

Roman Emperors – 193AD to 250 AD

Murder and Mayhem

THE SEVERAN DYNASTY

SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS (193-211). Of the three claimants following the murder of Didius Julianus, the first to arrive in Rome was Severus. He made peace with Clodius Albinus (offering to make him his heir) while he dealt with Pescennius Niger whom he defeated in battle. He then provoked Albinus by promoting his own young son above him and defeated him too. Severus spent much of his reign campaigning and came to Britain with his two sons in 208, suppressing a revolt and rebuilding Hadrian's Wall before dying at York in 211, leaving his two sons as joint heirs.

CARACALLA (198-217). Officially named Antoninus Pius, he was known as Caracalla after the Gallic tunic he usually wore. The elder and favourite son of Severus, he was made joint Emperor with his father at the age of ten. After his father's death, he murdered his brother Geta and 20,000 of his followers. He gave Roman Citizenship to all free inhabitants of the Empire and introduced a new silver coin, the Antoninianus, a double denarius as inflation began to take effect. Unpopular, feared and hated, he was murdered on the orders of Macrinus, Prefect of the Praetorian Guard.

GETA (209-212) was made joint emperor on the insistence of his mother Julia Domna but was murdered by his elder brother just a year after his father's death.

MACRINUS (217-218), Prefect of the Praetorian Guard, was made Emperor following the murder of Caracalla. He alienated the army by agreeing unfavourable peace terms with the Parthians (Persia) and by cancelling the army's pay rises authorised by Caracalla. Julia Domna's sister Julia Maesa orchestrated the opposition and Macrinus was defeated and murdered in favour of her grandson.

DIADUMEDIAN (218), son of Macrinus had been made joint Emperor in 218 but fled following his father's defeat and was also murdered.

ELAGABALUS (218-222). Officially Antoninus Pius (again!) he had been High Priest of the Sun God Elagabalus. He was proclaimed Emperor by the army after his grandmother spread the rumour that he was the illegitimate son of Caracalla. His grandmother (Julia Maesa) and mother (Julia Soemias) were the real powers behind the throne. Elagabalus was probably insane and his reign is noted for religious and other scandals. He and his mother were murdered in 222 AD but his grandmother survived to see her younger grandson become the next Emperor.

SEVERUS ALEXANDER (222-239). Dominated first by his grandmother and then by his mother (Julia Mamaea), Severus was beset by troubles at home (army unrest) and abroad where the Sassanians (new rulers of Persia) were more aggressive than the Parthians they replaced and advanced into Roman Mesopotamia. After an indecisive counter-attack led to a truce in Mesopotamia, the German tribes rebelled, had to be bought off to gain time and the army's pay was cut to save costs. When the Emperor went to lead his army into Germany he and his mother were murdered in their camp and one of his generals was proclaimed Emperor in his place.

MAXIMINUS I (235-238). Having risen from the peasantry to be a general and Governor of Mesopotamia, Maximinus was a giant (reputedly over 8 feet tall) and a strict disciplinarian whose ruthlessness provoked revolts in various parts of the Empire while he was fighting in Germany. When he attempted to return to Italy, he and his son were murdered by his own soldiers.

238 AD - THE YEAR OF THE SIX EMPERORS (Maximinus; Gordian I; Gordian II; Balbinus; Pupienus; Gordian III). Before Maximinus was murdered, the 81-year-old GORDIAN I was proclaimed Emperor jointly with his son GORDIAN II by the Senate. However, after a reign of only 21 days, they were defeated and murdered by a general loyal to Maximinus. The Senate, fearing the advance of Maximinus, elected two of their own members as joint Emperors. Although Maximinus was now dead, BALBINUS and PUPIENUS were murdered by the Praetorian Guard after only 98 days in favour of the grandson of Gordian I who was proclaimed Emperor as -

GORDIAN III (238-244) was only 14 when he became Emperor. After suppressing a revolt in North Africa, he marched east and forced the Persians to leave Mesopotamia. While there, he was deposed

and murdered by his own soldiers who were influenced by Philippus, Prefect of the Praetorian Guard. PHILIP I (244-249) replaced Gordian III, made peace with the Persians and returned to Rome where in 248 AD he began lavish celebrations of the 1000th anniversary of the foundation of Rome. His reign ended with multiple rebellions and Philip and his son were both killed fighting the leading one of several pretenders, Decius.

PHILIP II (247-249) son of Philip I was made co-Emperor in 247 and died with his father at the battle of Verona in 249.

PACATIAN, JOTAPIAN and SILBANNACUS were all pretenders who rebelled in various provinces in 248 AD and were all murdered by their own troops!

TRAJAN DECIUS (249-251) was Governor of Lower Moesia who was sent by Philip I to face rebels in Upper Pannonia. The Pannonians forced Decius to march on Rome at their head and he became Emperor after killing Philip I and his son in battle. As Emperor he was very active in the persecution of Christians. He took the name Trajan to link himself with the former Emperor when advancing to fight the Goths on the northern frontier but both he and his son were killed in battle fighting them. HERENNIUS ETRUSCUS (251), son of Decius, was made co-Emperor with his father shortly before they were both killed in battle.

HOSTILIAN (251), younger son of Trajan Decius, was made co-emperor with Trebonianus Gallus after the deaths of his father and elder brother. He died of plague after a few months.

TREBONIANUS GALLUS (251-253) was chosen by the army to succeed Decius. After he made what was considered to be a shameful peace with the Goths, Rome and its entire Empire was swept with a devastating plague. When Aemilian, Governor of Moesia inflicted a severe defeat on the Goths, he was proclaimed Emperor by his troops and advanced on Italy. Gallus and his son were murdered by their own soldiers to avoid certain defeat by a superior enemy.

VOLUSIAN was made co-Emperor with his father following the death of Hostilian. He was murdered with his father in 253.

AEMILIAN (253) met a similar fate when Valerian, Censor of Rome and supporter of Gallus, invaded Italy from Germany with a superior army and was proclaimed Emperor.

VALERIAN I (253-260) appointed his son Gallienus as joint ruler, went off to fight the Persians, was ambushed and spent the rest of his life in degrading captivity.

GALLIENUS (253-268) was entrusted with the defence of the Rhine frontier while his father went to fight (and be captured by) the Persians. After his father's capture he was left in sole charge of an Empire threatened by external attack, internal revolt and by plague and famine as well. Some Eastern Provinces, Gaul, Spain and Britain broke away from central control and Postumus, commander on the Rhine frontier created an independent state in the west which lasted for 15 years. Eventually Gallienus was murdered at the siege of Milan but neither of his sons, VALERIAN II and SALONINUS, although Caesars was able to succeed him.

MACRIANUS (260-261) and QUIETUS (260-261) were the sons of the General Macrianus who took charge of the campaign against Persia after the capture of Valerian. After initial success, they turned to advance on Italy but were defeated and killed by troops loyal to Gallienus.

POSTUMUS (259-268), commander on the Rhine Frontier, created a break-away empire of Gaul, Spain and Britain and resisted all attempts of Gallienus to recover it. However in 268 he had to quash an internal revolt and, in the aftermath, he was assassinated.

MARIUS (268) seized power after the death of Postumus but was assassinated after a very short reign. DOMITIANUS also tried to seize power (in Gaul) at this time.

VICTORINUS (268-270) also seized power after the death of Postumus but soon lost control of Spain and faced trouble in Gaul where he was killed by his own men.

TETRICUS I (270-273) succeeded Victorinus but made peace and abdicated when Emperor Aurelian invaded Gaul. He and his son TETRICUS II (Caesar 270-3) were allowed to retire to Rome.