

Lecture 27: The Severans I



Edward Gibbon



Gibbon, Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (1776-1788)

“If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus”, Chapter 1

Timeline

- **138-161:** Antoninus Pius
- **161-180:** Marcus Aurelius. **161-169:** Lucius Verus (co-emperor); **177-180:** Commodus (co-emperor)
- **180-192:** Commodus. **193** (January) : Pertinax.
- **193** (March): The Empire at auction: Julianus versus Sulpicianus
- **193** (June): Julianus is murdered by a loyal follower of L. Septimius Severus.

Death of Commodus

- Planned by Marcia (mistress) and Eclectus (chamberlain), along with Quintus Aemilius Laetus, the praetorian praefectus. Commodus was poisoned in the New years eve of 192.
- Pertinax was proclaimed emperor by the praetorians.

Pertinax to the senate

- “I have been named emperor by the soldiers, but I really do not want the office, but I will resign it this very day because of my age ill health and sad state of affairs.” (Dio 73, 1, 4)
- “He had failed to understand...that one cannot with safety reform everything at once.” (Dio 73, 10, 3)

AD 193. The Auction of the Empire.

Cassius Dio, Epitome of Book 74

- “...When the fate of Pertinax was noised about, some ran to their homes and others to those of the soldiers, all taking thought for their own safety. But Sulpicianus, who had been sent by Pertinax to the camp to set matters in order there, remained on the spot, and intrigued to get himself appointed emperor. Meanwhile Didius Julianus, at once an insatiate money-getter and a wanton spendthrift, ...now, when he heard of the death of Pertinax, hastily made his way to the camp, and, standing at the gates of the enclosure, made bids to the soldiers for the rule over the Romans. Then ensued a most disgraceful business and one unworthy of Rome. For, just as if it had been in some market or auction-room, both the City and its entire empire were auctioned off.”

Severans. Main Sources

- *Historia Augusta*
- Herodian
- Cassius Dio
- Aurelius Victor,
- Eutropius,
- The *Epitome de Caesaribus*
- Christian sources
- Legal texts, Ulpian

Main Literary Sources of (on) the Period

- 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*
- Christian sources
- Legal texts, Ulpian



Rebellion

- Julianus was follower of Commodus, supported by the guard and very unpopular among the people of Rome. Riots and protests against him.
- Rebellion: Septimius Severus, governor of Upper Pannonia, and Pescenius Niger, governor of Syria.
- Severus secures the loyalty of the Balkan and Danuvian troops and governors
- He also negotiates with Clodius Albinus and proclaims him Caesar (heir).
- Severus heads for Rome

