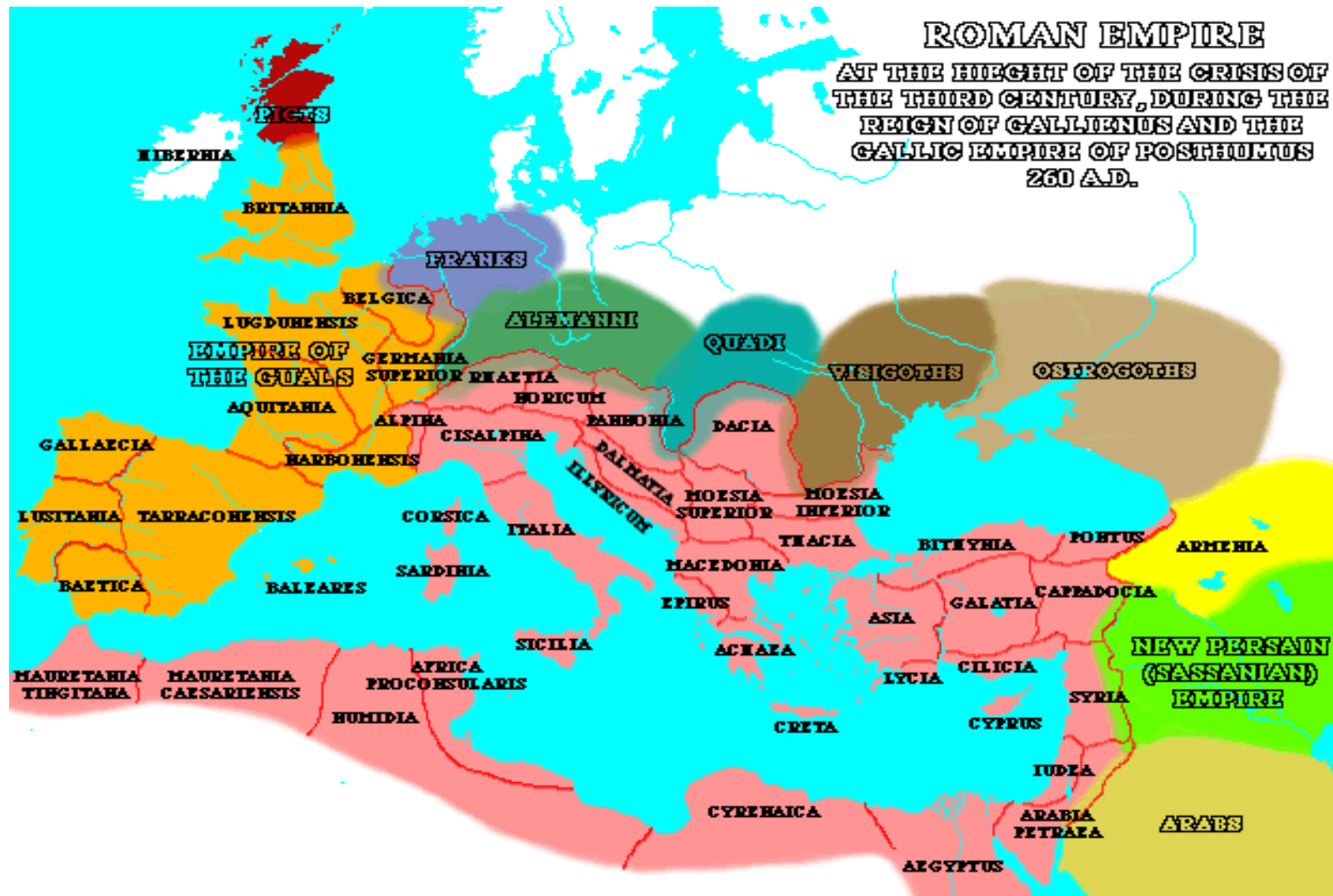
283-84: Numerian

283-85: Carinus

284-305: Diocletian

286-305: Maximian

Third Century: Provinces and Divisions



Sources and Scholarship

- Scarcity of sources on the period
- Period submitted to much unfounded speculation, both from ancient and modern authors.
- No systematic studies on this period.
- Coins as most important sources on the period

Main Sources

4th century sources:

- Historia Augusta,
- Ammianus Marcellinus,
- Aurelius Victor 'Liber De Caesaribus'
- Eutropius 'Breviarium Ab Urbe Condita'
(written 369)

Edward Gibbon (1776-88) on , the reign of Philip the Arab. Traditional scholarly views upon this period

- "The limits of the Roman empire still extended from the Western Ocean to the Tigris, and from Mount Atlas to the Rhine and the Danube. To the undiscerning eye of the vulgar, Philip appeared a monarch no less powerful than Hadrian or Augustus had formerly been. The form was still the same, but the animating health and vigour were fled. The industry of the people was discouraged and exhausted by a long series of oppression..."

