

Lectures 27-29

The Severans and the Crisis of the Third Century

Essential chronology

AD	
192	Assassination of Commodus. The imperial archives of Rome are destroyed
193	The plot against Commodus brings P. Helvius Pertinax to power. He is assassinated after 87 days by the praetorian guard.
193	Didius Julianus wins the throne from the praetorian guard.
193	Accession of Lucius Septimius Severus. Acclaimed emperor in Carnuntum. Born in AD 145 in Lepcis Magna. Consul in AD190.
193.	Pescenius Niger is hailed emperor by his troops in the east
193	Clodius Albinus sets an alliance with Severus. He becomes Caesar.
193	Julianus is declared enemy by the senate and sentenced to death before the arrival of Severus after 66 days of rule. Severus executes those involved in the death of Pertinax and substitutes the members of the praetorian guard by his own men.
194	Severus defeats Pescenius Niger at Issus on the very plain on which Alexander the Great had defeat Darius some 500 years earlier. Death of Niger.
195	Victories against the Parthians. Caracalla becomes Caesar and successor to the throne.
196	Sack of the city of Byzantium by Severus.
197	Severus on the Danube. From there in Pannonia he began a march west, through Noricum, Raetia, Upper Germany and Gaul Clodius Albinus is defeated by Severus at Lugdunum (Lyon), February 19.
198	Capture of the Parthian capital Ctesiphon. Re-annexing of the province of Mesopotamia. Unsuccessful siege of Hatra by the Romans. Caracalla becomes co-emperor.
202	Severus visits Egypt. Caracalla marries Plautianus' daughter Fulvia Plautina.
203	Severus returns to Rome.
203	Completion of the Arch of Septimius Severus in the Roman Forum.
203-11	Building of the Forma Urbis, Rome's marble plan. Building and rebuilding activity in the city of Rome, including the Forum Pacis and the Pantheon.
204	Secular Games (Ludi saeculares) celebrated throughout the Empire
205	First consulship of the Roman historian Cassius Dio. Death of Gaius Fulvius Plautianus, praetorian prefect and father of Caracalla's wife Fulvia Plautilla. He was accused of plotting against Severus. She was killed in 211 by Caracalla.
209	Septimius Severus campaigns in Britain against the Caledonians
211	Death of Septimius Severus in Britain. Caracalla and Geta become joint emperors.
211	Geta murdered by Caracalla.
211	Constitutio Antoniniana. The imperial edict granted the citizenship to all free men in the Empire.
215	Creation of the Antoninianus, a new form of silver coinage.

- 216 New wars against Parthia. Caracalla captures the Osroene King Abgarus during a visit in order to annex Osroene into the empire.
- 216 Completion of the baths of Caracalla in Rome.
- 216 Caracalla makes concessions to the Jews, exempting them from taxes.
- 217 Death of Caracalla assassinated by an officer of his bodyguard.
- 217 Macrinus, praetorian prefect under Caracalla is elected new emperor by his troops in Syria. He is the first emperor from the equestrian order.
- 217 Emperor Macrinus continues to campaign against the Parthians, but suffers several setbacks including a setback near the city of Nisibis.
- 218 He appoints his nine year old son **Diadumenianus** as successor (*caesar*). Diadumedianus and Macrinus are defeated. Macrinus executed in Cappadocia.
- 218 Bassianus (Elagabalus), nephew of Caracalla is elected emperor by the Legio III Gallica after being supported by his grandmother Julia Maesa, Julia Domna's sister. The first emperor of Syrian origin from mother's side.
- 219 Elagabalus consul. He arrives to Rome and is ratified by the senate. The Syrian god Elagabalus, whom he is priest, accepted in the Roman pantheon.
- 220 Marriage with the Vestal virgin Julia Aquilia Severa, whom he will remarriage in 221.
- 220-221 Debasement of coins
- 221 Adoption of his cousin Alaxianus (Alexander), who becomes his successor.
- 222 Conflicts between Elagabalus and Alexander. Elagabalus and his mother Julia Soaemias are murdered by the praetorian guard.
- 222 Severus Alexander becomes emperor with the support of the praetorians and of his mother Julia Maemia. *Damnatio memoriae* of Elagabalus.
- 223 The adviser of the emperor, the jurist Domitius Ulpianus is murdered by his own soldiers.
- 226 The Persian king Ardahir I reveals against the Parthians and defeats them at the battle of Hormuz. Foundation of the Sassanid dynasty of the Persians.
- 230 Offensive expansion towards the West of the new Persian Dynasty
- 232 Attack on Armenia and Mesopotamia, now occupied by the Persians, by the army headed by Alexander Severus. The offensive fails.
- 233 Alexander's campaigns against the Alemmani on the Rhine.
- 234 The Pannonian troops proclaim Maximinus Thrax as the new emperor.
- 235 Death of Alexander Severus, who is killed due to a mutiny of his troops near the town of Moguntiacum (Mainz).
- 235 Beginning of the period known as military anarchy/ soldiers emperors
- 235 Maximinus Thrax is recognised by the senate as emperor.
- 235 Maximinus Thrax campaigns successfully against the Alemmani
- 236-237 Campaigns against the Dacians and the Samatians.
- 237-238 Invasion of the Roman province of Mesopotamia by the Persians. Capture of the cities of Nibisis and Carrhae.
- 238 Year of the Six Emperors.

