

Aurelian and Cniva*

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Abstract: In 251 CE the ‘Scythian’/Gothic king Cniva defeated the emperor Decius in the battle of Abritus, and in 271 the emperor Aurelian defeated the Gothic leader Cannabas in a campaign north of the Danube. Dexippus and Jordanes supply the former name, and the *Historia Augusta* provides the latter. This article revisits the hypothesis that Cniva and Cannabas were one and the same person. It argues that the identification is plausible and may help to explain why Ammianus and the *Historia Augusta* attach special importance to Aurelian’s victory over the Goths.

The *Historia Augusta*, in its biography of Aurelian (22.2), narrates how the emperor defeated a Gothic leader named Cannabas or Cannabaudes: ‘For in Thrace and Illyricum he defeated the barbarians who came against him, and on the other side of the Danube he even killed the leader of the Goths, named Cannabas or Cannabaudes, and five thousand men with him.’¹ In 1970 Gerhard Kerler suggested that the passage may derive from a well-informed source, as it mentions specific casualties and the Gothic leader’s name(s).² Two years later, Timothy D. Barnes argued that the passage

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¹ HA, *Aur.* 22.2: *nam in Thraciis et in Illyrico occurrentes barbaros uicit, Gothorum quin etiam ducem Cannaban siue Cannabauden cum quinque milibus hominum trans Danuuium interemit.* Trans. Magie / Rohrbacher 2022, 235. The only other Roman known to have campaigned across the Danube during the troubled years between the Severan and Tetrarchic periods is Aemilian in 253 CE: Zos. 1.28.2.

² Kerler 1970, 228–230, suggesting Dexippus’ *Scythica*.

likely referred to an authentic historical figure.³ While the *Historia Augusta* is a famously problematic source, the references to historical campaigns in its biography of Aurelian line up well with the testimonies of other evidence.⁴ Barnes noted that Aurelian had indeed fought a campaign against Gothic peoples, and numerous inscriptions and papyri confirm that he adopted the title ‘Gothicus’, probably in late 271 CE.⁵ Unfortunately, Dexippus’ account from the *Scythica*, which was written soon after the campaign, no longer survives, and Aurelius Victor’s account of Aurelian has not been preserved in its entirety (*HAB* 35), thus lacking a reference to his Gothic campaign.⁶ However, Eutropius (9.13), whose account derives from Victor, mentions

³ Barnes 1972, 151.

⁴ E.g. Saunders 1992, 326; Kotula 1997, 82. We may also note that the *Historia Augusta* (*Aur.* 21.1–4) is the only surviving source that appears to be correct in recording Aurelian’s defeat against the Juthungi at Placentia in 271 (Saunders 1992, 323–324 n. 62), and, together with Zon. 12.27, appears to provide the correct chronology for Aurelian’s movements in 274–275 (*Aur.* 32.3–4, 35.4; Saunders 1992, 316; unlike *Aur. Vict. HAB* 35.1–3; Zos. 1.61.1–2). Drinkwater 2007, 76 has argued that the *Historia Augusta* invented the defeat at Placentia to develop a more dramatic tale, as the *Libellus breuiatus* (*LB* 35.2) lists Placentia together with Aurelian’s other battles in Italy against the Juthungi as victories. However, while Roman authors did invent Roman victories, the same was not true of defeats, and a defeat helps to explain the Juthungi reaching the Metaurus, the unrest in Rome at that time, and the erection of the Aurelian Wall. Aurelian’s army survived the battle of Placentia and was thus able to pursue the Juthungi and defeat them at Fanum Fortunae and Ticinum; this suggests that Aurelian could have presented Placentia as a success, but probably the success was keeping his army intact after being caught in an ambush, not unlike Caesar’s encounter at Ruspina or Alexander’s initial battle at the Persian Gate. That Aurelian survived the battle and its aftermath is impressive, considering the willingness of Roman soldiers in the third century to overthrow their emperors, but the danger of the situation is absent from the *Libellus breuiatus*, whose author was concerned with producing only a brief notice on the engagements fought in Italy.

