

Roman Emperors – 250AD to 360 AD

More Murder and Mayhem – and not a little Chaos!

CLAUDIUS II (GOTHICUS) (268-270) was a leading general under Valerian and Gallienus and was proclaimed Emperor on the death of Gallienus. He defeated the Goths in battle (hence his title) but died from the plague which he caught from the defeated Goth army.

QUINTILLUS (270) the brother of Claudius Gothicus, he was proclaimed Emperor but when his troops deserted him on the advance of his rival Aurelian, he took his own life.

AURELIAN (270-275). An outstanding General of Cavalry, Aurelian was proclaimed Emperor by his troops after the death of Claudius Gothicus. In a series of swift campaigns, he managed to reunite the whole Empire (apart from Dacia). He began the building of a defensive wall around Rome but when he began advancing against Persia in the east, he was assassinated by his own officers.

TACITUS (275-276) After the murder of Aurelian, a group of army officers asked the Senate to nominate an Emperor and regularise the succession. The Senate chose one of their own, Tacitus, who was well connected but, at 75, too old. The following year, after defeating the Goths in Asia Minor, he died worn out by the campaigning.

FLORIANUS (276) The half brother of Tacitus, Florianus was supported by the Senate but not by the army of the east who chose their general, Probus. To avoid the battle which might have ensued, Florianus was murdered by his own soldiers.

PROBUS (276-282). A successful general, Probus restored order on the Empire's frontiers and began a series of reforms to restore the Empire's economic wealth. Unfortunately he was murdered by mutinous soldiers who thought doing public works was beneath their dignity as fighting troops.

CARUS (282-283). The Praetorian Prefect was proclaimed Emperor by the army. He made his sons, Carinus and Numerian Caesars and left Carinus in charge while he and Numerian went to attack Persia. After a successful start to his campaign, Carus was killed in his camp by lightning.

NUMERIAN (283-284). Proclaimed Emperor after the death of his father, Numerian was slowly returning to Rome when he was found dead in the litter in which he was riding – murdered!

CARINUS (284-285) had been left in Rome while his father and brother went to fight the Persians and was proclaimed Emperor by the Senate. He then had to march against rival claimants, first JULIAN of Pannonia who he defeated and killed, and then Diocletian who had been proclaimed Emperor by the armies of the East. Carinus won the battle but was murdered by one of his own officers shortly afterwards, leaving Diocletian as the sole surviving claimant.

THE REFORMS OF DIOCLETIAN

DIOCLETIAN (284-305). An able general, Diocletian proved to be a far-sighted administrator as well. He reformed the monetary system and eventually subdivided the Empire into four groups of provinces to make administration and defence more manageable. There were two senior Emperors (Augusti) each with a Caesar. Diocletian became Emperor in the East and in 286 appointed MAXIMIANUS as Emperor in the West. In 293 CONSTANTIUS was appointed as Caesar in the West under Maximianus and GALERIUS as Caesar in the East under Diocletian. The system worked well, with the one major revolt (by Carausius in Britain and Gaul) being defeated eventually by Constantius. In 305, Diocletian and Maximianus agreed to abdicate and promote their Caesars to be the next Augusti.

CARAUSIUS (usurper in Britain and Gaul 287-293), The Commander of the Channel Fleet declared himself Emperor but found himself driven back into Britain by Constantius Caesar where he was murdered by his first minister Allectus

ALLECTUS (usurper in Britain 293-296) who was unable to hold out when Constantius invaded Britain in 296.

CONSTANTIUS I (Emperor in the West 305-306) appointed Severus II as his Caesar but died at York after crushing an invasion by the Picts.

GALERIUS (Emperor in the East 305-311) appointed one of his relatives, Maximinus as Caesar.

CHAOS

CONSTANTINE I (307-337 - *Constantine the Great*) was proclaimed Emperor by the army in Britain after the death of his father Constantius, throwing Diocletian's system into disarray.

Galerius, now senior Emperor, demoted Constantine to Caesar and appointed

SEVERUS II (306-307) as Emperor in the West. This sparked a rebellion in Rome led by MAXENTIUS (306-312), son of former Emperor Maximianus and Severus was captured and deposed when he marched against them.

MAXIMIANUS (second reign 306-308) now resumed as Emperor in the West but quarrelled with his son and placed himself under the protection of Constantine. In 308 Galerius, as senior Emperor, called a Conference which forced Maximianus to abdicate again, declared Maxentius a Public Enemy (he ignored this), demoted Constantine to Caesar and made LICINIUS I Emperor in the West, decisions which satisfied no-one.

MAXIMINUS II (Emperor in the East 309-313) – was granted the title Augustus, along with Constantine by Galerius to assuage their anger at his promotion of Licinius over their heads and, following the death of Galerius in 311, became the senior Emperor, in sole charge of the East.

MAXIMIANUS (third reign 310) who had been 'retired' for a second time, meanwhile pronounced himself Augustus for a third time. There were now five men with the title Augustus! However Constantine cornered him in Marseilles, took the city and put him to death.

Constantine (having made an alliance with Licinius) invaded Italy in 312 and confronted Maxentius. At the battle of Milvian Bridge, despite being heavily outnumbered, Constantine's army was successful and Maxentius was killed. This victory was put down to the support of the Christian God and subsequently persecution was ended in the Western Empire. Meanwhile Maximinus invaded the territory of Licinius but was defeated and killed, leaving Licinius in control of the Eastern Empire, with Constantine in control of the West. For a time there was an uneasy truce which flared into warfare briefly in 314 and openly in 324. Eventually Licinius was defeated and forced to abdicate, though he was later put to death when he continued to plot.

THE DYNASTY OF CONSTANTINE

CONSTANTINE I was now sole Emperor of the whole Empire and, in 330, dedicated his new Eastern capital of Constantinople. Constantine married twice and had four sons. The eldest CRISPUS was made Caesar, together with his half-brother CONSTANTINE Junior. Crispus was executed for treason on the false evidence of his step-mother (who was herself put to death when her treachery became known). Later the two youngest sons, CONSTANTIUS and CONSTANS were also made Caesar. Constantine's intention was that his three surviving sons, together with two nephews should divide his Empire between them. After his death however, the two nephews Delmatius and Hanniballianus were murdered and the Empire was split three ways.

CONSTANTINE II (337-340) received Spain, Gaul and Britain on his father's death but quarrelled with his brother Constans and was killed in an ambush as he crossed the Alps to confront him.

CONSTANS (337-350) received Italy, Africa and the Balkans but took over his brother's provinces as well and was the last Emperor to visit Britain. Following a rebellion by MAGNENTIUS he was killed fleeing to Spain.

CONSTANTIUS II (337-361) Initially Emperor in the East, he gained control of the whole Empire by defeating the usurper MAGNENTIUS.

VETRANIO (350) proclaimed Emperor by his troops after the death of Constans, Vetriciano held off Magnentius before abdicating in favour of Constantius.

NEPOTIAN (350) seized power in Rome only to be killed by supporters of Magnentius after 28 days.

MAGNENTIUS (250-253) seized power in the west, with the support of the army, after rebelling against Constans. He then made the mistake of invading the Eastern Empire and was forced to withdraw by Constantius. Pursued into Gaul, he was deserted by his soldiers and committed suicide.