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**The crisis of the Roman Empire in the IVth century Latin
historiographical breviaries**

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PhD thesis summary

Introduction

During its existence, the Roman Empire experienced a variety peak of moments politically, economically, socially, militarily, etc. On the other hand, it also went through difficult moments, when the entire state structure was shaken under the impact of internal or external events. Such a stage was overcome during of the IIIrd century. Delineated by the rise of the first emperor outside the senatorial order, Maximinus Thrax (235-238), and the seizure of power by Diocletianus (284-305), this is the longest crisis in chronological terms and the most complex in terms of forms of manifestation. Historiographically, it is known as the "Crisis of the Roman Empire in the middle of the IIIrd century".

Many historians have shown interest in this period, trying to provide clarity on the forms of its manifestation. However, there is no consensus among scholars even today. Moreover, among the most recent studies devoted to the subject, revisionist opinions have made their presence felt, which considers the term "crisis" to be inappropriate for the period in the middle of the IIIrd century. Instead, variants are proposed that do not imply the idea of a generalized crisis, but rather the existence of hotbeds of instability (soldiers' revolts, barbarian invasions, territorial losses and others).

The entire polemic developed around the crisis was constantly perpetuated by the lack of contemporary literary sources. It is already well known that the only literary works written during the crisis belong to Greek historians, such as Cassius Dio, Herodian and Dexippos. Otherwise, fragments of works of other Greek authors have been identified, which have not been preserved to this day: Asinius Quadratus, Nikostratos of Trebizond, Eusebius of Nantes. On the other hand, Latin literary sources written during the crisis do not exist. Only from the second half of the IVth century, works do appear in Latin in which specific realities of the period of the middle of the IIIrd century are encountered. These are the breviaries: *Liber de Caesaribus* (*Book about emperors*) (cca 358-360/1) pertaining to Sextus Aurelius Victor (cca 320/7 – post-388/9); *Breuiarium ab Vrbe condita* (*Breviary from the foundation of Rome*) (369) written by Flavius Eutropius (cca 320-390); *Breuiarium rerum gestarum populi Romani* (*Brief history of the Roman people*) (369-370) by Festus (sec. IV); *Epitome de Caesaribus* (*Epitome about emperors*) (c. 395–401/2), attributed to Pseudo-Aurelius Victor (second half of IVth century – first decades of Vth century).

The objective of this scientific endeavor was to analyze the IVth century Latin narrative sources, elaborated by pagan authors, concerning the crisis of the Roman Empire in the middle of the IIIrd century. The focus was exclusively on these works, because we wanted to provide a complete and unified picture of how IVth pagan historians, members of a declining social, political, and religious group, interpreted IIIrd century events which influenced the state structure of the late Roman Empire. However, the works of Christian authors were not entirely avoided, as they were consulted punctually in certain situations. An analysis similar to that applied to the works of pagan breviators is far-sighted, but in order to highlight as concretely as possible the peculiarities of the Christian conception over of the crisis of the middle of the IIIrd century, we consider that this approach could be the subject of a distinct work.

Until present times, contemporary historiography has been focused on the literary works of Greek authors contemporary to the crisis, while abbreviated writings have been used tangentially. Domestically, there are only some studies that address aspects adjacent to our subject, such as the vocabulary of sovereign power, the political ideas of epitomators and their religious orientation or the concept of *bonus princeps*. The lack of interest regarding these historians, from the perspective of the issues we are considering, was due to the fact that their writings are considered compilations, reduced in information and didactic porpouse. Overcoming these prejudices, we considered necessary to the in-depth study the works of the aforementioned authors, in order to highlight particular and original elements about the crisis of the Roman Empire in relation to the Greek authors contemporary with that phenomenon. The fact that in recent years editions of abbreviated works have appeared in English, French, German, Spanish, Italian and Romanian has also been an impetus to undertake this type of analysis.

Therefore, the lack of extensive scientific approaches that deal with such a complex phenomenon in the history of the Roman state, such as the mid-IIIth century crisis in abbreviated works, encourages this chosen research direction and gives its originality. Another element of novelty is the detailed analysis of the vocabulary used by the breviators in rendering the forms of manifestation of the crisis (political, institutional, military, moral, etc.). This type of investigation had as starting point the dissertation thesis *The Image of Emperor Aurelianus (270-275) in Latin Breviators*, wich was also written under the guidance of Professor Nelu Zugravu at the end of my masters cycle. During documentation, the premises of a more comprehensive research on the entire phenomenon were identified. In carrying out this analysis, had as a considerable contribution was made by the entire activity

carried out under the aegis of the Center for Classical and Christian Studies in Iasi, which included colloquia, conferences, summer schools and, especially, seminars dedicated to methods of editing and interpreting Greco-Latin sources. We point out that members of the Faculty of Classical Languages also participated in these scientific events, a salutary action with a positive impact on the chosen research direction.

In order to emphasize more concretely how the late Latin breviators rendered in their works the realities specific to the Roman world during the IIIrd century, we have tried to distance ourselves, as much as possible, from the classical model of approaching the subject, in which the chronological criterion prevails. **For this reason, the work acquired the following structure: 1. Introduction; 2. The crisis of the Roman Empire in the middle of the IIIrd century in contemporary historiography; 3. Late Latin Breviators - Life and Work; 4. Chronology of the the mid-IIIrd century crisis Roman Empire in IVth century Latin breviators; 5. The content of the crisis of the Roman Empire of the middle of the IIIrd century in late Latin breviators: manifestations and remedies; 6. Conclusions.**

The first section of the paper is dedicated to an issue whose magnitude can be the very subject of independent research. For this reason, we have confined ourselves to a brief presentation of the current historiographical play.