⁵ Sotgiu 1961, 22–23; Kettehofen 1986, 143; Peachin 1990, 394–403. He was the second emperor to receive this title, the first of course being Claudius II, who appears to have received it posthumously in 270 (Peachin 86–87). Aurelianic coins minted in Cyzicus use the legend *uictoriae Gothic(ae)* (*RIC* 5.1 nos. 339–340 = Göbl [1993] nos. 295–296), but they appear to predate the campaign in question, dating to the beginning of Aurelian’s reign in 270 (Göbl 62). These coins may refer instead to Aurelian’s successes between 268 and 270 as a commander under Claudius, on which see Watson 1999, 42–46. These earlier successes were likely promoted by Aurelian as part of his bid for power. Previously, the mint at Cyzicus had employed the legend for Claudius (*RIC* 5.1 nos. 251–252).

⁶ On the importance of Aurelius Victor to Late Roman historiography, see now Stover / Woudhuysen 2023, who argue that his lost *Historia*, rather than the hypothetical *Kaisergeschichte* (e.g. Bleckmann, Nickbacht / Scardino 2022), was employed by many later



that Aurelian defeated the Goths with great vigour,⁷ and Ammianus, when explaining the historical background to the battle of Adrianople in 378, describes Aurelian's campaign as the decisive action against the Goths, which effectively concluded the Roman-Gothic wars of the third century (31.5.17): '...but after the illustrious general Claudius became emperor and after he had been snatched from us by a noble death, they were driven out by Aurelian, a vigorous man and a severe avenger of their sins, and remained quiet for long ages, except that afterwards single bands of robbers made raids into the neighbouring regions, but very rarely and to their own destruction.'⁸

As Alaric Watson has observed, Aurelian's victory put an end to a series of Gothic invasions of the Balkans that had occurred on a yearly basis since 267, indeed making it the most decisive victory on the Gothic front.⁹ Although imperial campaigns

authors.

⁷ On Eutropius' use of Aurelius Victor, see Stover / Woudhuysen 2023, 193–234. See also Oros. 7.23.4.

⁸ Amm. 31.5.17: *sed assumpto in imperium Claudio, glorioso ductore, et eodem honesta morte praerepto, per Aurelianum, acrem uirum, et seuerissimum noxarum ultorem, pulsus per longa saecula siluerunt immobiles, nisi quod postea latrocinales globi uicina cum sui exitio rarius incursabant*. Trans. Rolfe 1939, 419. Zosimus' account (1.48.1–49.1) appears to merge Aurelian's campaign against the 'Scythians' (a term that can include Goths; see n. 12) with his campaign against the Vandals (Saunders 1992, 317–318). On the evidence for the Gothic war, see also Kotula 1997, 82–83.

⁹ Watson 1999, 54–55; see also Kerler 1970, 228–230; Kotula 1997, 83; Schwarcz 2020, 398–399. That said, we must acknowledge that possibly around the same time Aurelian made the bold decision to withdraw what remained of Rome's administrative and military presence from Dacia, presumably a lengthy process: Eutr. 9.15; Festus, *Brev.* 8.2; HA, *Aur.* 39.7; Iord. *Rom.* 217; with Okamura 1996, 17–19; Kotula 1997, 83–86; Tausend 1999, 124–127; Watson 1999, 55, 155–157; Hartmann 2008, 314–316; Potter 2014, 266, 633 n. 49; Schwarcz 2020, 399; cf. Cizek 1994, 123–152 and Velkov 1998, who argue that the withdrawal happened later in Aurelian's reign. Prior to Aurelian's reign, Dacia appears to have been lost already to a large degree. The Carpi had been making attacks since the reign of Philip (Zos. 1.20; Potter 1990, 233–234), Gallienus had transferred part of the two Dacian legions to Pannonia Superior, and a source tradition hostile to Gallienus claims that he lost Dacia (Aur. Vict. *HAb* 33.4; Eutr. 9.8; Festus, *Brev.* 8.2). Lactantius (*DMP* 9.2) notes that Galerius' mother Romula fled across the Danube into 'New Dacia' to escape the inroads of the Carpi. In any case, Aurelian's successes on the Danube were enduring not only because of their military impact, as acknowledged by Ammianus, but also because he rationalized the frontier, which allowed him to repopulate the devastated provinces of Moesia with those whom he evacuated from Dacia, and which may have allowed him to withdraw Danubian forces to campaign against Zenobia.