Edward Gibbon (1776-88) on , the reign of Philip the Arab. Traditional scholarly views upon this period

“...The discipline of the legions, which alone, after the extinction of every other virtue, had propped the greatness of the state, was corrupted by the ambition, or relaxed by the weakness, of the emperors. The strength of the frontiers, which had always consisted in arms rather than in fortifications, was insensibly undermined; and the fairest provinces were left exposed to the rapaciousness or ambition of the barbarians, who soon discovered the decline of the Roman empire.”

Averil Cameron 'The Later Roman Empire' (1993)

- "From the great secular games celebrated by Philip (248) to the death of the emperor Gallienus there elapsed twenty years of shame and misfortune. During that calamitous period every instant of time was marked, every province of the Roman world was afflicted by barbarous invaders and military tyrants, and the ruined empire seemed to approach the last and fatal moment of its dissolution. The confusion of the times, and the scarcity of authentic memorials, oppose equal difficulties to the historian, who attempts to preserve a clear and unbroken thread of narration. Surrounded with imperfect fragments, always concise, often obscure, and sometimes contradictory, he is reduced to collect, to compare, and to conjecture ..."

Example: the Gallic Empire

- Control of the Roman Empire had been divided by **Valerian**. When he was proclaimed emperor, in 253, he immediately shared power with his son, **Gallienus**.
- They were equal partners; Valerian assuming responsibility for the east, Gallienus the west.
- Britain, Spain, and, for a time at least, probably the province of Raetia (southwest Germany, Austria and Switzerland) were a part of this 'Gallic Empire'.
- **Marcus Cassianius Latinus Postumus** usurped power from Gallienus in 260 and formed the so called Gallic Empire. He was recognised in Gaul, Germania, Britannia and Iberia until his murder in 268.

Gibbon on the foreign menaces of the 'Gallic Empire'

- "The joint government of the father and the son subsisted about seven, and the sole administration of Gallienus continued about eight, years. But the whole period was one uninterrupted series of confusion and calamity...
- the Roman empire was at the same time, and on every side, attacked by the blind fury of foreign invaders, and the wild ambition of domestic usurpers ... The most dangerous enemies of Rome, during the reigns of Valerian and Gallienus, were, 1. The Franks; 2. The Alamanni; 3. The Goths; and 4. The Persians.

Postumus, the Usurper

- "... **Postumus**, a man of extremely insignificant family, assumed the purple in Gaul and for ten years ruled in such a way that he restored the provinces which had almost been ruined, by means of his great vigour and restrained government."

Eutropius 'Breviarium Ab Urbe Condita' (written 369)

Maximinus



Monetary reforms. The creation of the *antoninianus* under the Severans

- In 215 AD Caracalla introduced the radiate *antoninianus*, declaring that it was 2 *denarii* worth. It was initially silver, but was slowly debased to bronze.
- The antononianus weighted a great deal less than two denarii
- With this trick Caracalla introduced practically a double standard
- *Denarius* still continued for a while as the change for *antoninianus*; and anyways as a legal unit.

The antoninianus

- However the antoninianus lost in 35 years some 40 % of its weight; and, what is more, its "purity" went down to 2.5 %.
- The *antoninianus* looked nevertheless like a silver coin and was accepted because it was minted under the authority of the Emperor.
- In **293 Diocletian** reformed the system. As fundamental coin he introduced the *nummus*, 5 denarii. In 299 the "parity" to denarius was 12.5. He also introduces the *argenteus* (pure silver) = 4 *nummi*

Antoninianus, AD 215

- Caracalla AR Antoninianus. Struck 215 AD. ANTONINVS PIVS AVG GERM, radiate, draped & cuirassed bust right, seen half from back / P M TR P XVIII COS IIII P P, Jupiter seated left, holding Victory & scepter, eagle at his feet. RSC 277a.