The second section is reserved for the authors of the four abbreviated works on which we have concentrated. Appealing to the specialized literature and to some information encountered in the literary sources submitted to our attention, **we have drawn a profile of each breviator, taking into consideration aspects related to origin, social background, education and administrative career. We have also outlined the main characteristics, in general and in particular, of their works: the interval in which they were written, the main sources consulted, the purpose of the works and the core ideas emanating from their content.**

In the third section I offered a personal perspective over the periodization of the crisis from a factual point of view. More precisely, having as main separation criterion the reigns of the sovereigns and the events that occurred during them, sectioning the interval 192-284, we identified the following stages: **prelude to the crisis, onset of crisis, lull period, exacerbation of crisis, peak of crisis and exit from crisis.**

The fourth section is devoted to forms of manifestation of crisis and their remedies. In order to capture them as concretely as possible, a subchapter was dedicated to each form of manifestation. In doing so, we applied the principle of cause and effect. **The most important and original aspect of this section is the extensive analysis of the terminology of the**

***Breviary* crisis. On this account, we tried to capture both the common elements and the particularities of each work.**

The most used method of work was the classical one, **text analysis**. Where appropriate, by means of the **comparative method**, we managed to highlight the main text divergences between the four works. This method has been applied punctually in support or in refutation of information from *Breviary*, by relating them to other literary sources of the IVth century, namely the collection of imperial biographies called *Historia Augusta, Res gestae* by Ammianus Marcellinus, *Lactantius, De mortibus persecutorum* **and, of course, to epigraphic, numismatic or other sources**. Finally, using the **statistical method** we detected certain frequencies of terms and formulas that helped us highlight some personal opinions of the breviators.

In rendering Latin texts we used for *Liber de Caesaribus, Breviarium rerum gestarum populi Romani* and *Epitome de Caesaribus*, the Romanian editions curated by Nelu Zugravu; for *Opera Breviarium ab Vrbe condita* we mainly used Gheorghe Șerban's edition and, in specific cases, we used Harold Bird's English edition. I mention that the translations encountered in the thesis do not belong to us and are also taken from the Romanian editions.

Chapter I

The crisis of the Roman Empire in the middle of the IIIrd century in contemporary historiography

In this first chapter we have captured the evolution of the subject "the crisis of the Roman Empire in the middle of the IIIrd century" in international historiography. Starting from the first mentions of a generalized decline found in the work of the English historian Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, we followed the main historiographical currents. In this regard, we have highlighted the existence of three stages.

The first of them is specific to the period of the mid - XXth century when, within the most important European historiographical schools, works dealing with the crisis were published, the most notable of them being signed by authors such as Roger Rémondon, Jean-Pierre Callu, Ramsay MacMullen or Geza Alföldy. Their writings defined the concept of "crisis" and laid the foundation for future research directions.

In the second stage, between 1990 and 2010, a new generation of historians stood out, among them Michel Christol, Pat Southern, David S. Potter and Olivier Hekster. Their studies problematized the chronology of the crisis and its content.

The third stage, which is recurrent today, is marked by revisionism. The latest approaches preferring terms such as 'transformation', 'accelerated transformation', 'isolated disasters' or 'continuous evolution' to 'crisis'. The new paradigm of crisis research has led to an even broader diversification of the subject. In this respect, works have been written whose multidisciplinary approaches focused on epigraphic, numismatic and, in particular, archaeological sources.

These polemics are favored by the lack of literary sources written during the crisis. It is well known that the only surviving works are by Greek authors (Cassius Dio, Herodian, Dexippus etc.), contemporary with the early period of this phenomenon. On the other hand, literary sources written in Latin, contemporary to the crisis do not exist or, more likely, have not been preserved. It was not until the second half of the IVth century that Latin works appeared in which information was identified about the crisis of the Roman Empire in the mid - IIIth century, including the works of Latin breviators: *Aurelius Victor's Liber de Caesaribus*; *Eutropius' Breviarium ab Vrbe condita*; *Breviarium rerum gestarum populi Romani* of Festus; *Epitome de Caesaribus*, attributed to an anonymous man known in literature as Pseudo-Aurelius Victor.

Therefore, at this moment, on account of these two major lines of research, the case of the crisis of the Roman Empire in the middle of the third century is far from closed, as suggested by the numerous works dedicated to this period published in recent years.

Chapter II

Latin historiographic breviators - Life and work

In the second chapter, using some information found in the works of the breviators, but also the secondary bibliography dedicated to them, we have compiled a biographical sheet for each author, focusing on aspects related to origin, education and political career. At the same time, we have provided a series of information regarding their works, following in particular the details given by the context of their writing, their content and the historical concepts emanating from their ranks.

Sextus Aurelius Victor, *Liber de Caesaribus*

Sextus Aurelius Victor was a Roman historian of African descent born between 320 and 327. As evidenced by the line of his work, he had a humble origin, having a poor and illiterate father. His political rise was facilitated by the education he received in the early part of his life. From the little information that has been preserved about his political career, it appears that in 361 Sextus Aurelius Victor was at *Sirmium* where he met Julianus (361-363). On this occasion the

sovereign appointed him governor (*consularis*) of the province of *Pannonia Secunda*, a position which facilitated the breviator's access to the senatorial order. Until 389 we are not aware of other magistracies performed by Sextus Aurelius Victor. It was not until Theodosius I (379-395) that he came to occupy the new position, namely that of prefect of Rome. Other information about this history has not been identified, which is why the year of his death is uncertain.

