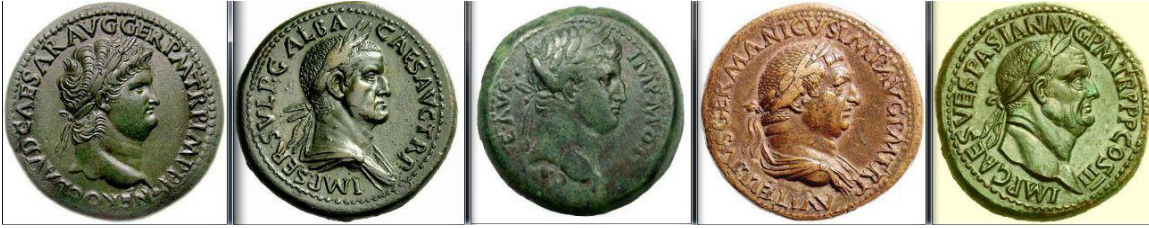


# **The Year of the 7 Emperors**

**The establishment and development of the Roman Empire led it through at least four Civil Wars.**

**The first of these began with the assassination of Julius Caesar on the Ides of March in BC44 and ended with the supremacy of Octavian in August of BC30 – a period of fourteen years and five months, though it was not until January of BC27 that the Senate proclaimed this Civil War victor over Marc Antony as Caesar Augustus. Most of the portraits shown in this presentation are from portrait sestertii struck by the Roman Empire.**





**The second Civil War ran from the execution (or suicide) of Nero in June of AD68 through Galba, Otho, and Vitellius until the supremacy of Vespasian in December of AD69 – running through five emperors in eighteen months.**



**The third Civil War ran from the assassination of Commodus on the night of 31 December AD192 through Pertinax, Didius Julianus, Pescennius Niger, and Clodius Albinus until the supremacy of Septimius Severus in February of AD197 – running through six emperors in four years and two months.**

**But the fourth Civil War broke all previous records. In a mere four months of AD238 the Roman Empire went through seven Caesars. This is the period of military anarchy, where succession is by assassination.**





**AD238 is a momentous year, the fourth civil-war upheaval of the Roman Empire. Maximinus Thrax (the “Thracian giant”) is Emperor, along with his 22-year-old son Maximus. Neither has set foot into Italy since Maximinus was proclaimed Emperor by his troops on the murder of Severus Alexander three years ago. He was likely involved in that assassination. Sestertii of Maximinus and Maximus are common.**

**Maximinus has demanded a massive tax-increase to support the German war. Gordian I, the governor of North Africa and reportedly the richest man in the Empire, has dispatched an assassin to Rome to eliminate Vitalianus, the Praetorian Prefect and a strong supporter of Maximinus. After this murder and the ensuing bloody purge of Maximinus supporters, the Senate proclaims Gordian I and his son Gordian II as co-Emperors to oppose Maximinus and his son Maximus. In early April of AD238 the mint of Rome begins to crank out coins picturing the new Emperors. The Roman citizens applaud the new regime to replace the uncouth and demanding absentee Emperor.**



Unfortunately for the Gordiani, their province is an agrarian one with no legions, while neighboring province Numidia is ruled by Capellianus who commands the Third Legion with full cavalry, is strongly loyal to Maximinus, and has a long-standing grudge against the Gordiani. Gordian II, aged in his mid-40's, frantically raises whatever "army" he can from the resident herdsmen, vinedressers, and merchants. A large gaggle of many thousands of



farmers and such meets a Roman Legion whose orders are “no survivors, no prisoners”. The slaughter is so massive and so complete that the body of Gordian II cannot even be identified on the field of blood. Gordian I, age 80, hangs himself before Capellianus’ Legion reaches his home in Carthage. The Gordiani have been co-Emperors of the Roman Empire for just three weeks, becoming the second pair of Caesars to never see Rome during their reign, and the shortest-term Caesars in history. Sestertii of Gordians I and II are scarce.

When word reaches Rome of the slaughter of the Gordiani, the Senate is VERY justifiably terrified. They know that each of them is a dead man when Maximinus addresses this issue. They proclaim two of their own, Pupienus and Balbinus as co-Emperors to oppose Maximinus. Both of these men are senior, pompous, and are liked only by other Senators of their respective (and opposing) factions. Balbinus is to be responsible for domestic affairs – keep the taxes coming in, the water running, and the grain delivered. Pupienus is to mobilize an army to march against Maximinus. Sestertii of Pupienus and Balbinus are a bit scarce.



To enhance support from the Citizens and to appropriate the family wealth of the Gordiani, the new Emperors search for any surviving male of the Gordian family. Gordian II has no surviving brother and no legitimate heirs. A thirteen-year-old grandson of Gordian I survives from Gordian I's daughter Maecia Faustina. This lad is acclaimed as Caesar Gordian III, and the wealth of the Gordiani becomes Imperial property.



Meanwhile, no army has marched from Rome, but word has reached the camp of Maximinus of the events of the last four months. Expecting to meet a massive army from Rome, tired of continual warfare with no respite, and discouraged at the thought of battling against the Rome they have pledged to defend, Maximinus' officers hold a council of war and decide that their best strategy is to dispatch a messenger to the Senate with the heads of Maximinus and Maximus.

The Senate receives this gift with great joy and relief, but Balbinus and Pupienus are still unpopular with the citizenry and with the Praetorians, who are miffed that they had no voice in their choice. Within a month the Praetorians storm the palace, drag out the two Emperors, and the hacked-up bodies of Pupienus and



**Balbinus are dragged through the streets of Rome and are tossed into the Tiber as garbage.**



**Thus Gordian III becomes the seventh Emperor of AD238 and the third thirteen-year-old Emperor in the past twenty years, following Elagabalus, who became Emperor at 13 in AD218 on the murder of Macrinus, and Severus Alexander, who became Emperor at 13 in AD222 on the murder of his first cousin Elagabalus. Sestertii of Gordian III are common.**

**So AD238 has now become the year of the shortest civil war in the history of the Roman Empire, as well as the year boasting the greatest number of Caesars.**



**Gordian III will lead a troubled Empire for five and a half years (age 13 to 19), under the tutelage of his father-in-law Timesitheus, the Praetorian Prefect. But Timesitheus is murdered in 243 and “Philip the Arab” becomes the new Praetorian Prefect. Within a few months Gordian is assassinated and Philip becomes the new ruler of the Empire.**

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ANA Summer Seminar  
Coinage of the Roman Empire  
30 June 2005  
Enhanced for ILNA 2005  
10 Sept 2005  
Pictures inserted into text  
16 August 2012  
Enhanced for CCC 2015  
27 December 2014**