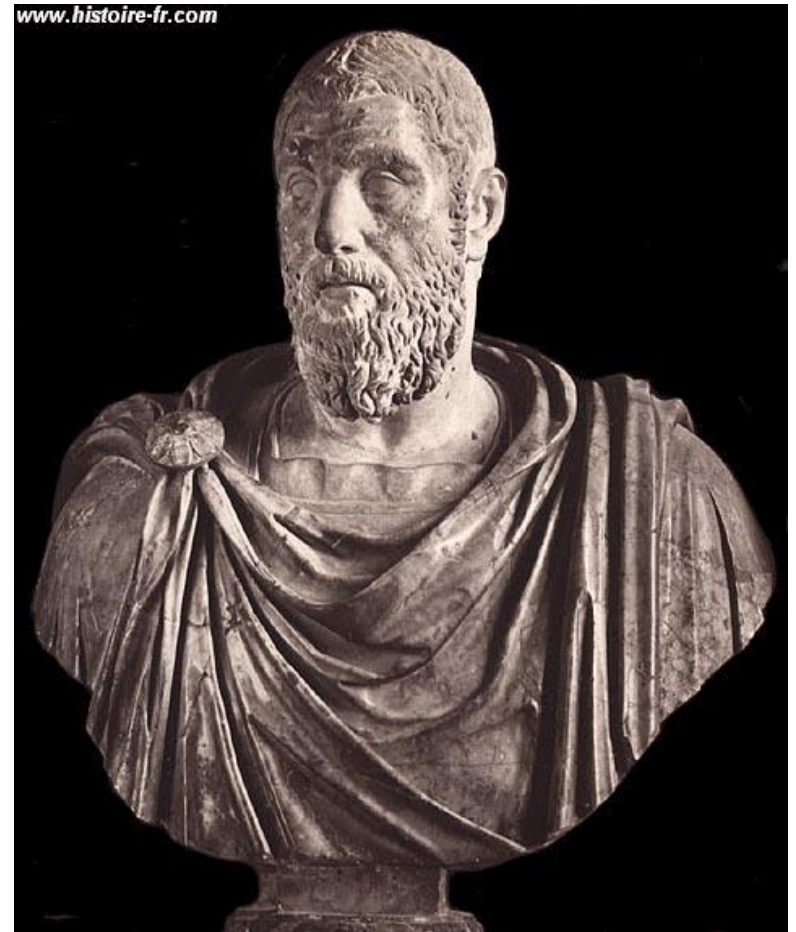
Septimius Severus



Severus' early career

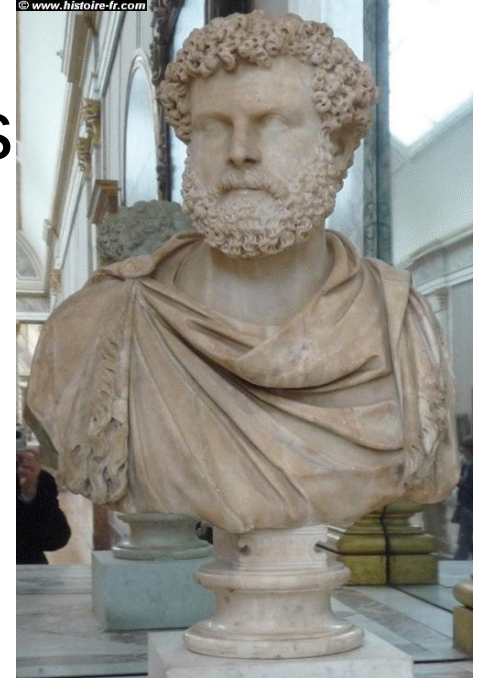
- Born in Lepcis Magna in 145 (Tripolitana) Descended from a notable Punic family.
- In 169 and 170 he was quaestor.
- 173: served the governor of Tripolitania, his relative c. Septimius Severus.
- 175: Tribune of the plebs. 177: Praetor.
- 180: Command of a legion in Syria, governed by Pertinax.
- 187: he married Julia Domna, a Syrian descendent from the kings of Emesa.
- He was governor of Gallia Lugdunensis and Sicily
- 190: consul and governor of Upper Pannonia.
- After the accession of Didius Julianus, Septimius was proclaimed emperor by his own legions, probably in Carnuntum, in Upper Pannonia.

Pescenius Niger



Clodius Albinus

- Clodius Albinus breaks the agreement of 193
- Albinus' troops are defeated in Lyon, Lyon on February 19, 197.
- Proscriptions and confiscations senatorial fortunes



Restructuring of the Eastern Provinces

- Division of the province Syria: Syria Coele and Syria Phoenice
- 195: Creation of a new province in western Mesopotamia (Annexation of Osrhoene in 199)
- 196: Septimius returns to Rome.
- 197-: New conflicts with the Parthians
- 202: Severus in Antioch