Gordian III

- Gordian III, as Augustus, AR Antoninianus. 238-239 AD. IMP CAES M ANT GORDIANVS AVG, radiate draped bust right / FIDES MILITVM, Fides standing with standard and scepter. RIC 1, RSC 86.



Gordian III

- Gordian III AR Antoninianus. IMP CAES M ANT GORDIANVS AVG, radiate, draped & cuirassed bust right / VICTORIA AVG, Victory advancing left with wreath & palm. RIC 5, RSC 357.



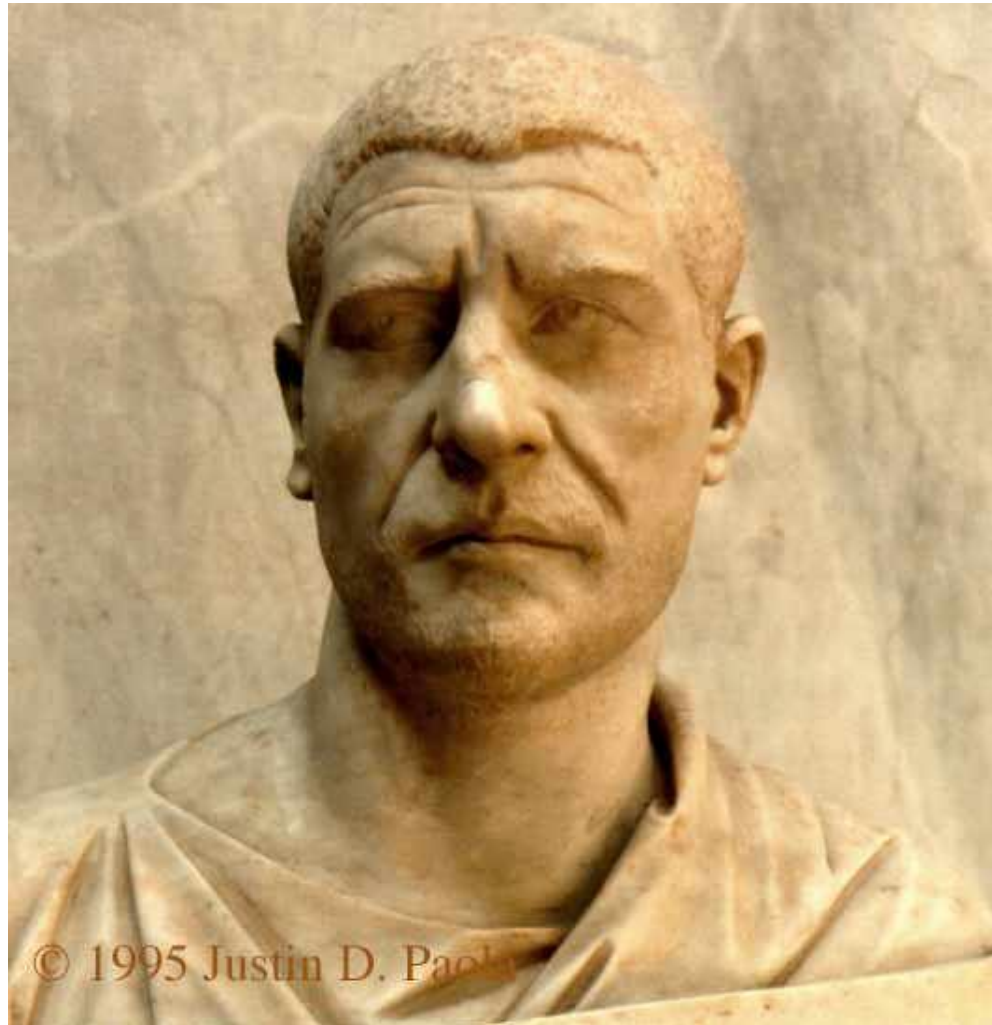
Philippus I Arabs (244-249)

- **RIC 44b., C. 169**

Antoninian 244/247, Rom. Brustbild mit Strahlenkrone n. rechts, IMP M IVL PHILIPPVS AVG / AEQVITAS AVGG Aequitas hält Waage Füllhorn



Phillip the Arab



Valerian, Victoria Partica

- Valerian I AR Antoninianus. 258-259 AD. VALERIANVS dot P dot F dot AVG, radiate and draped bust right / VICT PARTICA, Victory advancing left, holding wreath and palm, treading down captive beneath foot. Cohen 13.