Sextus Aurelius Victor is the author of a historical work particularly known as *Liber de Caesaribus*. Most likely written between 358 and 361 without, a commissioner, it narrates in the form of imperial biographical medallions the history of Rome from Augustus (27 BC-14 AD) to Constantius II (337-361). The editors of Sextus Aurelius Victor concluded that his work represents an original mixture of rules and procedures found in other literary genres. Thus, *Liber de Caesaribus* falls into the literary genre of *the breuiarium*, a representative genre of Late Antiquity which, in a few pages, familiarized members of the Roman administrative apparatus and sovereigns with the deeds of their ancestors.

Flavius Eutropius, *Breviarium ab Vrbe condita*

In chronological order, the second abbreviated work belongs to Flavius Eutropius. We know that he was born around 320 and had a remarkable political career being appointed throughout his life to various positions: *magister memoriae*, proconsul of Asia, *comes rerum privatarum*, *praefectus praetorio Orientis* and, finally, consul, during the reign of Valentinianus II (375-392). His work, *Breviarium ab Vrbe condita*, was written during 369 at the instigation of Emperor Valens (364–378). Therefore, it had a specific purpose, to acquaint Valens, emperor from among soldiers, with the deeds of famous men in Roman history.

The Breviarium ab Vrbe condita narrates in a concise, pedagogical and linear manner the history of Rome from its founding (753 BC) to the accession of Valens (364). The work has ten books, in which the publishers found the existence of three unequal parts, delimited by the forms of government and the sources used: part one, which covers the royal period and the republican period, until the assassination of Julius Caesar (I-VI); the second part, in which the biographies of the emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty and that of the Flavians (VII) are encountered; the third part, which begins with the reign of Nerva (96-98) and ends with the beginning of the reign of Valens (364) (VIII-X).

Rufius Festus, *Breviarium rerum gestarum populi Romani*

It was also at the request of Emperor Valens that the *Breviarium rerum gestarum populi Romani* was drafted by Rufius Festus in 369. The author is known to have been a member of

the senatorial order and to have served in turn a number of magistracies (*magister memoriae*, *consularis Syriae* and *proconsul* of Asia).

Compared to the other abbreviated works that appeared during the IVth century, that of Festus was very likely written using a smaller number of sources. Among scholars there is a suspicion that the main source of Festus was the work of Eutropius. However, it is possible that the similarities between the two works have as their starting point a common source. At the same time, for the Kingdom, the Republic and for the early years of the Principality, the works of Livy and Florus were consulted.

The concise and simplistic style assumed by Festus must be seen in the context of the impending Roman-Persian conflict and Valens' lack of culture. On account of this, Eutropius' work narrated in ten books the history of Rome, from its foundation to the reign of Valens, while in the work of Festus for the same chronological interval 30 chapters are allocated. Broadly speaking, exegetes have divided these 30 sections into four parts: I - chapters 1-3, containing the imperial dedication, a brief description of Roman political regimes and Roman expansion during these stages; II - chapters 4-9, in which the expansionist wars in the Western parts are recalled; III - chapters 10-14, which envisages the eastward expansion of the Romans; IV - chapters 15-30, which depict the Roman-Persian conflicts.

Pseudo-Aurelius Victor, *Epitome de Caesaribus*

The last abbreviated work belongs to an anonymous man, confused for a long time with Aurelius Victor, known among historians with the title of *Epitome de Caesaribus*. Until recently, the *Epitome de Caesaribus* was thought to represent a more condensed form of Sextus Aurelius Victor's *Liber de Caesaribus*. However, analyzing the texts, exegetes pointed out the existence of information adjacent to those found in the *Liber de Caesaribus*, which is why this hypothesis was rejected. In this case, it is considered that the work of Aurelius Victor was only a consulted source. Given these aspects and the lack of any information to help profile the identity of the author, a consensus has been reached among exegetes that - the *Epitome de Caesaribus* is the work of an anonymous man whom modern historiography calls Pseudo-Aurelius Victor. The editors of Pseudo-Aurelius Victor's work managed to nuance, based on the sources used, ideas and intentionality, certain aspects related to the cultural, social, political and religious views belonging to this anonymous. In this regard, scholars believe that he was a member of the entourage of a high-ranking official in the political-literary circle of the *Nicomachi-Symmachi*, in the second half of the IVth century and the first decades of the Vth century. As for his origin, most likely, he was a resident of Rome, as evidenced by the numerous

topographical details of the city and its surroundings. His political orientation was favorable to the Senate, but towards which, at times, he did not hesitate to adopt a critical attitude. Finally, he was a follower of the ancestral Roman religion.

The Epitome de Caesaribus was written sometime between the last years of the IVth century and the early years of the Vth century and presents the evolution of Rome from Augustus (27 BC – 14 AD) to the death of Theodosius (395) in the form of imperial biographical medallions. In it, the author managed to reveal certain beliefs and create an ideal model of the emperor by narrating events and depicting characters. Several emperors, such as Augustus, Vespasianus, Trajanus, Aurelianus, and Theodosius, stand out in this regard. This tendency is not unique to Pseudo-Aurelius Victor, but represents an obsession with laudatory, historiographical, biographical, and poetic literature of Late Antiquity. Thus, *the Epitome* refers to the ancient political theologies of the Savior Emperor expressed in the times of the Classical Empire through the concepts of *Salus Augusta (Publica)* and *Securitas Populi Romani (Publica, Imperii, Generis Humani)*

Chapter III

Chronology of the crisis of the Roman Empire from the middle of the IIIrd century in the Latin breviators of the IVth century

In the third chapter, analyzing the content of the abbreviated works, we established the chronological limits of the crisis. Sextus Aurelius Victor, Eutropius and Pseudo-Aurelius Victor frame the crisis chronologically between the reigns of Maximinus Thrax (235–238) and Diocletianus (284–305). These landmarks cannot be applied to the work of Festus, because he presents the expansion of the Romans, and in this context, internal facts from the analyzed period are not encountered.

