

CLAH4006

**From Village to Empire: An
Introduction to the History of Rome**

**The Severans – AD 193-235
Septimius Severus to Macrinus**

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Struggle for Power

- Septimius – support of Danubian and Rhine legions.
- Clodius Albinus – support of British legions.
- Pescennius Niger – support of Syria Legions.



Septimius Severus – Reigned from June AD 193 to 14th February 211.

Praetorian Guards

- Septimius tricks praetorians with a ruse – accompanied emperor unarmed to a festival.
 - Surrounded by troops of Severus.
 - Forced to go 100 miles from Rome.
 - A new 10,000 praetorians established, also reserve force at Albanum (II Parthica).
 - Danubian and Rhenish legions.
- “Severus, on becoming emperor in the manner described, inflicted the death penalty on the Pretorians who had taken part in the slaying of Pertinax; and as for the others, he summoned them, before he came to Rome, and having surrounded them in the open while they were ignorant of the fate in store for them, uttered many bitter reproaches against them for their lawless deed against their emperor, and then relieved them of their arms, took away their horses, and banished them from Rome.” – **Dio Cassius 74.1.1.**

- Clodius Albinus granted title of Caesar.
- Septimius Severus marches against Pescennius Niger – battles near Byzantium and Issus - Siege of Byzantium, surrenders in winter of AD 195.
- Punitive expedition against the Osrhoeni (Parthian vassals who had aided Niger).

“Most of all, this opportune coming of the storm inspired courage in the one side, which believed it was being aided by Heaven, and fear in the other, which felt that Heaven was warring against it; thus it made the one army strong beyond its own strength, and terrified the other in spite of its real power; and as the forces of Niger were already taking to flight, Valerianus came in sight. Upon seeing him, they faced about again, and then, when Anullinus beat them back, they once more turned around. Then, running this way and that, wherever they could break through, they wandered about the country. This proved to be the greatest disaster of the war; for twenty thousand of Niger's followers perished.” – **Dio Cassius 74.7-8.**

Defeat of Clodius Albinus

- Caracalla made Caesar.
- Discontent in Rome.
- Albinus defeated in a battle near Lugdunum – February AD 197.



Caracalla, as Caesar, Denarius. 196-197 AD. M AVR ANTONINVS CAES, draped & cuirassed but right / SECVRITAS PERPETVA, Minerva standing left with spear & leaning on shield – **RIC 2**.

“Before Severus had recovered from his conflicts with the barbarians he was involved in civil war with Albinus, his Caesar. For Severus would no longer give him even the rank of Caesar, now that he had got Niger out of the way and had settled other matters in that part of the world to his satisfaction; whereas Albinus aspired even to the pre-eminence of emperor.” – **Dio Cassius 76.4**.

Purge

“While reading to the senate a speech, in which he praised the severity and cruelty of Sulla, Marius and Augustus as the safer course and deprecated the mildness of Pompey and Caesar as having proved the ruin of those very men, he introduced a sort of defence of Commodus and inveighed against the senate for dishonouring that emperor unjustly...After reading this address, he released thirty-five prisoners who were charged with having sided with Albinus, and behaved toward them as if they had not incurred any charge at all (they were among the foremost members of the senate), but condemned to death twenty-nine other men, among whom naturally was Sulpicianus, the father-in-law of Pertinax.” – **Dio Cassius 76.8.2.**

War Against Parthia

- Campaign launched against Parthians in AD 197 – motive support for Pescennius Niger.
- Sack of Ctesiphon c. December AD 197.
- Annexation of Osrhoene and Mesopotamia – AD 199.



“The army, sailing in a large number of ships, was not borne to its intended destination on Roman-held shores, but after the current had carried the fleet a great distance, the legions disembarked on Parthian beaches at a spot within a few days' march of the road leading to Ctesiphon, where the royal palace of the Parthians was located. There the king was spending his time peacefully, thinking that the battles between Severus and the Hatrenians were no concern of his... The Romans fell upon the unsuspecting barbarians, killing all who opposed them. Taking captive the women and children, they looted the entire city. After the king fled with a few horsemen, the Romans plundered the treasuries, seized the ornaments and jewels, and marched off. – **Herodian Roman History 3.9.9, 11.**

Arch of Septimius Severus



- West end of the Roman forum adjacent to the Capitol hill.
- Originally surmounted by bronze statues of Severus, Caracalla and Geta in a six-horse chariot, flanked by equestrian statues.
- 75 ft high (23 m) and 82 ft (25 m) wide – artificial step base.
- Victory chronicled on the on four narrative slabs above the side arches.
- Reflects two wars against the Parthians/ Parthian Vassals in AD 194-195 and 197-199.

West Façade – Facing the Capitoline



- Left conquest of Selcucia.
 - Troops approach from bottom left
 - Parthian cavalry flee, perhaps with King Vologases
 - Top: city surrenders
 - Emperor top right
- Right conquest of Ctesiphon.