against Gothic peoples resumed from 275 to 276/7,¹⁰ at least in part against groups raiding across the Black Sea, the next major war with a Gothic enemy is not attested until decades later during the reign of Constantine.¹¹ Indeed, for this reason it has been suggested that Dexippus concluded his *Scythica*, his account of Rome's wars against 'Scythian' (Lower Danubian and North Pontic) peoples, with Aurelian's victory, the latest fragments of which relate to Aurelian's wars against the Juthungi, Vandals and Alemanni in 270/1.¹²

But who led the Goths during this climactic war? If the *Historia Augusta's* reference to 'Cannabas or Cannabaudes' reflects a historical figure, as Kerler and Barnes argued,¹³ then who was he? In 1862 Alfred von Gutschmid asserted that, without doubt, 'Cannabas' must be 'Cniva', the 'Scythian'/Gothic leader who defeated and killed the emperor Decius in 251 at the battle of Abritus.¹⁴ Edmund Groag, in his 1903 essay on Aurelian in *Paulys Realencyclopädie*, endorsed this as a possibility.¹⁵ Barnes, following in their footsteps, noted that 'the form 'Cannabas' presumably goes back to an original 'Cniva'.'¹⁶ He thus suggested that 'this man can be identified either as the Cniva who defeated and killed Decius twenty years earlier... or, more probably, his son.' Jordanes' *Getica* (101–103) names Decius' nemesis as 'Cniva', and this leader's

¹⁰ De Blois 2019, 91; Schwarcz 2020, 399–400. On the renewal of fighting in 275, see Watson 1999, 102–104. Probus had adopted Gothicus by 277 (*ILS* 594). See also Gajdukevic 1971, 474 on a victory of the Bosporan king Teiranes over a North Pontic people, dated between 275/6 and 279/80.

¹¹ Brennan 1980, 565–566. Barnes 1976b, 150–153 dates the beginning of this war to 328/9, whereas Brennan 566 n. 47 implicitly prefers 323/4. Licinius appears to have fought against the Goths in 315 (Barnes 154–155).

¹² Kerler 1970, 228–230; Martin 2006, 161. For the debated relationship between the terms 'Gothic' and 'Scythian', see Boteva 2020, 195–202. The earliest uses of the term 'Goth' are the adoption of 'Gothicus' for Claudius (270) and Aurelian (271), and Shapur I's ŠKZ inscription (6 [Huyse]). The latter is dated to the 260s or the beginning of the 270s (Huyse 1999, 1.12–14), but it refers to Gordian III's use of Goths against the Persians from 242 to 244.

¹³ Cf. Wolfram 1988, 400 n. 103 and Goetz / Patzold / Welwei 2013, 100 n. 350, who suggest that 'Cannabas' is a play on 'cannabis', but it is not clear why the author would apply such a pun to this specific character.

¹⁴ Reprinted in von Gutschmid 1894, 330–331.

¹⁵ Groag 1903, 1378. See also the support from Cizek 1994, 106 (tentatively); Watson 1999, 236–237 n. 63. Cf. the scepticism of e.g. Homo 1904, 89–90 n. 2; Hachmann 1970, 113; Paschoud 1996, 136; Gerhardt / Hartmann 2008, 1196–1197.

¹⁶ Barnes 1972, 151–152.



name has since been confirmed through the discovery of the Vindobonensian fragments of Dexippus' *Scythica* (Κνίβαϛ; *Scyth. Vind. fragm.* Ia-b, IIa), where he is also called 'king' (*basileus*).¹⁷ The fact that Dexippus writes 'Cniva' as Κνίβαϛ clearly strengthens the possibility of a connection to 'Cannabas', which matches how one might expect Dexippus' Greek rendering to be reproduced in a Latin text.¹⁸ The presence of a variant name in the *Historia Augusta* – 'Cannabaudes' – must be acknowledged, but, as Barnes noted, if this is not a variant form found in a different source, it may reflect the intrusion of West Germanic names into the *Historia Augusta*'s text.¹⁹