- 238 Death of Emperors Balbinus (praetorians), Gordian I(suicide), Gordian II(killed in battle), Maximinus Thrax (mutiny of his soldiers), Pupienus Maximus (killed by his bodyguards).
- 239 The Goths invade Lower Moesia under Gordian III. Repelled successfully.
- 240 Rebellion by the governor of Africa pulled down.
- 242 Gordian III responds to the Persian invasion of the East and saves the city of Antioch.
- 243 Persian occupation of the province Syria repelled by the Romans.
- 244 Death of Gordian III, executed by Philip the Arab.
- 244 Emperor Philip the Arab negotiates the Peace with the Persian invaders in order to deal with the troubles on the Rhine/Danube border.
- 245 The Emperor Phillip the Arab sets out from Rome to campaign against Germanic tribes, and he secures peace from some tribes.
- 247 Philippus II is proclaimed emperor by the troops who were loyal to his father.
- 248 A rebellion under a Danube commander, Tiberius Claudius Marinus Pacatianus. While this is happening, the Goths take advantage and wreak large-scale destruction in the northern part of the empire.
- 248 Decius defeats the invasion of the Goths and resettles Moesia and Pannonia.
- 249 Decius proclaimed Emperor.
- 249 death of Philip the Arab, killed in a battle near Verona against Decius Traianus.
- 249 Incursions of the Goths into the Roman Empire
- 250 Decius defeats an incursion of the Goth king Kniva.
- 251 A new soldier emperor, Herennius, claims the throne, backed by his army. A pretender to the throne, Julius Valens Licianus, is defeated and executed.
- 251 Death of Emperor Decius in battle against the Goths.
- 251 Trebonius Gallus is proclaimed as emperor, but only for a short period, as he soon dies.
- 251-252 Invasions of the northern borders of the empire by the Goths and other barbarians. Persians attack Mesopotamia in the East.
- 253 Aemilianus is proclaimed emperor.
- 253 Death of Aemilian by his own troops who rejected to face the army of Valerian.
- 253 Valerian becomes emperor.
- 254 The Marcomani attack and invade Pannonia and raid the city of Ravenna.
- 254 The Goths under Kniva sack Thrace.
- 256 The Franks attack the border cities of the lower Rhine and invade Gaul.
- 256 The Goths attack Asia Minor from the sea.
- 257 new invasions of the Persians.
- 259 Invasions of the Germanic tribe of the Juthungi. They crossed the Upper Danube and entered Italy.
- 260 The Juthungi move to Mediolanum where they were defeated by the emperor Gallienus. The Juthungi defeated again in Augsburg.
- 260 Emperor Valerian is taken captive by the Persian King Shapur I, and spends the rest of his life in captivity as a slave.

- 260 The Persians invade the Roman Empire and sack the city of Antioch.
- 260 A marauding tribe of Franks attack, capture and sack the city of Tarraco in Spain.
- 261 A battle occurs in the Balkans region between the rival emperors M. Acilius Aureolus and F. Iunius Macrianus.
- 262 A Palmyrian Prince under command of Emperor Gallienus, Odenathus, mobilises his forces against the Parthians and Armenians.
- 262 The plague once again reaches Italy and Africa from the East.
- 267 The Goths invade the province of Asia Minor.
- 267 The Palmyrian prince, Odenathus, who had been named dux orientalis, or duke of the orient, is murdered.
- 267 A nomadic tribe known as the Heruli invade Greece.
- 268 An invasion occurs by the largest Gothic horde yet, and Gallienus, retreating before this, is deserted by his officers. The Goths raid and sack towns on their journeys, destroying a small portion of Greece and Thrace.
- 268 Battle of Naissus, in which Gallienus defeated a larger Gothic horde.
- 268 Slave revolts break out in Sicily.
- 268 Death of the Emperor Gallienus, who is murdered by his Praetorian prefect and others, including Claudius II Gothicus.
- 268 Battle of Lake Benacus, where the army under command of Emperor Claudius II Gothicus defeated the army of the pretender M. Acilius Aureolus.
- 268 Battle of Mediolanum, in which Emperor Claudius II Gothicus defeated a force of the Germanic Alemanni.
- 269 The new queen of Palmyra, Zenobia, revolts against Rome and attacks Roman territory.
- 269 Emperor Claudius II Gothicus defeats the largest and most dangerous of the German invasions in the 3rd century at the battle of Naissus. He then marched quickly through the Balkans to intercept and demolish the greater part of the retreating army. The Germanic raiders were reduced to becoming allies of Rome.
- 269-270 The defeat of the Germani came at a price. Emperor Claudius II Gothicus had to cede Spain to a new Gallo - Roman Empire.
- 270 Death of the Emperor Claudius II Gothicus, who died of the plague.
- 270 Death of the Sassanid Persian King Shapur I.
- 270 The Romans abandon the province of Dacia.
- 270 The army of Zenobia invades Egypt and enters the city of Alexandria.
- 271 The province of Dacia is lost forever to the Romans.
- 271 The Emperor Aurelian builds a wall to protect Rome from attacks.
- 271 Emperor Aurelian destroys the Gothic Chieftain Cannabas and 5,000 of his men in a small area north of the Danube.
- 271 A battle occurs near Placentia, in which a combined Germanic invasion of the Alemanni, Marcomanni, and Juthungi defeat a Roman army under the command of the Emperor Aurelian.
- 271-272 Revolts under a Septimius in Dalmatia, a Domitianus in southern Gaul and a Urbanus somewhere else in the empire.
- 271 Battle of Immae, in which the main part of the Palmyrene army was destroyed by Aurelian.