At the same time, we have captured some forms of manifestation of the crisis in the period between the reigns of Commodus (180-192) and that of Alexander Severus (222-235). For this reason, the final chronological scheme was divided as follows: prelude to crisis, onset of crisis, period of calm or fragile stability, exacerbation of crisis, peak of crisis and end of crisis.

Prelude to crisis (192–235)

For this period, we have identified the following forms of manifestation. Internally we have noted the following: the tendency of sovereigns such as Commodus and Heliogabalus to redefine imperial authority and legitimacy by associating them with various deities (Hercules and Elagabalus); imposing the will of the army in the "constitutional" process of appointing

emperors and co-emperors, as seen in the case of Didius Julianus, Septimius Severus, Macrinus and Alexander Severus; internal conflicts such as those, between supporters of Pertinax and those of Didius Julianus; civil wars caused by the existence of several pretenders to the imperial throne; fratricidal struggles after the death of Septimius Severus; the inability of sovereigns to establish a sustainable dynasty. Externally, we caught the following: the escalation of war with the Parthian Empire and, subsequently, with the Sassanid Empire, the intensification of barbarian raids and wars with them, as well as the emergence of new external populations, especially of Germanic origin, such as the Alamanni. Thus, the onset of the crisis is shaped by a series of factors, both internal (institutional, religious and ethical) and external (invasions of barbarians and the escalation of war between Romans and Sassanids).

Onset of crisis (235-238)

For the breviators, the onset of the crisis was marked by a lack of consensus between senators, legions and the population of Rome. On account of this dissension, a civil war broke out during which decision-makers supported their suitor. Maximinus Thrax was initially supported by the army and Gordianus I by the Senate. Then, after the liquidation of the revolt in North Africa and the appointment of Pupienus and Balbinus, the legions remained loyal to Maximinus, the senators supported Pupienus and Balbinus, while the population of Rome demanded the enthronement of a member of the Gordian family. Finally, the acceptance of Gordianus III as emperor by all factors involved in the appointment of the sovereign brought to an end one of the most violent periods in Roman history.

Period of lull or fragile stability (238-249)

At this stage of the crisis, we have identified in the works of the breviators aspects that point to a period of stability, which was under the sign of practices and customs meant to reaffirm old habits. Also, this revival of the Roman state was correlated by the authors of the *breviaria* with the the millennium celebration of Rome, an event that took place between 21 and 23 April 247. Within these, the main idea was that of a new founding of *SAECULUM NOVUM*. Also, during this timeline, by paying subsidies, Philip ended the war with the Sassanids.

Worsening crisis (249-253)

According to abbreviated works, between 249 and 253, the forms of manifestation of the crisis increased in the context of intensifying raids by barbarian peoples. More concretely, I pointed out that the defeat of the Romans in the battle of *Abrytus* (251) represents the beginning of the process of decentralization of the Roman Empire. This explains the significant

number of usurpers mentioned by the breviators during this period. At the same time, political and military instability led to the resumption of dissensions between senators and legions.

Peak of crisis (253-268)

Unanimously, the reigns of Valerianus and Gallienus represent for the breviators the climax of the crisis. During these years, barbarian nations threatened Rome, the centrifugal tendencies of the outlying provinces reached their climax with the emergence of secessionist states: the Gallic Empire in the West and the Kingdom of Palmyra in the East, and Gallienus faced numerous usurpers. However, this disastrous stage for the Romans was also hopeful. In this sense, Gallienus' commanders who had been subjected to heavy military trials would usher in a period of recovery for the Roman Empire.

End of crisis (268-284)

According to abbreviated sources, the exit from the crisis was due to the ascension of emperors from among the ranks of commanders who worked during Gallienus' time. We pointed out that the recovery was possible thanks to the military, moral and administrative qualities of emperors such as Claudius II, Aurelianus or Probus. They managed to defeat the barbarians, secessionist territories were regained, and in relation to the Sassanids, Rome regained its dominant position. All these military successes were doubled by a series of religious and monetary reforms.

Post-crisis period – a new beginning

The reign of Diocletianus (284-305) marks for breviators the beginning of a new stage in Roman history. He introduced radical changes to the Roman Empire, renouncing the title *princeps* in favour of *dominus et deus*, reflecting an absolute and divine power; established a diarchic and later tetrarchy system, consolidating power and streamlining the defense of the empire; He put an end to abuses during the civil wars and strengthened the Roman defensive system. All these changes were the result of political and military turmoil during the third century.

Chapter IV

The content of the crisis of the Roman Empire of the middle of the IIIrd century in the Latin breviators of the IVth century: manifestations and remedies

In this chapter, we have analyzed information related to the timeline of the crisis in abbreviated works in order to identify all forms of its manifestation. The main working methods

were as follows: text analysis, statistical and comparative. By these means, we managed to highlight institutional, military, moral, spirit, economic and health aspects.

Political-institutional aspects

Regarding this perspective over of the crisis, the most consistent information was spotted in the work of Sextus Aurelius Victor. He notes that the period following the reign of Maximinus Thrax was marked by a "dispute" between the main political factors involved in appointing sovereigns (senators, legions and plebeians in Rome). Its finality is outlined by the same breviator with his own judgment. According to him, after the reign of Tacitus (275-276), the last emperor from among the senators, the Senate loses its right to elect the emperor: *abhinc militaris potentia conualuit, ac senatui imperium creandique ius principis ereptum ad nostram memoriam*.