While the matter is of course speculative, we can consider what is plausible based on the available evidence. I suggest that Barnes erred in proposing that an otherwise unattested son of the same name is a more likely candidate for identifying Aurelian's 'Cniva'. There seems no clear reason to favour this alternative. If Cniva can be identified with the Gothic dynast Nidada (Cnidada?), as has sometimes been suggested,²⁰ then Cniva's son of note was his successor Ovida (*Iord. Get.* 113). But leaving aside that possibility, twenty years is an unexceptional length of rule.²¹ As the earliest Roman clash with the 'Scythians' may have taken place in 238 (HA, *Max. et Balb.* 16.3, citing Dexippus),²² and since 'Scythian' raids on the Roman Empire only

¹⁷ These fragments are collected in Martin / Grusková 2020.

¹⁸ This of course disproves the hypothesis of von Gutschmid 1894, 330–331 that Cassiodorus inserted Cniva/Cannabas, known from Aurelian's reign, into the reign of Decius to fill a gap in Gothic knowledge.

¹⁹ Barnes 1972, 152: '...the author may have been influenced by the thought of one of two historical persons: the Gennoboudes who received a kingdom from Maximian... or the Frankish chief Genobaudes attested in 388'. For the former, see *Pan. Lat.* X(2).10.3, as well as *Pan. Lat.* XI(3).5.4, which identifies him as a Frank (Nixon / Rodgers 1994, 68 n. 35), and for the latter see Gregory of Tours, *Hist. Franc.* 2.9. See also Merten 1968, 111–112 n. 29; Paschoud 1996, 136. We might also consider the examples of the Frankish king Mallobaudes (*Amm.* 30.3.7, 31.10.6–10) and the Alemannic king Hariobaudus (*Amm.* 18.2.15–18). Cf. Wolfram 1988, 400 n. 103, who saw 'Cannabas' as a Greek derivation of 'Cannabaudes'.

²⁰ E.g. Wolfram 2020, 18.

²¹ Cf. Kotula 1997, 82 n. 103 and Wolfram 2020, 18, who are sceptical on account of the duration of time.

²² For Barnes 1978, 61, this passage contains authentic information. Paschoud 2020, 168–169 instead argues that the date is incorrect, as, for him, it conflicts with Petr. Patr. fragm. 8 (*FHG* IV, 186–187), which implies that, at some point during Gordian III's reign the Goths had been receiving annual subsidies. But if we date this diplomatic situation to later in Gordian's reign then it does not clash with a conflict in 238 (see e.g. the reconstruction in de Blois 2019, 62).



became a perennial problem from 248/50 onwards, perhaps suggesting political change north of the Danube, Cniva could well have been a relatively new ruler in 251 when he defeated the emperor Decius.²³ If Cniva, as *basileus*, was a supreme commander rather than a continuously reigning monarch,²⁴ it still does not strain belief that a successful commander reappeared in the field twenty years later, especially if the commander had the reputation that came with destroying a Roman emperor alongside the imperial Roman army.²⁵

Moreover, an identification with this Cniva could help to explain why Aurelian's victory was so impactful. Cniva was among the most formidable enemy commanders that Rome ever faced. Leading probably a mixed coalition of 'Scythian' peoples, he won multiple victories on Roman soil in a campaign fought from 250 to 251.²⁶ Facing off against the formidable emperor Decius,²⁷ he defeated the emperor at

²³ Jordanes (*Get.* 89–90) indicates that the Goths, initially led by Ostrogotha, began their new bout of raiding across the Danube in 248, which is supported by Boteva 2001; see also Martin / Grusková 2014, 746–747 n. 44. Mitthof 2020, 327–328, noting confusion in Jordanes' chronology, with Ostrogotha incorrectly reported to have died before Cniva's campaign in 250–251 (*Get.* 101), instead dates the beginning of the war to 250 (however, Brodersen 2020, 154 suggests that the death mentioned by Jordanes' source was actually that of Philip rather than the death of Ostrogotha). Potter 1990, 234–235 interprets *Oracula Sibyllina* 13.35–36, alluding to Germani and the Ocean, as an indication of raids across the Black Sea under Philip, but the Romans did not regard the Goths and 'Scythians' as Germani, and, while the Black Sea was seen to have derived from the Atlantic (Plin. *HN* 6.1), 'Ocean' typically denoted the latter.

