ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΜΕΙΖΟΝΟΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΥ

**Authoring :** *Koutras Nikolaos* *(14/4/2008)*

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# Ballista

## Summary :

Commander of Emperor Valerian's guard during his expedition in Persia. After the arrest and death of Valerian in 260 A.D. he repulsed the Persian invasion in Asia Minor, aided the usurpers of the throne Macrianus I, Macrianus II and Quietus and was eventually killed at 261.

## Other Names

Callistus

## Date and Place of Birth

First half of 3rd century A.D.

## Date and Place of Death

261 A.D., Emesa of Syria or Daphne of Antioch

## Main Role

Commander of Valerian's guard, conspirator

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### 1. Deeds

Ballista is also mentioned in ancient literature as Callistus. Some scholars have argued that 'Ballista' was a nickname deriving from ballista (kind of a missile-hurling weapon). It has finally been confirmed that this name occurs in Italy, Philippi[1] and in the region of modern Skopje.[2]

Ballista was the head of Valerian's guard (praefectus praetorio) during his campaign to Persia.[3] Immediately after the capture of Valerian (260 AD), he regrouped the army, landed at Soloi and at Corycus of Cilicia, drove back the Persians and captured the concubines and treasures of king Sapor I.[4]

With the prestige that he had gained after that victory, Ballista proposed as new emperor Macrianus I and supported his two sons, Macrianus II and Quietus, when they were nominated emperors of the East.[5] Ballista and Quietus were defeated near Emesa of Syria by the king of Palmyra Odaenathus. Both of them were killed; Ballista in battle, Quietus was murdered by the citizens of Emesa.

According to another account, after the battle the two defeated men sought refuge in the city, where after a conspiracy Ballista killed the treasurer, and had the emperor's soldiers destroy the city and murder the emperor, and then proclaimed himself emperor. He was later killed by the soldiers of Aureolus, general of emperor Gallienus, who had been sent to arrest Quietus. Finally, in yet another version, Ballista withdrew after his defeat and was murdered in his estates at Daphne of Antioch.[6]

### 2. Assessment

Ballista is presented as a very efficient administrator, for the emperor Valerian writes to the commander of Illyricum and of Galatia to act just like Ballista, that is to say not to impose financially unbearable burdens on the residents of the

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provinces and to maintain army and horses near places that can offer supplies; the emperor himself thanks him for his advice with respect to the administration of the empire.

However, none of the above information can be considered as reliable, as his life (4th century) is a mixture of information taken from previous texts wholly unrelated to Ballista. Moreover, we do not know if he ever held any other command except in the military.[7]

The attitude of ancient writers towards Ballista is hostile due to his support of Macrianus and his sons, which led to the obliteration of law and order in the eastern part of the empire. His strategic abilities, however, are recognised, as well as his success at repelling the Persian raids in a very decisive historical moment for Asia Minor.

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1. A town close to modern city of Kavala.

2. In this last case, P. Aelius Ballista could belong to that same family, for he originated from the equestrian class and followed a carrier in the military, like Callistus.

3. His presence is reported during the last phase of the campaign (259-260). It is possible that he was in that post since 253/254, when Valerian launches his offensive against the Persians.

4. SHA, *Val.* 4.4; Zonar. 12.23; Sygg. 716.

5. SHA, *Gal.* 1.2, *Tyr. Trig.* 12.1. The view expressed in *CAH* XII, p. 172 (A. Alfoldi) that he was eliminated from the contention of the throne because he was of low birth is unsupported.

6. SHA, *Gal.* 3.2-4, *Tyr. Trig.* 14.1, 15.4, 18.1-3, 18.12; Zonar. 12.24. The reference to his self-proclamation as emperor is considered untrustworthy. Even the coins he is said to have minted are considered spurious, *RE* II.2 (1896), column 2831, see under entry “Ballista (2)” (W. Henze).

7. Birley, E., "Ballista and ‘Trebellius Pollio’", in Straub, J. (ed.), *Bonner Historia-Augusta-Colloquium 1984/1985* (Antiquitas 4.16, Bonn 1987), pp. 56-58; Chastagnol, A., "Végèce et l'Histoire Auguste", in *Bonner Historia-Augusta-Colloquium 1971* (Antiquitas 4.11, Bonn 1974), p. 73; Mazzarino, S., "Precetti del buon governo (praecepta gubernandae rei p.) e problemi di economia militare", in *Bonner Historia-Augusta-Colloquium 1971* (Antiquitas 4.11, Bonn 1974), pp. 103-112.

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## Webliography :

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http://www.roman-emperors.org/galusurp.htm

## Glossary :

praetorian prefect (praefectus praetorio)

Commander of the emperor's bodyguard under the principate. During the regne of Constantine I the praetorian prefect becomes a dignitary responsible for the administrative unit called the prefecture, which was subdivided into dioceses. In 400 A.D. there were four such praetorian prefectures, of Oriens, of Illyricum, of Illyricum, Italia and Africa and of Gallia. The praetorian prefects were second only to the emperor. The praetorian prefect of Oriens was the mightiest among prefects. His office is for the last time mentioned in 680.

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