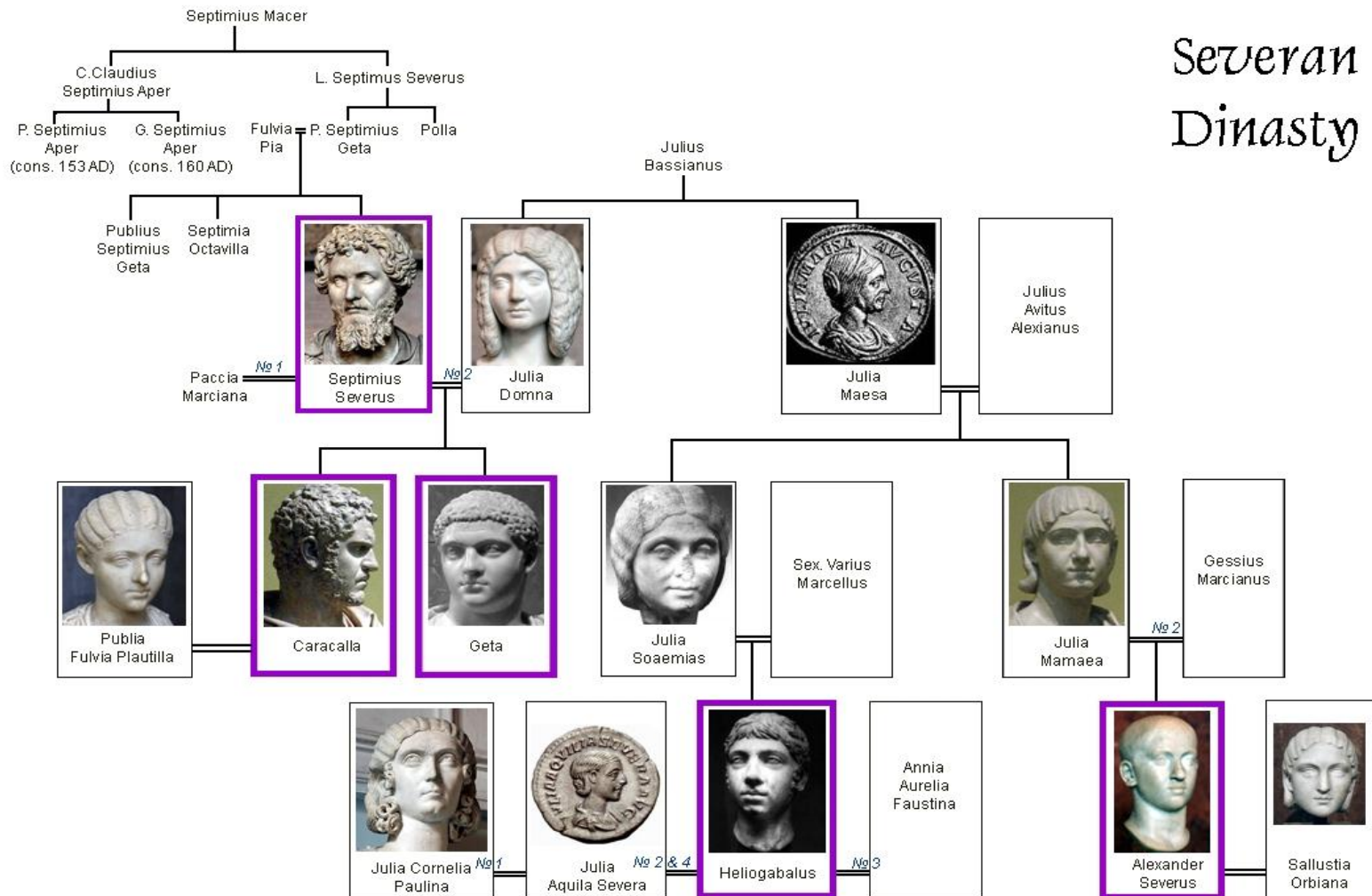
The Provinces under the Severans



Legitimacy: Severus and the Antonines



Severan dynasty: Family tree



New Parthian Campaign

- “Severus said that he had acquired a great country and provided a bulwark for Syria. The facts proclaim otherwise, that it has been for us the cause of constant wars and of enormous expense. It yields very little, it costs a very great deal, and, reaching out to people who are closer to the Medes and Persians, we are always, in some way, fighting their wars.” (75, 3, 2-3)