East Façade – Facing the Forum



- Left conquest of Nisibis.
- Right conquest of Edessa.



Imperial Policy and Domestic Affairs

Posthumous Adoption

- Marcus Aurelius - posthumous adoption of Septimius Severus.
- Commodus deified.
- Pertinax is given a lavish funeral.

“He caused us especial dismay by constantly styling himself the son of Marcus and the brother of Commodus and by bestowing divine honours upon the latter, whom but recently he had been abusing.” – **Dio Cassius 76.7.**

“Upon establishing himself in power he erected a shrine to Pertinax, and commanded that his name should be mentioned at the close of all prayers and all oaths; he also ordered that a golden image of Pertinax should be carried into the Circus on a car drawn by elephants, and that three gilded thrones should be borne into the other amphitheatres in his honour.” – **(74.4.1).**

Caracalla as Co-Emperor

- Made joint Augustus with Septimius Severus in AD 198.
 - Geta probably made Caesar
- “For when he passed beyond the age of a boy, either by his father's advice or through a natural cunning, or because he thought that he must imitate Alexander of Macedonia, he became more reserved and stern and even somewhat savage in expression, and indeed so much so that many were unable to believe that he was the same person whom they had known as a boy.” – **SHA Caracalla 2.1.**



- Marcus Aurelius Antoninus “Caracalla”.

Downfall of Plautianus

- Gaius Fulvius Plautinas become praetorian prefect in AD 197.
- Daughter Plautilla marries Caracalla.
- Makes himself unpopular due to amassing of wealth.
- Hostility of Julia Domna.
- Denounced by Lucius Septimius Geta on death bed.

“Plautianus, who not only shared Severus' power but also had the authority of prefect, and possessed the widest and greatest influence of all men, put to death many prominent men among his peers...

Plautianus did not live the year out, but was slain and all his images destroyed [January AD 205].” – **Dio Cassius 76.14, 16.**

Death of Septimius Severus

- Septimius Severus dies on 4th of February AD 211 at Eboracum (York).
- Caracalla and Geta co-heirs.

“When this had been done, and the Caledonians had joined the revolt of the Maeatae, he began preparing to make war upon them in person. While he was thus engaged, his sickness carried him off on the fourth of February, not without some help, they say, from Antoninus. At all events, before Severus died, he is reported to have spoken thus to his sons (I give his exact words without embellishment): ‘Be harmonious, enrich the soldiers, and scorn all other men.’” – **Dio Cassius 77.15.2.**

Caracalla and Geta

Murder of Geta

After the murder of Geta, those soldiers who had not been bribed received the news of the fratricide with anger, and all declared they had sworn allegiance to both sons and ought to maintain it to both. They then closed the gates of the Camp and for a long time the Emperor was not admitted. And not until he had quieted their anger by bitter words about Geta and by giving them great sums of money, was Bassianus able to return to Rome.” – **SHA Geta 6.1-3.**

- Geta murder – 20,000 of his supporters killed.



Caracalla, AV aureus, Rome. 212 AD.
ANTONINVS PIVS AVG BRIT, laureate head right / P M TR P XV COS III P P, IOV VIC below, Jupiter, seated left, holding Victory and sceptre, eagle at foot. **RIC 200.**

Damnatio Memoriae



- Fayum portrait – wooden tondo now in Berlin.
- Septimius Severus - Julia Domna - Caracalla and Geta (removed).

“To the Emperor Caesar Lucius Septimius, son of Marcus, Severus [Septimius Severus]... conqueror of the Parthians in Arabia and Assyria... and to the Emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius, son of Lucius [Caracalla]... **the best and bravest of princes** - on account of the republic restored and the empire of the Roman people increased by their outstanding virtues at home and abroad, the Senate and Roman people dedicate this arch.” – ***ILS 425 = CIL 6.1033.***

War Against Parthia

“After this Antoninus [Caracalla] made a campaign against the Parthians, on the pretext that Artabanus had refused to give him his daughter in marriage when he sued for her hand; for the Parthian king had realized clearly enough that the emperor, while pretending to want to marry her, was in reality eager to get the Parthian kingdom incidentally for himself... The barbarians took refuge in the mountains beyond the Tigris in order to complete their preparations, but Antoninus suppressed this fact and took to himself as much credit as if he had utterly vanquished these foes...” – **Dio Cassius 79.1.**

Citizenship

“Now this great admirer of Alexander, Antoninus [Caracalla], was fond of spending money upon the soldiers, great numbers of whom he kept in attendance upon him... he made it his business to strip, despoil, and grind down all the rest of mankind, and the senators by no means least. In the first place, there were the gold crowns that he was repeatedly demanding, on the constant pretext that he had conquered some enemy or other... This was the reason why he made all the people in his empire Roman citizens; nominally he was honouring them, but his real purpose was to increase his revenues by this means, inasmuch as aliens did not have to pay most of these taxes.” – **Dio Cassius 78.9.**

Macrinus

- Caracalla murder by plot of Macrinus on 8th April AD 117.
- Joint Praetorian Prefect in AD 216.
- First emperor of non-senatorial origins.
- Deifies Caracalla.
- Senate notified, not “consulted” about his accession.