²⁴ Thus e.g. Piso 2020, 338–339, who uses Jordanes' account to argue that Cniva had eclipsed Ostrogotha, who is king in Jordanes' account of events in the late 240s but is only *archon* in Dexippus' account of the campaign against Decius in 250–251, albeit operating with his own army (see also Grusková / Martin 2014, 40–42).

²⁵ We can compare this scenario to the careers of Roman magistrates who were repeatedly granted *imperium* over the course of several decades, such as Valerius Corvus, Fabius Maximus Rullianus, Curius Dentatus, Claudius Marcellus and Fabius Maximus Verrucosus.

²⁶ Perhaps due to the embarrassment of Rome's defeat, some Roman authors (e.g. Aur. Vict. *HAb* 29.4; Zos. 1.23.1–2) shifted the site of Cniva's final victory over Decius to beyond the Danube (Potter 2018, 30, 32–34). On this war, see the papers in Mitthof / Martin / Grusková 2020.

²⁷ The Romans often explained away their defeats through claims of incompetence or treachery among the Roman leadership (see e.g. Potter 2018; 2022), a practice that can obfuscate the fact that good leaders can be bested by better leaders, but the emperors of the mid third century, a period when military rebellion was rife, were unlikely to have succeeded in establishing their rule, however briefly, without there being some confidence in their military



Beroea (Augusta Traiana) in Thrace (Sync. 459, citing Dexippus [Mosshammer]; Iord. *Get.* 102), thereby destroying an auxiliary force (*Scyth. Vind.* fragm. IIa-IIb), and after a feigned retreat he seized the Thracian capital Philippopolis through a surprise night assault (*Scyth. Vind.* fragm. Ia-Ib, IIa).²⁸ Most famously, through an elaborate series of ambushes near Abritus (see esp. Zos. 1.23), he then crushed Decius' army and seized the imperial camp treasury, with Decius' corpse being lost in a swamp.²⁹ This defeat was so devastating that the new emperor, Trebonianus Gallus, felt it necessary to resume paying subsidies to the Goths, who returned to their homeland with senatorial prisoners in tow.³⁰

credentials. Indeed, Decius had enjoyed multiple governorships (including Moesia Inferior and possibly Germania Inferior), received an extraordinary military command in Pannonia and Moesia in 249, and defeated the larger army of Philip at the battle of Verona (Birley 1998, 59–67; de Blois 2019, 66). While Decius' decision to battle the Goths near swampy terrain was a risk, both Maximinus 'Thrax' (Hdn. 7.2.5–8) and Galerius (*Origo* 2.3) won battles in similar circumstances. Previously, Decius may have inflicted a setback on Cniva at Nicopolis (Sync. 459 [Mosshammer]; but cf. Iord. *Get.* 101), and he appears to have won a great victory over the Gothic *archon* Ostrogotha (*Scyth. Vind.* fragm. IIa-IIb; see also Zos. 1.23.1; with Grusková / Martin 2014, 43 on the possible suppression of this defeat in Gothic historical tradition), although Mitthof 2020, 328–329 argues that there was only one victory over the Goths, that Syncellus' condensed account probably only refers to the defeat of Ostrogotha, not a defeat suffered by Cniva at Nicopolis. Decius maintained control over his army despite the defeat at Beroea, and he survived the usurpations of Jotapian, Valens and Priscus (Kienast / Eck / Heil 2017, 194, 199). In the case of the latter two, who began their usurpations by rebelling against Decius (Jotapian had rebelled against Philip), they did not seize power through military rebellions (Aur. Vict. *HAb* 29.2–3; Iord. *Get.* 103), which again suggests that Decius was trusted by the military. Similarly, Valerian, although he eventually suffered defeat to Shapur I in 260, appears to have enjoyed an illustrious senatorial career (Kienast / Eck / Heil 205; *contra LB* 32.1), had been entrusted by Trebonianus Gallus with assembling an army to deal with Aemilian, had likely secured a victory against Aemilian at Spoletium in 253 (*LB* 31.2, which may explain the murder of Aemilian by his own soldiers; cf. Zos. 1.28.3), and elicited sufficient loyalty as emperor that he never faced a noteworthy usurpation (with the possible exception of the obscure and all-but-forgotten Silbannacus: Kienast / Eck / Heil 208).