Chronology of events

- **202:** Severus visits Egypt. Caracalla marries Plautianus' daughter Fulvia Plautina.
- **203:** Severus returns to Rome.
- **205:** Execution of Plautianus
- **208:** Severus' campaigns in Britain.
- **211:** Death of Severus in York.
- **212:** Death of Geta

Death of Severus in York, AD 211

- Last words to his sons according to Dio:
"be harmonious, enrich the soldiers, and scorn all other men."

Arch of Septimius Severus. Rome



Arch of Septimius Severus



The Septizonium



Historia Augusta, Severus 24, 3:
“When he built the Septizonium he had no other thought than that his building should strike the eyes of those who came to Rome from Africa.

Roman North Africa



Provincial Urbanism: Leptis Magna



Provincial Urbanism: Leptis Magna



Provincial urbanism: Leptis Magna



Carthage, AD 203-204

- Septimius Severus Denarius. SEVERVS PIVS AVG, laureate head right / INDVLGENTIA AVGG, IN CARTH in ex, Dea Caelestis in elaborate headdress riding right on lion, holding thunderbolt & scepter; below, water gushing from rocks left. RSC 222.



Indulgence (generosity) of the Augusti towards Carthage)

Cuicul



Cuicul. Arch of Caracalla



Cuicul, Temple of Severus



Timgad (Djemila, Argelia)



