

Zenobia of Palmyra Encyclopedia Article

Zenobia of Palmyra

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Zenobia of Palmyra

c. 231-after 271

Syrian queen who built a short-lived empire that briefly challenged Roman hegemony in the East. Born Bat Zabbai, Zenobia was destined to become one of the most significant female rulers of antiquity. Her town of Palmyra served as an important trading post for caravans crossing the Syrian desert, and today its ruins reflect the powerful impact of Hellenism in the region. Following the death of her husband Odenathus, Zenobia ruled Palmyra as regent for her son Vaballath, and eventually began building a realm that included much of Egypt. The situation became so serious that the Roman emperor Aurelian (r. 270-275) personally came to Syria, defeated Zenobia, and brought her back to Rome in chains. Legend holds that the wily Zenobia was not executed, however, but married a Roman senator and lived out her days in comfort.