- Marcinus (Marcus Opellius) reigns from April AD 217 to June 218.

Military Autocracy

Size of the Military

- Augustus - 28 legions (25 after AD 9).
- Trajan – 30 legions.
- Septimius Severus – 33 legions – also increase in *numeri* (allied troops), such as mounted archers from Osrhoene and Palmyra.
- Increasingly troops conscripted into the army.

Increase in Pay

- Centurions now paid 8,333-33,333 *denarii* depending upon grade (5-20,000 in late first century AD).
- Legionaries now paid 500 *denarii* (had been 300 under Domitian).
- “Be harmonious, enrich the soldiers, and scorn all other men.” – **Dio Cassius 77.15.2.**
- Price inflation and debasement of coinage? – *aureus* reduced from 7.2 to 6.5 grams by time of Caracalla – *denarius* about 51% silver by this point.

Changes in Practice

- Soldiers unions with women now legally recognised – desire for hereditary service?
- Garrisons increasingly assigned plots of land divided into allotments – practice of farming?
- Increase in provision of goods in kind – “... Then there were the provisions that we were required to furnish in great quantities on all occasions, and this without receiving any remuneration and sometimes actually at additional cost to ourselves all of which supplies he either bestowed upon the soldiers or else peddled out...” – **Dio Cassius 78.9.**
- Caracalla stationed no more than 2 legions in a province.

The Roman Senate

- Near disappearance of old Republican patrician *gentes* by early second century AD – similar for patricians created by Augustus.
- Older plebeian families from Julio-Claudian period also appear to decline.
- Ennobling of plebeian senatorial families throughout second century AD (primarily Italians).
- Causes of the decline – persecution/execution? – low birth-rate? – inability to maintain sufficient wealth?

- By reign of Septimius Severus it rare for senatorial members to go back more than two generations.
- By this period over half the membership of the senate is composed of provincials – many large landowners.

	<i>V.</i>	<i>D.</i>	<i>T.</i>	<i>H.</i>	<i>A.</i>	<i>M.</i>	<i>C.</i>	<i>SC.</i>	<i>EA.</i>	<i>III cent.</i>
1. Total senators listed	386	404	428	332	355	342	259	937	471	548
2. Senators whose origin is known	178	163	152	156	167	180	114	479	238	265
3. Percentage of total whose origin is known	46.1	40.3	35.5	47.0	47.0	52.6	44.0	51.0	50.0	48.0
4. Italians surviving from previous reigns	93	91	70							
5. Italians added in a given reign	55	34	30							
6. Total Italians	148	125	100	88	96	98	63	204	113	116
7. Percentage Italians among those of known origin	83.2	76.6	65.8	56.4	57.5	54.4	55.3	42.6	49.5	44.0
8. Provincials surviving from previous reigns	16	23	24	41	36	47	39			
9. Provincials added in a given reign	14	15	28	27	35	35	12			
10. Total provincials	30	38	52	68	71	82	51	275	125	149
11. Percentage provincials among those of known origin	16.8	23.4	34.2	43.6	42.5	45.6	44.7	57.4	52.5	56.0
12. Western provincials surviving	14	17	17	21	12	5	3			
13. Western provincials added	7	12	12	10	5	3	1			
14. Total western provincials	21	29	29	31	17	8	4	41	17	23
15. Percentage westerners among provincials	70.0	76.3	55.8	45.6	23.9	9.7	7.8	15.0	13.6	15.4
16. Eastern provincials surviving	1	4	5	15	15	26	21			
17. Eastern provincials added	4	2	13	10	18	18	10			
18. Total eastern provincials	5	6	18	25	33	44	31	157	72	86
19. Percentage easterners among provincials	16.7	15.8	34.6	36.8	46.5	53.7	60.8	57.0	57.6	57.7
20. African provincials surviving	1	1	1	4	8	15	15			
21. African provincials added	2	1	2	7	11	10	1			
22. Total African provincials	3	2	3	11	19	25	16	72	33	34
23. Percentage Africans among provincials	10.0	5.3	5.8	16.2	26.8	30.5	31.4	26.0	26.4	22.9
24. Dalmatian provincials surviving	0	1	1	1	1	1				
25. Dalmatian provincials added	1	0	1	0	1	4				
26. Total Dalmatian provincials	1	1	2	1	2	5	0	5	3	6
27. Percentage Dalmatians among provincials	3.3	2.6	3.8	1.4	2.8	6.1	0.0	2.0	2.4	4.0

Table from Hammond (1957)

Useful Reading

- Birley, A. (1971) *Septimius Severus: The African Emperor*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode. – Chapter 17.
- Verlag, F. S. (1972) 'The Army Reforms of Septimius Severus', *Historia* 21 (3): 481-500.