The existence of this "dispute" was also noticed within the works written by Eutropius and Pseudo-Aurelius Victor through formulas indicating the seizure of power by some emperors and which have in their composition verbs such as: *arripere, suscepit, invade* etc. More often than not, these lexemes suggest an "illegal" manner of acquiring power.

Furthermore, after 284, none of the abbreviated works mention the involvement of the Senate in the process of appointing sovereigns, this right being reserved strictly to the army and the imperial college.

Also from a political point of view, we have demonstrated that the power held by most emperors during the crisis had an authoritarian characteristic, which is evident from the incidence of the term *imperium* used by breviators for most princeps. At the same time, since these authors render events according to the realities of their times, for them, most emperors were legitimate. Of course, we also spotted other lexemes used by breviators in relationship with supreme power: *principatus, potentia, potestas, regnum* and *tyrannidem*. They appear in defended cases and reflect the political beliefs of the authors.

Related to these lexemes are those in the sphere of the holder of sovereign power. In this regard, we have highlighted the preponderance of the term *imperator*. In accordance with the specifics of sovereign power, (*imperium*) emphasizes the claim that the power held by the emperors during the crisis had the army as its main supporting factor. Other terms (*Augustus, Princeps, Caesar, Dominus*) occur in the following cases. *Augustus* is found in the case of emperors who acquired power through the Senate; *princeps* it is recurrent to emperors who were supported by plebs; *Domnius* it is used by breviators to depict ideological changes during the time of Diocletianus. The significant incidence of the term *Caesar* suggests the intention

of the emperors during the crisis to establish a dynasty that would provide stability to the throne.

Military aspects

From a military point of view, I have focused on two dimensions presented in the abbreviated works: one internal and the other external.

In the first case, I pointed out the existence of a significant number of usurpers during the crisis, particularly during the reign of Gallienus. According to Eutropius, during Gallienus' principality, numerous internal conflicts brought the Roman Empire to the brink of collapse: *tum desperatis rebus et deleto paene imperio Romano*. In the same vein Sextus Aurelius Victor, as he considers this period to be a *naufrogium*. The mentions of the two breviators refer to the territorial and political dissolution of the Roman Empire that culminated in the emergence of the two secessionist states, the Gallic Empire and the Kingdom of Palmyra, and territorial losses.

Regarding the second case, it is the inability of the Roman legions to repel the attacks of barbarian nations that was considered. Amidst background of the erosion of Roman military power, barbarians devastated some territories. Also, externally, Rome lost its status as a dominant force vis-à-vis the Sassanid Kingdom.

However, the recovery from a military point of view was also due to Gallienus. His generals, who would occupy the throne after his death, managed to recover the state from this perspective. Specifically, the breviators make references to the defeat of the Goths by Claudius II, the territorial reunification under Aurelianus, and the victories obtained by Probus against the Sassanids.

As a mark of military recovery, at the end of the crisis, Sextus Aurelius Victor and Eutropius recall the civilizing character of the Roman legions.

The moral and spiritual-religious aspects

Another form of manifestation for the crisis identified in *breviaria*, especially in the work of Sextus Aurelius Victor, is of a moral nature. Carefully analyzing the information on this aspect, I noticed that moral degradation touched the entire socio-political structure of the Roman Empire (sovereigns, senators, army and plebs).

From a moral perspective, the most degrading portrait offered by the breviators is that of Gallienus. He is accused of: political disinterest, association with dubious persons, submissiveness towards women and non-Roman marriage. Among other things, the hostility of Latin sources is also based on imperial propaganda during the Constantinian dynasty. The

idea that Gallienus' successor, Claudius II, was an ancestor of Constantinus (306–337) is found in several sources.

To counter the effects of moral degradation, some sovereigns during the crisis (Gordianus III, Philippus Arabs, Claudius II) resorted to ancestral customs, while others reformed religion (Aurelianus) and imperial ideology (Diocletianus).

Economic aspects

From an economic point of view, for the breviators the crisis was a period of abuse. In this interstitium, Maximinus Thrax implemented an aggressive fiscal policy in order to continue the war with the Germans, the legions committed plunder, and administrative positions were occupied by corrupt persons. To stop these behaviors, some sovereigns such as Philippus, Decius, Gallus and Hostilianus committed acts of public benefaction, Probus, with the help of the army, executed works of public interest in the provinces, while Aurelianus reformed *annona Urbis*, destroyed denunciations of tax fraud, punished the desire for wealth, the misappropriation of public money and the looting of provinces committed by soldiers, and finally, in the fashion of Greece, a general amnesty was decreed.

Sanitary aspects

Despite the fact that the breviators' mentions of this aspect are limited, they offer a disastrous perspective in which plague (*pestilencia*) and disease (*morbis*) ravaged the plebs, but also among some sovereigns such as Hostilianus or Claudius II. To counter the manifestations of this epidemic, emperor Philip undertook public works, thus providing the necessary water for the population of Rome, while Gallus and Volusianus showed interest in the plebs through acts of public benefaction.

Conclusions

Until this moment, the scientific approaches that focused on the crisis of the Roman Empire in the middle of the IIIrd century have focused on its forms of manifestation. **The stake of these research directions was to highlight in what manner the key elements of Roman governance (political, military, administrative or moral ideology) were perpetuated, transformed or disappeared. For this reason, the concept of "crisis", accepted by historians for a long time, has been challenged and replaced by other notions such as "transformation", "accelerated transformation" or "isolated disasters".** However, given the lack of literary sources contemporary to the crisis, the debates among historians on this subject are far from over.

