High Politics:
From the Flavians to the Severans
Year of the Four Emperors, AD 69

- Galba: Spanish Legions / Praetorians
- Otho: Praetorians
- Vitellius: German Legions
- Vespasian: Eastern Legions
‘They (the Senate) hated him (Otho) most of all, however, because he had shown that the imperial office was for sale and had put the City in the power of the boldest spies; also because he held the senate and the people in slight esteem, and had convinced the soldiers of the fact that they could both kill and create a Caesar.’

From *Cassius Dio: Roman History*. Translated by Earnest Cary. This material is in the public domain.
‘But the Roman Empire was a prey to convulsions and disasters like those caused by the Titans of mythology, being torn into many fragments, and again in many places collapsing upon itself, not so much through the ambition of those who were proclaimed emperors, as through the greed and licence of the soldiery, which drove out one commander with another as nail drives out nail.’

From Plutarch’s Lives. Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. This material is in the public domain.
The Flavians

Vespasian 69-79

Titus 79-81

Domitian 81-96
DOMITIAN

‘Dominus et Deus’

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M. Cocceius NERVA
96-98

Image by Marie Lan. This image is in the public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years</th>
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<td>Nerva</td>
<td>96 – 98</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trajan</td>
<td>98 – 117</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hadrian</td>
<td>117 – 138</td>
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<tr>
<td>Antoninus Pius</td>
<td>138 – 161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcus Aurelius</td>
<td>161 – 180</td>
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Trajan 98-117

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Forum of Trajan
Dedicated AD 112 (column in 113)
Image courtesy of Charlie Phillips on flickr. License CC BY.
Hadrian 117-138

Image by Bibi Saint Pol. This image is in the public domain. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=181737).
Antoninus Pius 138-161

Image by Bibi Saint Pol. This image is in the public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons.
Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus

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Tacitus, *Histories* 1.16

“If the mighty structure of the empire could stand in even poise without a ruler, it were proper that a republic should begin with me. But as it is, we have long reached such a pass that my old age cannot give more to the Roman people than a good successor, or your youth more than a good emperor. Under Tiberius, Gaius, and Claudius, we Romans were the heritage, so to speak, of one family; the fact that we emperors are now beginning to be chosen will be for all a kind of liberty; and since the houses of the Julii and the Claudii are ended, adoption will select only the best; for to be begotten and born of princes is mere chance, and is not reckoned higher, but the judgment displayed in adoption is unhampered; and if one wishes to make a choice, common consent points out the individual.”

*Tacitus: The Histories*. Translated by C.H. Moore. This material is in the public domain.
Commodus, AD 177-192

Image by Marie Lan Nguyen. This image is in the public domain. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Forces</th>
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<tr>
<td>P. Helvius Pertinax</td>
<td>Senate/Praetorians</td>
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<td>Didius Julianus</td>
<td>Praetorians</td>
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<tr>
<td>Septimius Severus</td>
<td>Pannonian Legions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pescennius Niger</td>
<td>Syrian Legions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clodius Albinus</td>
<td>British Legions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ‘Auction’ of 193

Sulpicianus

vs

Didius Julianus

• 25,000 sesterces per Praetorian
  • = 5 years’ pay
Table 12.2  The dynasty of Septimius Severus

Julius Bassianus

Julia Domna

SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS
(193–211)

Julia Maesa

C. Julius Avitus Alexianus

Bassianus

= Caracalla
M. AURELIUS
ANTONINUS
(198–211–217)

Geta

P. SEPTIMIUS
GETA
(209–211–212)

Julia Soaemias

Sex. Varius
Marcellus

Julia Mamaea

Gessius Marcianus

Varius Avitus Bassianus

= Elagabalus
M. AURELIUS
ANTONINUS
(218–222)

Gessius Alexianus
M. AURELIUS
SEVERUS ALEXANDER
(222–235)
Septimius Severus
AD 193 - 211

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Arch of Septimius Severus
AD 203

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Image courtesy of Richard Mortel on flickr. License CC BY NC SA.
Septimius Severus’s last words?

“Be harmonious, enrich the soldiers, and scorn all other men.”

Cassius Dio 77.15

From *Cassius Dio: Roman History*. Translated by Earnest Cary. This material is in the public domain.
‘…and to the most noble Caesar P. Septimius Geta…’

cpyanged to

‘…excellent and strongest principes…’
Caracalla 198-209 w/ Severus
209-211 w/ Severus & Geta
211-217 alone

Image by Marie Lan Nguyen.
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Legionary pay

- Under Augustus: 225 denarii = 900 sest.
- By Septimius Severus: 600 denarii = 2,400 sest.
- Caracalla: 900 denarii = 3,600 sest.
Macrinus, 217-218

Image by Classical Numismatic Group, Inc. This image is in the public domain. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org).
Julia Maesa

This image is in the public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons.
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Elagabalus, AD 218-222

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Severus Alexander, AD 222-235

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