



Maximinus Thrax: Strongman Emperor of Rome

Paul N. Pearson

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Maximinus was a half-barbarian strongman 'of frightening appearance and colossal size' who could smash stones with his bare hands and pull fully laden wagons unaided. Such feats impressed the emperor Severus who enlisted him into the imperial bodyguard whereupon he embarked on a distinguished military career. Eventually he achieved senior command in the massive Roman invasion of Persia in 232 and three years later became emperor himself in a military coup. Supposedly over seven feet tall (it is likely he had a pituitary disorder), Maximinus was surely one of Rome's most extraordinary emperors. He campaigned across the Rhine and Danube for three years until a rebellion erupted in Africa and the snobbish senate engaged in civil war against him. This is a narrative account of the life and times of Maximinus, from his humble origins up to and beyond the civil war of 238, written for enthusiasts of Roman history and warfare.

Maximinus Thrax: Strongman Emperor of Rome Details

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From Reader Review Maximinus Thrax: Strongman Emperor of Rome for online ebook

Kenneth says

I would not be surprised to learn that this book has become the definitive treatment of the life and times of the Roman emperor Maximinus Thrax (reigned 235-238 A.D.) for a long time to come. The author takes into account all the extant ancient written sources, the previous scholarship of the past few hundred years, and the relevant archaeological discoveries, as well as the evidence of numismatics and statuary.

The third century was a turbulent time for the Roman Empire, with very few emperors dying natural deaths, and Maximinus was no exception. Born in the Balkans of non-Roman parentage, he enlisted and rose in the Roman army to the highest rank. In 235 the previous emperor Severus Alexander was murdered and Maximinus was acclaimed emperor by the army. A few years later, he was murdered in turn. Professor Pearson lays out all the ins and outs of what and why things happened the way they did, a blow by blow description, to the extent that they can be pieced together from the oft times scanty and not always reliable evidence.

Terence says

Maximinus Thrax: From Common Soldier to Emperor of Rome is a generally well-written narrative of the titular emperor's reign (235-38). With the death of Alexander Severus in 235, the Roman Empire entered a 50-year period of civil war and economic and social upheaval known as "The Crisis of the Third Century." By its end, the ascension of Diocletian in 285, Augustus' Principate had been transformed. Maximinus was the first of those remarkable Illyrio-Danubian emperors who laid the foundations upon which Diocletian and his successors, particularly Constantine, recreated the empire and bequeathed it another two centuries of dominance.

Most of our information about Maximinus comes from Herodian's *History of the Empire from the Death of Marcus Aurelius*, which covers 180-238, and the so-called *Augustan Histories*, a scurrilous compilation of fact and fantasy that the historian relies upon at her peril. Despite his senatorial bias, Herodian's history is a balanced account of the emperor's reign, and Pearson uses a variety of other sources to squeeze as much blood as possible out of these turnips.

The Thracian, as Maximinus was known as, first came to prominence under Septimius Severus, when his prodigious size and strength brought him to the emperor's attention and secured him a place in Septimius' bodyguard. He was not just another "pretty face," however. Maximinus developed into a good soldier and charismatic leader. In the wake of Alexander Severus' failed military campaigns against Persia and the Germans and his subsequent murder, Maximinus was proclaimed emperor and immediately carried out a successful punitive expedition against the latter. Unfortunately, Maximinus was far less successful as a politician. He worked under several handicaps, perhaps the most critical being that he wasn't from the senatorial class. And in order to finance the military expenditures necessary to preserve the empire, he alienated said class with extortionate confiscations of wealth. It was a situation that couldn't last. The Senate raised a revolt against the "upstart" that eventually succeeded. Maximinus and his son were murdered while besieging Aquileia. Balbinus and Pupienus, the candidates raised to the purple by the Senate, didn't long enjoy their victory. Discontented elements in the army and the Roman mob murdered them only weeks after the Thracian's death.

I would recommend this to general readers interested in Roman history. And despite not being a rigorous academic biography, Pearson's bibliography and endnotes are thorough and a source of further study.

Jane says

Fascinating study of a unique and little-known character from Roman history -- the 3rd century emperor, the 8 foot tall Maximinus Thrax [The Thracian]. Based on not-always-completely-accurate primary material of the Roman and Byzantine periods, as well as on archaeological finds, the author has pieced together what he feels is the most accurate, and taken educated guesses as to anything else. Maximinus came from Thracian peasant stock; parents were most probably barbarians. He entered the army as a common soldier and his military ability, great size, and strength earned him quick promotions. He finally was acclaimed emperor, unwillingly, I might add, upon the assassination of the then current emperor, Alexander Severus, a young man under his evil mother's thumb. But he did don the purple; his focus was always the army with an eye to subduing Germans and Dacians [modern Romania]. He left no architectural monuments. The book concentrated then on his reign, defects, strengths, assassination at the hands of the army after Aquileia. The book stressed his cruelty, neglect of the city of Rome--he never even went there-- and the reason for his unusual physique--most probably *acromegaly*, [gigantism], a pituitary disorder. Although cruel, he was not dissolute or debauched like Nero, Caligula or Elagabalus. He genuinely loved his wife, Paulina, and deified her upon her death. I feel had he not become emperor, he would have become a great general and European history may have had a different outcome. After death, his memory was damned [*damnatio memoriae*], in that his name and those of his wife and son were scratched out of inscriptions and any statues destroyed.

This book read quickly and was a good general survey of Maximinus's life, accomplishments, "what might have been" had he lived longer, and the rest of the third century. I feel it was a good study intended for the general reader, interestingly written. As a side note: Harry Sidebottom's Throne of the Caesars series is a good fictional representation of this period.

Highly recommended.

Matthew says

A good solid coverage of what we know of the life of Maximinus Thrax. It is well footnoted for a narrative history. It is also much more than just a biography. The coverage of the Severan dynasty, the Sassanid Empire, the actions of the senate leading up to the death of Maximinus and the reigns of first few emperors after is well done. However, the narrative gets somewhat long-winded at times when covering points that aren't very important. Additionally, the last quarter of the book, focusing on the legacy of Maximinus, was dry, overly detailed and much too long.

Brian Turner says

A surprisingly interesting biography of one of the more easily over-looked Roman Emperor's of the 3rd century BC. Actually, one of the more engaging explorations of the early 3rd century in general, as it follows Maximinus - who apparently had gigantism - moving up in the world from brawler, to imperial bodyguard, to leader of the ceremonial guard, to commander of Rome's legions, and finally, emperor.

Rob says

Solid account of an under-represented Roman Emperor from the 3rd century, Maximinus Thrax. It was interesting to better understand the power of the Roman army in politics and the ascension of the 8-foot Thracian through military achievements to Emperor without spending any substantial time in Rome itself. As others have noted, the book covers more than just Maximinus with good background on the prior 2 emperors and some of the neighboring powers.

The author switches between easy-going, conversational style and textbook history (awkwardly at times) and goes down a few rabbit holes that stray from the main focus (example - page after page after page coverage of a bronze statue that *might* depict Thrax), but overall a healthy read for a Roman history fan. I am going with 3 stars but would recommend to the right audience.