Timgad. General View. Theatre



Timgad. Severan Arch

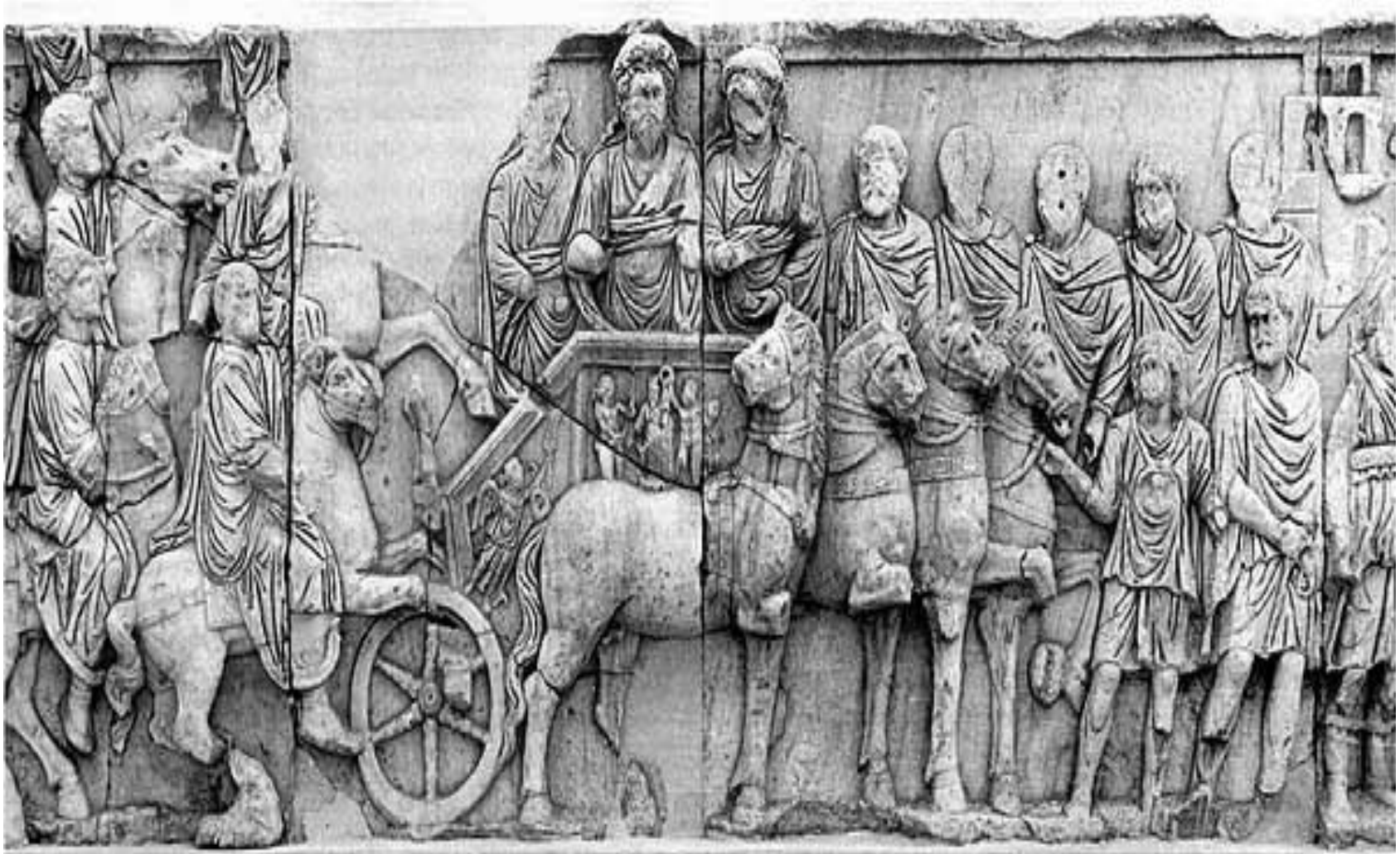


Honorific Arcs dedicated to the Severans and in North African Cities

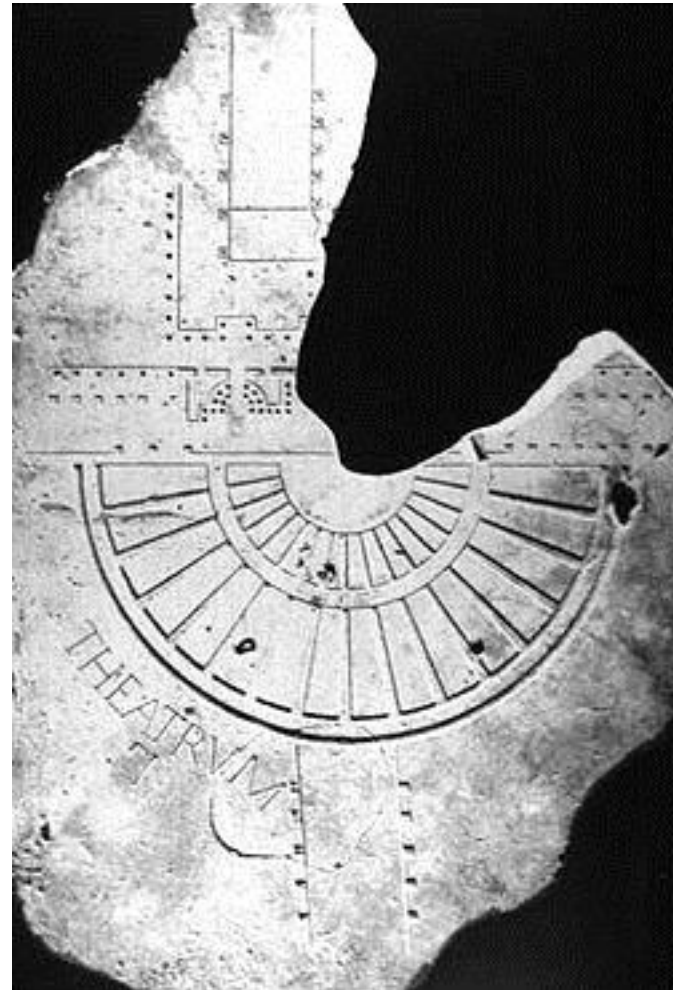
- Lepcis Magna (193-211)
- Cuicul (216)
- Tigisis (198)
- Thubursicu Numidarum (198)
- Lambaesis (203)
- Timgad (203)
- Ammaedara (195)
- Thuga (205),
- Vaga (209),
- Seressi