²⁸ See also Dexipp. *Scyth.* fragm. 23–24 (Martin).

²⁹ See also Lact. *DMP* 4.3; Aur. Vict. *HAb* 29.4–5; Eutr. 9.4; Amm. 31.13.13; Iord. *Get.* 103; *LB* 29.2; Sync. 459 [Mosshammer]; Zon. 12.20. For the loss of the treasury, see Bursche 2013; Bursche / Myzgin 2020.

³⁰ Zos. 1.24. If there is any truth to Jordanes' claim (*Get.* 94–100) that the Goths in c. 249/50 fought off an expansionist Gepid named Fastida who had previously defeated the Burgundians, battling him at a settlement named Galtis, then Cniva may have come to prominence through this war. It has been suggested that this war against Fastida is a mistaken reference to a conflict fought between the Tervingian Goths and Taifali on the one hand and Vandals and



If Cannabas is to be identified with this Cniva, then this helps to explain the representation of Aurelian's campaign in Ammianus and the *Historia Augusta*. Constantine claimed that Claudius II, the first emperor to be nicknamed 'Gothicus', was his ancestor, and so the Constantinian lens through which fourth century authors wrote naturally meant that Claudius' victory over the Goths at Naissus in 269 received more attention than the later successes of Aurelian. But as Zosimus' account makes clear (1.45–46), Claudius' war against the Goths was not wholly decisive.³¹ Ammianus appears to avoid this obfuscation of history when he gives the most credit to Aurelian in countering the Gothic threat. While the fact that this campaign brought an end to multiple years of fighting in the Balkans could itself justify Ammianus' acknowledgement without need for an illustrious enemy leading the Goths, the defeat and death of such an infamous enemy certainly would have added to the memory of a great campaign that, to an extent, managed to survive the Constantinian manipulation of history. Ammianus' account of Aurelian's reign no longer survives, and so we do not know whether he knew of Cannabas, but the fact that both Ammianus and the *Historia Augusta* made heavy use of Aurelius Victor strengthens the likelihood that all three authors knew of him.³²

Moreover, the *Historia Augusta* treats Cannabas as a figure of great importance. The author mentions him by name, which, in the case of enemy leaders from European 'Barbaricum', only happens in one other passage of the *Historia Augusta*,³³ and he claims (*Aur.* 33.3) that Aurelian's triumph in 274 included a chariot

Gepids on the other, attested in c. 290 (*Pan. Lat.* XI(3).17.1; thus e.g. Wolfram 1988, 58–59, 398 n. 3; 2020, 30), but the fact that Jordanes did not mention this later conflict does not require such a solution, as his history of the Goths is not comprehensive – e.g. he does not mention the war fought between Burgundians and non-Tervingian Goths in c. 290 (*Pan. Lat.* XI[3].17.1), nor the Gothic-Carpic war of c. 303 (Lact. *DMP* 38.6; with Barnes 1976a, 191) –, and indeed multiple wars were fought in the region (thus e.g. the fighting between Goths, Sarmatians and possibly Vandals during the reign of Constantine: Jer. *Chron.* 233; Iord. *Get.* 113–115; *Origo* 6.31).

³¹ See also Watson 1999, 46 ('At the time of Claudius' death the Gothic wars remained unfinished business.');

³² On their close engagement with Aurelius Victor, see Stover / Woudhuysen 2023, 193–366. Stover and Woudhuysen's argument that much of Late Roman historiography revolved around Aurelius Victor's now lost *Historia* persuades this author, but the standard interpretation is that Aurelius Victor, Ammianus and the *Historia Augusta* were employing a common source, the hypothetical *Kaisergeschichte* (Bleckmann / Nickbacht / Scardino 2022).

