Craig CALDWELL

Burying Aureolus: A Usurper’s Monument in the *Historia Augusta*

As a prominent commander of cavalry under the emperor Gallienus, Aureolus was one of the most important figures of the mid-third century AD, but much of the detail for his career is only found among the Lives of the Thirty Tyrants in the *Historia Augusta*. Instead of rejecting the account of his death and burial as simple fabrications, we may productively analyze them in a fourth-century context of usurpation and civil war, the contemporary world of the *Historia Augusta*.

Aureolus the third-century Dacian cavalryman and claimant to the imperial purple has received considerable attention with reference to the reign of Gallienus (Alföldi 1927, Bird 1971, De Blois 1977, Birley 1987). Efforts to reconstruct the historical Aureolus, however, have tended to scrutinize the account of his reign in the *Historia Augusta* in search of reliable details rather than considering the value of the Aureolus story to its audience. Elsewhere in the *Historia Augusta*, scholars have begun to understand other third-century civil wars as expressions of fourth-century concerns (Bleckmann 2000). Reading the details of the death and burial of Aureolus in this way can provide several insights into how a fourth-century author might remember and use the third-century chaos.

After the emperor Claudius II defeated and killed Aureolus in a battle, the *Historia Augusta* records that Claudius granted Aureolus a tomb inscribed with Greek verse. Justice and mercy are the themes of the inscription – the qualities attributed to Claudius, the adopted ancestor of the emperor Constantine. Furthermore, Claudius is said to have recovered Aureolus’s remains from the vengeful soldiers, who hated the deceased general for conspiring against Gallienus. The fate of the bodies of would-be emperors was not just a third-century matter. In the fourth century, the beheading and exposure of usurpers’ corpses were common following civil wars. For example, in the 380s, the body of the emperor Gratian, who had been slain in a civil war, became a bargaining chip in intra-imperial diplomacy. In such a setting, the author of the *Historia Augusta* could craft a story about a third-century emperor so magnanimous that he gave his rival some honor in death.

A fourth-century audience was also interested in emperors whose fates had been decided in northern Italy. After all, Constantine II and Magnus Maximus had fallen at Aquileia in 340 and 388, respectively, and Eugenius died just east of there at the Frigidus River in 394. Significantly, the author of the *Historia Augusta* links Aureolus to a tomb, its inscription, and a Pons Aureoli built by Claudius. This final landmark was a genuine one, and it connected the story of Aureolus to a landscape familiar to fourth-century Romans. In this respect, the fourth century sought and found continuity with the third. Considering the *Historia Augusta*’s account of Aureolus in a fourth-century context thus reveals a new relevance for this often obscure third-century figure.