- Madauros,
- Sufetula,
- Assuras
- Vallis (211/212)
- Vazi Sarra (212),
Theveste (214),
- Assuras (215);
- Cuicul (216),
- Volubilis (216),
- Cirta and Uzappa.
- Rusicade

Arch of Septimius Severus. Lepcis Magna



Forma Urbis Romae: a map of marble



Forma Urbis

- Sometime between 203 and 211 the Forma Urbis, measuring 18.10 by 13 meters and covering 235 square metres, was carved onto marble slabs set into a wall within Vespasian's Templum Pacis.
- It was created in the course of the restoration of the building which had been damaged by fire in 192.
- The Templum Pacis as a whole celebrated Roman imperialism and cultural appropriation through its display of religious objects taken at the sack of the temple of Jerusalem and of famous Greek works of art.
- The Forma urbis may have replaced an older map.
- Official vision of the city.
- This map does not tell an objective story of the city. Abstract representation and omission of certain elements, like measures. It included the recently built Septizodium.

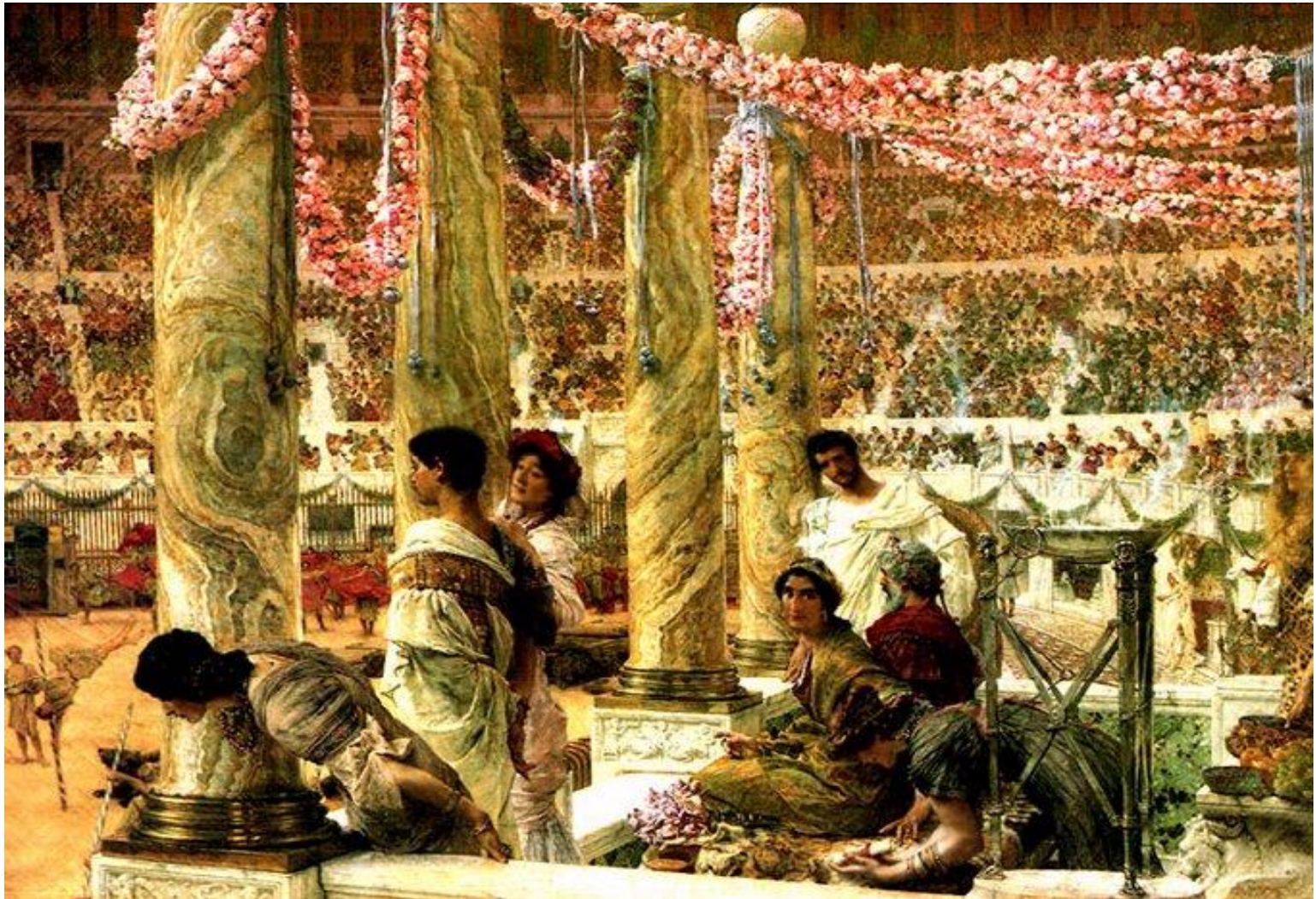
Caracalla. Chronology

- 212: Death of Geta and persecutions, followed by games, chariot racings and public celebrations in Rome.
- 212: Constitutio Antoniniana
- 213: Caracalla's campaign in Germany
- 215: Devaluation. Caracalla introduced the radiate *antoninianus*, which was 2 denarii worth.
- 215: Plunder and massacre of Alexandria
- 215: Invasion of Parthia
- 217: Caracalla murdered by Macrinus

Caracalla



Alma-Tadema, Caracalla and Geta



Geta: Damnatio memoriae



Damnatio memoriae



Arch of the Argentarii



Arch of Septimius Severus



P(atri) P(atriae) OPTIMIS FORTISSIMISQUE PRINCIPIBVS
instead of ET P. SEPTIMIO GETAE NOB(ilissimo) CAESARI