Within this framework, starting from the methodology underlying his study Géza Alföldy, *The Crisis of the Third Century as Seen by Contemporaries*, **we have detached ourselves from interdisciplinary methodologies and subjected to a thorough analysis of how a new generation of Latin historians, born shortly after the end of the crisis, reflected in their works on the period between the reigns of Maximinus Thrax (235-238) and Diocletianus (284-305).** The approach was encouraged by the fact that Sextus Aurelius Victor, Flavius Eutropius, Rufius Festus and Pseudo-Aurelius Victor are exponents of a new stage in Rome's existence, in which Roman society was under in pursuit of discovery and which is known as Late Antiquity. At the same time, we took into account the fact that their works, *Liber de Caesaribus*, *Breviarium ab Urbe condita*, *Breviarium rerum gestarum populi Romani* and *Epitome de Caesaribus*, have been treated superficially in the epistemological process dedicated to the crisis.

The importance of these works in order to understand the period from the middle the IIIrd century is given by several aspects.

Firstly, the breviators consulted some sources whose existence has been confirmed by other Roman historians, but which have not been preserved to this day: the memoirs of Septimius Severus, the imperial biographies of Marius Maximus, the controversial imperial history of Enmann (*EGK*) and *Annales* of Virius Nicomachus Flavianus. On account of these, in these epitomes information can be found considered to be *hapax legomena*. At the same time, this fact explains the many similarities encountered in the narration of the events of the middle of the IIIrd century. In this sense, we cover: dates, aspects related to the origin and death of some sovereigns, the controversial edict of Gallienus, the plot that led to the death of the same emperor and the conflict between senators and legions.

Secondly, each of those works has certain peculiarities. This is due to the context in which they were written, but also to the personality of the authors. For example, the text of Sextus Aurelius Victor was not written at the request of a sovereign, but for his own use. For this reason, the author integrated into the work personal opinions and anecdotes reflecting the grievances and frustrations of a IVth century intellectual. In a more generalized framework, they are testimonies of spiritual and social dissatisfaction specific to the period of Late Antiquity. On the other hand, in the works of Eutropius, Festus and Pseudo-Aurelius Victor the personal opinions of the authors are lacking. Their style is more concise and sometimes reduced to aspects without historical value, this fact being especially specific true for Pseudo-Aurelius Victor. The blurring of the authors' personal opinions is a consequence of the fact that the works of the three had a commissioner and a precise purpose, namely to make known to

bring to the attention of Valens and Theodosius respectively the deeds of their predecessors. Despite this, these historians of Late Antiquity developed original conceptions of the crisis of the Roman Empire in the middle of the IIIrd century.

From a chronological point of view, depending on the manner chosen for rendering the history of Rome, in the case of Sextus Aurelius Victor - the cyclical one, and in the case of Flavius Eutropius, Rufius Festus and Pseudo-Aurelius Victor - the linear one, the crisis period represents a well-defined stage in the economy of abbreviated works. In this respect, Sextus Aurelius Victor's assessments of the period after the assassination of Alexander Severus (222-235) stand out. For Flavius Eutropius and Pseudo-Aurelius Victor the onset of the crisis is marked by the illegal manner of seizure of power by Maximinus Thrax (235-238). In the case of Festus, which narrates the territorial expansion of the Romans, the period of crisis is depicted in the context of the reigns of Valerianus and Gallienus and emphasizes Rome's military regression, but also the unprecedented situations in which, due to the capture of Valerianus (253-260) and the carelessness of Gallienus (253-268), the Eastern Roman provinces were defended by a handful of peasants led by Odenathus. For the rest, the reigns that are framed by the other three breviators in the context of the crisis (Alexander Severus, Gordianus III, Aurelianus and Carus) are represented in the hypostasis of their victories against the Persians and Aurelianus' triumph over Zenobia.

For the breviators, the end of the crisis corresponds to the reign of Diocletianus (284–305), during which usurpations, abuse by soldiers, secessionist movements, and barbarian incursions were no longer a constant in the politics of the Roman Empire. **These works therefore confirm the already known chronological limits of the crisis.**

However, by carefully analysing the pages dedicated to this interval, we were able to distinguish the following substages of the crisis: the onset, the period of calm or fragile stability, the exacerbation, the climax and the end. Of course, some forms of manifestation of the crisis were also captured in the period between the reigns of Commodus (180-192) and that of Alexander Severus (222-235), which is why I treated this interval as a prelude.

The onset of the crisis falls between 235 (Alexander Severus) and 238 (Gordianus III) and is marked by a political degrading, accentuated by a violent civil war that exposed the limits of the political system installed by Augustus. In this regard, we mainly consider the lack of consensus between the main Roman political factors involved in the election of the emperor: the Senate, the army and plebeians in Rome, but also the unusual manner in which Pupienus and Balbinus were appointed emperors.

The lull is recurring within the reigns of Gordianus III (238–244) and Philip Arabs (244–249). During this time, on account of the compromise between senators, legions and plebes, materialized in the election of Gordianus III, the foundations of a fragile internal peace were laid, during which some ancestral practices resumed: the opening of the temple of Janus, the organization of the five-year games and the celebration of 1000 years since the foundation of Rome. However, it also represents the moment when the Roman legions lose the initiative to the Persian Kingdom.

The crisis (249–253) intensified under the reigns of emperors Decius, Hostilian, Trebonianus Gallus, and Aemilianus. Under the leadership of these sovereigns, the Roman defensive system was penetrated by barbarian populations. At the same time, internally, there are the reigns of emperors with obscure and short-lived origins (Aemilianus), but also numerous usurpations of commanders located in the peripheral provinces, located in the path of barbarians.