³³ For the other passage, see *Gord.* 31.1, where the author mentions the 'Scythian' Argunt, possibly the Goth Argaitus (Iord. *Get.* 91). For a prosopographical list of 'barbarian' leaders from the mid and late third century who are mentioned in Roman sources, see Gehardt /



drawn by four stags, said to have belonged once to the Gothic king (he then sacrificed the stags on the Capitol). The author then relates (34.1) that ten Gothic women marched in the procession, who, having fought in male clothing, were captured after many Goths had been killed, and were labelled 'Amazons'. While the author's description of Aurelian's triumph is fanciful and hints at the mythologization attached to imperial triumphs,³⁴ the repeated mention of the Goths and their king, the only European 'barbarian' to be associated with a chariot in this triumph (the other chariots belonged to Odaenathus, Zenobia and the Persian king: 33.2), reinforces the impression that Cannabas was more important than Aurelian's other 'barbarian' enemies.

If Cannabas can be identified with Cniva, then this helps to explain why the Roman victory in 271 was so decisive. From 248/50 to 271, the Roman Empire had experienced numerous incursions by 'Scythians', including Goths and other peoples with whom they were associated by the Romans, such as the Heruli, Borani and Urugundi.³⁵ While Cniva became famous for his victories from 250 to 251, it is possible that he continued to profit from the raiding of Rome's provinces and the sacking of its cities.³⁶ If Aurelian, by following the Goths back across the Danube, succeeded in killing an enemy both infamous and militarily brilliant – and what is more possibly a continuing threat to Rome's provinces –, then perhaps the emperor succeeded in reinvigorating Roman confidence while destroying the morale of the Goths.³⁷ This reconstruction is speculative, but it strikes me as plausible. If true, it would have been

Hartmann 2008, 1192–1198.

³⁴ Paschoud 1996, 160–169; with Maris 2025 on the mythologization of the female warriors.

³⁵ See e.g. Zos. 1.27.1, 31. The 'Urugundi' are called 'Burugundi' in Agath. 5.11.2, 4, and may have been eastern Burgundians (Wolfram 1988, 413 n. 336).

³⁶ That said, we should acknowledge the 'Scythian' leaders mentioned in relation to this intervening period, namely Respa, Veduco and Tharvaro, who led one of the raids into Asia and are referred to by Jordanes as *duces* of the Goths (*Get.* 107), and the Herulian leader Naulobatus, who received the *ornamenta consularia* from Gallienus after that emperor's victory at the battle of the Nessus in 268 (Sync. 467 [Mosshammer]).

³⁷ See also Wolfram 1988, 35, who, considering an identification of Cannabas with Cniva, suggests that the destruction of Cniva and his people led to a reshuffling of the 'western' Goths, leading to the formation of the Tervingi, first attested in c. 290 (*Pan. Lat.* XI(3).17.1). In 2020, 18, Wolfram sees a connection between the fall of Cannabas and the formation of the Tervingi, regardless of whether Cannabas was Cniva.



a fitting success for the martial emperor, one of Rome's most impressive military commanders.³⁸

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³⁸ As an addendum, it is worth pointing out that Aurelian is already known to have commanded with brilliance against another highly formidable commander, Zenobia's principal general Septimius Zabdas, using clever cavalry and infantry tactics to win the battles of Immae and Emesa in 272 (Zos. 1.50–53). Probably having distinguished himself in the campaigns of Odaenathus, in the summer and autumn of 270 Zabdas conquered Egypt over the course of two expeditions, defeating and capturing the crafty and successful commander Tenagino Probus at a hill near the fortress of Babylon through a surprise manoeuvre (Zos. 1.44). Zabdas may well be the same general who wiped out the army of Heraclianus (HA, *Gall.* 13.5 with Potter 2014, 262), who was probably sent against Zenobia in 269 or 270, and he likely led the campaign that annexed Arabia Petraea, destroying the general Trassus and his army (*IJGLS* 9107; Malal. 12.28) and possibly warring against the Tanukhids (Andrade 2018, 174–175), as this was probably a precursor to the Egyptian campaigns (Andrade 173–174). Fittingly, he almost overcame Aurelian's cavalry at Emesa, who manoeuvred to avoid being outflanked by Zabdas' horsemen but were closely pursued all the same, at which point units of Aurelian's infantry, specially equipped to deal with super-heavy cavalry, wheeled around and attacked the enemy's exposed flanks (Zos. 1.52.3–53.3).



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