- 271- 273 After the capture of the city of Emesa, the city of Palmyra surrendered. But a few months later, the city revolted under Zabdas and slaughtered the garrison stationed there. Emperor Aurelian reacted by marching back to Palmyra, capturing it and sacking and looting the city, and killing its inhabitants.
- 272 Emperor Aurelian campaigns with his army along the Rhine river against the Carpi.
- 272 Death of the successful Persian ruler Shapur I.
- 273 The revolts brought about by the occupation of Alexandria by Zenobia are crushed by Emperor Aurelian.
- 273 The territory lost to the breakaway Gallic Empire are re-annexed back into the Empire after a battle fought at Chalon-sur-Marne, in modern Belgium.
- 274 Riots break out in the city of Lugdunum, which is suppressed by Aurelian.
- 274 The Emperor Aurelian drives into Gaul and defeats the breakaway Gallic empire at the battle of Campi Catalaunii. He punishes the rebel soldiers by executing many, but he shows mercy to the usurper Tetricus.
- 274 Emperor Aurelian defeats the incursions of the Franks and the Batavians, and drives them back across the Danube causing heavy casualties to the invaders.
- 274 The emperor Aurelian moved and quickly contained an invasion by the Jutes.
- 275 Death of the Emperor Aurelian, who was stabbed to death by a Praetorian named Mucapor, a Thracian, in the province of Thrace.
- 275 A new emperor, Cornelius Tacitus, is asked to fill the vacant throne as emperor. He is 75 years old.
- 276 Emperor Cornelius Tacitus dies in Rome. His successor, his brother Florian, is murdered.
- 276 Ascension of Probus as the new Emperor of Rome.
- 277 The Emperor Probus begins to campaign in Gaul, clearing the Goths and Germanic tribes from the province.
- 278 The new ruler, Emperor Probus, campaigns in the province of Raetia and secures it. He then goes on to drive invading groups of Vandals from Illyricum.
- 278 In order to check the brigandage and barbarism of the Isaurians, Emperor Probus builds forts to secure the province.
- 279 Emperor Probus settles unrest in Asia Minor and the more recently acquired eastern provinces.
- 279 Probus signs a peace treaty with the Persian King Vahram II.
- 279 Birth of the Emperor Maxentius.
- 282 Death of the Emperor Probus, who was murdered near Sirmium by his own troops.
- 282 A new emperor, Carus, is proclaimed as ruler in Rome.
- 282 An army under Emperor Carus marches against invading bands of Quadi and Sarmatians, and defeats them causing moderate losses of around 16,000 men.
- 282 Invasion of Persia by the Emperor Carus.

- 283 The emperor Carus invaded Mesopotamia, capturing Seleucia first and finally Ctesiphon.
- 283 Death of the Emperor Carus, who was suspected to have been struck by lightning.
- 283 New emperors are appointed for the empire. Carinus succeeds as the emperor in the West, and Numerian as the emperor in the East.
- 283 The leader of the Praetorian Guard, a Danubian named Diocles, assumes the name Diocletian and the title of emperor in the East after he kills Numerian.
- 284 This year marks the ascension of the Emperor Diocletian, and it also marks the end of the rulers known as the soldier emperors, finishing almost fifty years of constant turmoil and civil war.

Essential primary sources

- Ammianus Marcellinus,
- Aurelius Victor 'Liber De Caesaribus'
- Eutropius 'Breviarium Ab Urbe Condita' (written 369)
- Cassius Dio (155-235?)
- Tertullian (ca. 160-220)
- Herodian (ca. 170-240)
- Aurelius Victor (ca. 320-390)
- Eutropius (4th century)
- Historia Augusta (4th c.)
- The *Epitome de Caesaribus*
- Legal texts, Ulpian

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