The peak of the crisis (253–268) was reached during the reigns of Valerianus and Gallienus. During their time, the process of decentralization of Roman power led to the emergence of two secessionist states, the Gallic Empire and the Kingdom of Palmyra, the legions of Rome were defeated by Shapur, Valerianus was made prisoner, barbarians reached as far as Italy, and the province of Dacia fell out of Roman control. In parallel with these political-military aspects, the plague reappeared.

With the seizure of power by Claudius II, the last stage of the crisis of the Roman Empire in the middle of the IIIrd century (268-270) began. This is marked by the victories of Claudius II, Aurelianus and Probus against the barbarian nations, by the economic and spiritual reform promoted by Aurelianus, and by the resumption of military initiative against the Persians under Carus. **Finally, Diocletianus (284–305) reconfigured the entire political, social, and military structure of the Empire and made the transition from the Principate to the Dominate.**

Another purpose of this research was to identify the forms of manifestation of the crisis and how they were solved. **Thus, we highlighted the following aspects: political-institutional, military, moral, spiritual-religious, economic and health.**

At the political-institutional level, **breviators emphasize the increasing interference of the army in the Roman custom of transitional imperial power, beginning with Maximinus Thrax).** This has been seen both through the way in which the authors convey the narrative of events and through the political terminology of taking power (*potentiam cepit suffragis legionum; sola militum voluntate; regnum arripuit*) the political terminology for

rendering power held by sovereigns (*imperium* and *regnum*) and the political terminology by which the holder of sovereign power is indicated (*imperator* and *Dominus*). In the context of the militarization tendencies of the method of transferring imperial prerogatives, the Senate tried to counteract this development by reaffirming collective and alternative government (Pupienus and Balbinus), by appointing sovereigns from among senators (Gallus, Hostilianus, Aemilianus, Gallienus, Tacitus) or by supporting someone appointed by the army (Gordianus I). **This form of political-institutional manifestation of the crisis ended in the context of the death of Aurelianus and the interregnum that followed it. The appointment of Tacitus as *princeps* represents the last time the Senate had such a role. The assertion of Sextus Aurelius Victor that, after Tacitus' death, senators were stripped of their right to appoint sovereigns is confirmed by the other abbreviated works, since none of them indicates the involvement of the Senate in the making of sovereigns after this reign.**

Also from an institutional perspective, **the period of crisis is marked by the inability to establish viable dynasties that would provide stability to the empire.** The presence of a significant number of *Caesars* precisely suggests the intention of emperors such as Philippus Arabs, Decius, Valerianus and Gallienus to provide stability to the throne. However, due to numerous military pronouncements, this practice failed. However, it can be considered an incipient form of the monarchical system implemented by Diocletianus. In this respect, eloquent is the example of Gallienus, who named his sons *Caesares* and delegated them to secure vulnerable areas of the empire.

A final political-institutional aspect is the change in the imperial nomenclature of the holder of sovereign power. Until Diocletianus, the lexem *Dominus* is attributed by breviators to rulers with autocratic and despotic tendencies (Caligula and Domitianus). **Although this term is also attributed to Diocletianus, it is not considered by breviators to be the equivalent of a *tyrannus*. This shows that these historians were sufficiently capable of understanding the new political-institutional realities after the crisis.**

From a military perspective, Rome was adrift (*naufragium*). Constant confrontations with the Persians and numerous barbarian incursions into Roman territory brought about the state (*Romanum statum*) into a critical situation, where cities were besieged, as some territories were lost and others were ceded. Because of this, during the reign of Gallienus, the very existence of the Roman Empire was endangered (*tum desperatis rebus et deleto paene imperio Romano*).

The inability of the Roman legions to defeat external threats was further enhanced by civil wars that significantly reduced the number of soldiers and shattered the ideological unity

of the Roman army. However, with the help of Gallienus' military reforms, their concord and the good militancy received during the reign of the same sovereign, the emperors who followed him managed to avoid military collapse. In doing so, Claudius II defeated the Goths who roamed the eastern territories, Aurelianus restored the territories of the secessionist states, and Carus defeated the Persian troops.

Morally, the degradation was so profound that it spread over the entire Roman social and political structure: princes, senators, military figures and plebes. On account of this, Sextus Aurelius Victor considers that in the period we are taking into consideration, the big things were mixed with the small, the insignificant with the important (*ita, quasi uentis undique saeuientibus, paruis maxima, ima summis orbe toto miscebantur*) and all had reached the last stage of degradation (*proinde cuncta ad extremum reciderant*). The entire institutional degrading also had as its starting point the despotism of sovereigns such as Maximinus Thrax who persecuted the rich, guilty and innocent alike (*dum persequitur pecuniosos insontes pariter noxiosque*) or Carinus, who killed a considerable number of prominent men based on imaginary charges (*Carinus plurimos innoxios fictis criminibus occidit*). **From this perspective, for breviators, the main counterexample, from a moral point of view, is Gallienus. To him, the breviators attribute the most despicable behavior: association with drunkards and dubious** (*inter haec ipse, popinas gemeasque obiens, lenorum ac uinariorum amicitias haebat*); **disinterest in state affairs** (*rem Romanam quasi naufragio; diu placidus et quietus, mox in omnem lasciviam dissolutus tenendae rei publicae habenas probrosa ignavia et desperatione laxavit*); **submissivity towards women** (*expositus Saloninae coniugi atque*) and **non-Roman marriage** (*atque amori flagitioso filiae Attali, Germanorum regis, Pipae nomine*). However, this negative portrait has an ideological reasoning, provided by Constantinian propaganda. At the same time, it is carried out by conservative authors attached, in particular, to the ancestral Roman moral values, which Gallienus, in the context of the crisis, tried to transform by adopting a style of government influenced by Hellenistic philosophical ideas.

