

EMPEROR AURELIAN AND THE SOLAR ECLIPSE OF 272

by

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The Emperor Aurelian's peculiar coinage has been the subject of scholarly interest for a long time. In the latter half of his reign, references to the Sun god, often accompanied with the designation "Invincible" (*Sol Invictus*) definitely came into prominence. The reasons for the issue of the coins dedicated to the Sun god have been a matter of some controversy among historians. It is not even quite certain which solar deity was the object of Aurelian's fervent worship. Most recently, a brand-new view of this question has been proposed by Luigi PEDRONI. He links the issue of Aurelian's coins (in particular, of *RIC* V 319) with the solar eclipse of 8 November 272. In the scholar's opinion, this eclipse was interpreted as a sign of the Sun god's protection over the Emperor during his confrontation with Queen Zenobia, who had ruled the Eastern part of the Roman Empire on behalf of her juvenile son Vaballathus. PEDRONI argues for the date of the decisive battle of Emesa in early November 272¹. This is an interesting, yet completely implausible, hypothesis.

First of all, Roman historians do not say anything about the solar eclipse of 272; nor is it mentioned in the two principal sources on the conflict between Aurelian and Zenobia and the Battle of Emesa: the *Historia Augusta* and

¹ L. PEDRONI, *The Sun without Rays and the Eclipse of 272*, *Journal of Late Antiquity* IV 2011, pp. 116–123. For the most significant modern studies of the conflict between Aurelian and Zenobia, see: R. T. SAUNDERS, *A Biography of the Emperor Aurelian A.D. 270–275*, Ann Arbor 1992, pp. 204–243; E. E. SCHNEIDER, *Septimia Zenobia Sebaste*, Roma 1993, pp. 79 f.; R. STONEMAN, *Palmyra and its Empire. Zenobia's Revolt against Rome*, Ann Arbor 1993, pp. 165–179; E. CIZEK, *L'Empereur Aurélien et son temps*, Paris 1994, pp. 103–122; A. WATSON, *Aurelian and the Third Century*, London–New York 1999, pp. 70–88; U. HARTMANN, *Das Palmyrenische Teilreich*, Stuttgart 2001, pp. 364–394; IDEM, *Das Palmyrenische Teilreich*, in: K. P. JOHNE (ed.), *Die Zeit der Soldaten-Kaiser. Krise und Transformation des Römischen Reiches im 3. Jahrhundert n. Chr. (235–284)*, vol. 1, Berlin 2008, pp. 368–371; R. SUSKI, *Konsolidacja Cesarstwa Rzymskiego za panowania Aureliana 270–275*, Kraków 2008, pp. 102–135; P. SOUTHERN, *Empress Zenobia. Palmyra's Rebel Queen*, London–New York 2008, pp. 131–146.