Caracalla Baths



212: Constitutio Antoniniana

- Edict granting Roman citizenship to all free inhabitants of the empire.
- It also thereby subjected them to the obligations and taxes of Roman citizens, which were simultaneously doubled.
- The empire turned now into a ***communis patria***, a common homeland: the unification of the Empire.

212: Constitutio Antoniniana: consequences and aims

- The measure did just replace the distinction between citizen and non-citizen by that between *honestiores* and *humiliores*, rich and poor.
- Dio considered the Constitutio simply as a measure with fiscal purposes.
- A papyrus suggests that the Constitutio was a form of Thanksgiving to the immortal Gods for saving the emperor from Geta's supposed plot against him.

212: Constitutio Antoniniana: consequences and aims

- Regarding the Christians, it has been also said that the Constitutio opened the road for the persecutions of 212.
- From now on all the soldiers, except those in native formations, were citizens.

Imitatio Alexandri

- **Dio, epit. Book 78, 7** “He was so enthusiastic about Alexander that he used certain weapons and cups which he believed had once been his, and he also set up many likenesses of him both in the camps and in Rome itself. He organized a phalanx, composed entirely of Macedonians, sixteen thousand strong, named it "Alexander's phalanx," and equipped it with the arms that warriors had used in his day”

The Parthian Campaign

- Caracalla had the idea of marrying the daughter of Artabanus V, the king of Parthia (c. 213-224).
- Artabanus rejected
- Excuse to invade Parthia in 215.
- Invasion of Parthia through northern Mesopotamia
- Caracalla in Arbela
- Caracalla reaches Edessa