Morally antithetical to Gallienus are his successors: Claudius II, Quintillius, Aurelianus, and Probus. The breviators **attribute to them the following moral qualities: endurance to work, interest in state affairs, austerity and military prowess.** However, Eutropius and Pseudo-Aurelius Victor capture an interesting aspect, which reflects the political realities of the middle of the IIIrd century. More precisely, although they appreciate him for his exemplary morality, the two epitomators also attribute to him the vice of cruelty (*crudelitas*). For this reason, Aurelianus was rather necessary (*necessarius*) than worthy of being loved (*saevus et*

sanguinarius ac necessarius magis in quibusdam quam in ullo amabilis imperator). This opinion highlights the evolution of the concept of *princeps bonus*. Against the background of the traditions of classical Antiquity, an ideal emperor was one who had a friendly attitude towards the Senate and the main social orders in the Empire. At the same time, he had to possess virtues such as: *eruditio* (erudition), *elegantia* (elegance), *comitas* (affability), but also *Fortuna* (good luck) and the ability to weigh insightfully the decisions made. For the timeline from the end of the IIIrd century, the ideal sovereign was one who put himself at the service of saving the state (*Romana res publica*). Carrying out this responsibility required putting into play the choicest qualities: integrity in peacetime (*Sanctitas Domi*), courage in times of war (*in armis fortitudo*) and in both cases, wisdom (*utrobique prudentia*).

In regards to the morality of senators and legions, emphasis is placed on idleness (*otium*) senators, caused by the despotism of emperors such as Maximinus Thrax and the acts of violence of soldiers directed against them.

Among the breviators, Sextus Aurelius Victor adopted a critical attitude towards the population of Rome. For this reason, the lexem used by most to indicate plebeians is *Vulgus*, a term that has a pejorative connotation. His reticence towards this Roman body politically stemmed from his fickleness and inconsistent interventions in appointing sovereigns.

Closely related to the moral aspect is the spiritual-religious one. From this perspective, the crisis was a period of spiritual unrest, in which *fortuna* manifested itself in a capricious way. To maintain the spiritual unity of the Empire, Gordianus III and Philippus Arabs resorted to ancient rituals designed to emphasize spiritual unity. Amid this dissatisfaction, for ideological purposes, **Aurelianus reformed the Roman religion by assuming a theocratic imperial conception.**

From an economic point of view, the middle of the IIIrd century was marked by abuses by emperors and tax agents, plunder by soldiers, and high inflation. Continuing the process of economic reform begun by Aurelianus, Diocletianus laid the foundations for the economics of Late Antiquity.

All these forms of manifestation had as a starting point the human factor. But at the same time, they were doubled by the natural factor, the plague.

In conclusion, for these IVth century historians, the interval between the reigns of Maximinus Thrax (235-238) and Diocletianus (284-305) represents the most decadent period in Roman history. The major dysfunctions of the Roman political system and numerous external threats completely upset the order of the Roman world in the classical period. For Eutropius, Pseudo-Aurelius Victor and, especially, for Sextus Aurelius Victor, this evolution of

Rome represents a period of crisis, at the end of which ancestral political, moral and social values, to which they nurtured a deep attachment, were replaced.

Abbreviations and Bibliography

Abbreviations

Research instruments

DIR - De Imperatoribus Romanis: An Online Encyclopedia of Roman Emperors – <http://www.roman-emperors.org>.

OLD - Oxford Latin Dictionary, edited by P. G. W. Glare, Oxford, 1968.

ODLA- The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity, vol. I, edited by Olivier Nicholson, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018.

PIR - Prosopographia Imperii Romani Saec. I, II, III, editio altera, Berlin, 1 (1933), 2 (1936), 3 (1943), 4/1 (1952), 4/2 (1958), 4/3 (1966), 5/1 (1970), 5/2 (1983), 5/3 (1987), 6 (1998), 7/1 (1999), 7/2 (2006), 8/1 (2009).

PLRE - The prosopography of the later Roman Empire, I, A.D. 260-395, by A. H. M. Jones, J.R. Martindale, J. Morris, Cambridge, 1971.

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AJN- American Journal of Numismatics Edited by Dr. Nathan T. Elkins and David Yoon, New York.

ArchBulg- Archaeologia Bulgarica, Sofia.

AȘUI-Istorie- Analele Științifice ale Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași, Iași, Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași.

C&C - Classica et christiana, Iași, Revista Centrului de Studii Clasice și Creștine, Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași.

CPh- Classical philology: a journal devoted to research in classical antiquity, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

GRBS- Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies, edited by José M. González and Kent J. Rigsby, Duke University Press.

HAC- Historiae Augustae Colloquia..

Histos- Histos: The new electronic journal of ancient historiography, Durham, University of Durham, Department of classics.

JRA- Journal of Roman archaeology.

Klio - Klio. Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte, Berlin, Akademie Verlag.

Latomus Latomus - Latomus: revue d'études latines, Bruxelles, Société d'études latines de Bruxelles.

MH- Museum Helveticum: schweizerische Zeitschrift für klassische Altertumswissenschaft, Basel, Schwabe.

REA- Revue des études anciennes.

SHHA- Studia historica historia antiqua.

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ANRW- Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung, II, *Prinzipat*, Berlin-New York.

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