Gallienus, Fides Militum

- Gallienus AR Antoninianus. 258 AD. GALLIENVS PF AVG, radiate, cuirassed bust right / FIDES MILITVM, Eagle standing left on globe between two standards. RIC V-1, Lyons 14[j] (Joint reign).



Aurelian, Oriens Aug

- Aurelian Æ Antoninianus. Rome mint. IMP AVRELIANVS AVG, radiate cuirassed bust right / ORIENS AVG, Sol standing left with hand raised, foot on one of two bound captives, Q in right field, XXI in ex. Cohen 154, Sear5 11572.



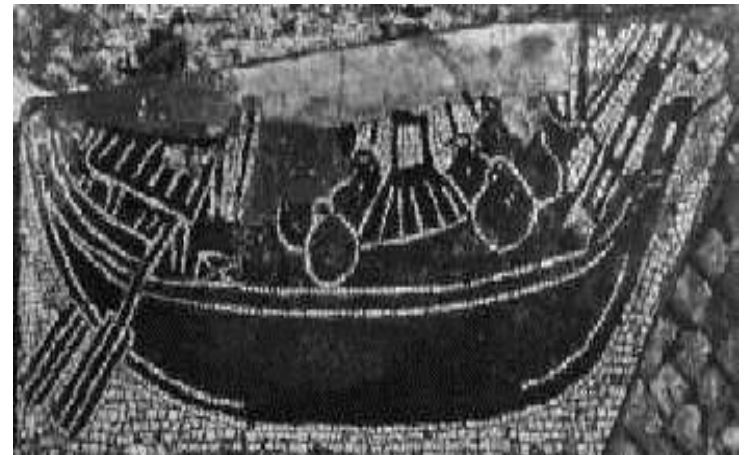
Probus

- Probus AE Antoninianus. Lyons Mint, 278-279 AD. IMP C M AVR PROBUS AVG, radiate cuirassed bust right / ABVNDANTIA AVG, Abundantia standing right emptying cornucopiae, III in ex. Cohen 4.



Changing patterns in the economy?

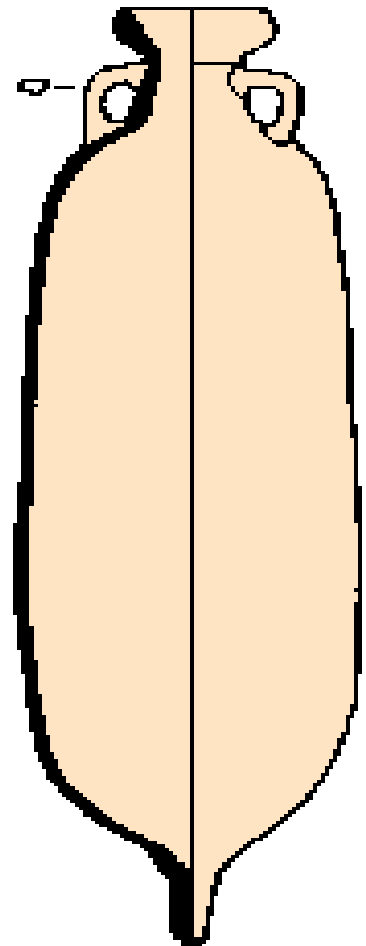
Baetican Oil Amphorae. Distribution, c. 1st to 3rd AD



African oil, production and distribution in Rome. From the second part of the 2nd century onwards



Byzacena
Amphorae. Oil
and fish-sauce



Ceramic: African Red Slip Types

Produced in Tunisia. From the 1st to the 7th c. It is distinguished by a thick-orange red slip over a slightly granular fabric. Interior surfaces are completely covered, while the exterior can be only partially slipped



Summary

- Military and political crisis
- Financial crisis: coin mintage problem
- Economic instability affecting particular regions, products and the structures of the state (transport, distribution etc.). Phenomenon of the provincial interconnection affected by the political situation.
- Problem of the lack of sources
- However: scholarly debate about the global character of the crisis
- Very important: this was a **crisis** not the **end**.