

= Battle of Antioch ( 218 ) =

The Battle of Antioch ( 8 June 218 ) was fought between the Roman armies of the Emperor Macrinus and his contender Elagabalus , whose troops were commanded by General Gannys . Gannys ' victory over Macrinus led to the downfall of the emperor and his replacement by Elagabalus . After a short reign of four years , Elagabalus was also killed , after which a short period of stability followed .

The battle itself is not particularly notable , and even the ancient scholars , Dio and Herodian , only briefly consider the battle itself . However , it is historically notable as the ultimate action in a series of events that led the Army to select the emperor over the objections of the Senate . This further eroded one of the few official powers remaining in the Senate .

= = Background = =

= = = Death of Caracalla and rise of Macrinus = = =

Macrinus ' predecessor Caracalla was murdered while traveling to visit a temple by Justin Martialis , a soldier who was incensed at being declined the rank of centurion , during a period of war with the Parthians . Macrinus , a Praetorian prefect at the time , was involved in the assassination . Macrinus may have plotted against Caracalla because of fear for his own life , based on a story mentioned by Herodian and supported by Gibbons : Macrinus would often read dispatches sent to Caracalla , and one such dispatch delivered from Materianus , a friend of Caracalla , detailed a prophecy , perhaps fabricated , from the oracle at Delphi , suggesting that Macrinus was plotting against Caracalla and that Macrinus was destined to become the next emperor .

In the immediate aftermath of Caracalla 's death , Adventus was selected to serve as emperor , but he declined the position due to his old age . The army then chose Macrinus ; they had no feelings of ' love or esteem ' towards him , but there was no one else competing for the position . The army proclaimed Macrinus as emperor three days after the death of Caracalla , and named him Augustus .

The results were applauded by the Senate at first , who were glad to be rid of the former emperor . But tradition held that the emperor could only be selected from among the Senate , causing some concern . Macrinus was a member of the equestrian class , the lower of the two aristocratic classes , which led to further concern . This led the Senate to severely scrutinize his every action . The Senate , however , was powerless to do anything about it , the military was at the time so concentrated at Edessa that there was no force anywhere else in the Empire that could contest the action .

As the new emperor , Macrinus had to deal with the major threat of the Parthians , with whom Rome were currently at war . An indecisive battle at Nisibis is cited as a reason for the opening of peace negotiations . Negotiations may have been favourable for both sides ; Rome was being threatened by Armenia and Dacia , and the Parthians were far from home and low on supplies . The settlement , however , was viewed by many people as being unfavourable to Rome ; Dio quotes that a payout of 200 million Sesterces was paid to the Parthians in exchange for peace . The sum was called into question by Scott due to its sheer enormity and because Dio is known for being unreliable when discussing finances . Regardless , the general opinion on the negotiations was one of contempt , with Macrinus being accused of being cowardly and weak .

With the peace treaty concluded , Macrinus took measures to control the expenditures of Rome , reinstating the fiscal policies of Septimius Severus . This included a reduction in pay and benefits for Legionnaires , which was not popular with the Army who had placed him in command . These policies would only apply to new recruits , but the enlisted soldiers saw this as setting precedent for further changes to the fiscal policies brought in by Caracalla . The sullen behaviour of new recruits , who entered service committing to greater labour for less payment , only furthered discontent among the soldiers . Gibbon suggests that from here only a small spark would be required to ignite a

rebellion .

= = = Rise of Elagabalus = = =

Following the death of Caracalla , Macrinus allowed Caracalla 's mother , Julia Domna , and his aunt Julia Maesa , to settle in their home town of Emesa . Julia Domna , who was at Antioch at the time of Caracalla 's death , attempted suicide and eventually succeeded by starving herself . Julia Maesa , however , returned to Emesa with her finances intact .

Julia 's suspicions regarding Macrinus ' involvement in the death of Caracalla led to her championing the case of her grandson , Elagabalus , as the rightful emperor . At the time Elagabalus was the chief priest of the Phoenician god Elagabal in Emesa . The soldiers stationed there frequently visited the temple where Elagabalus was chief priest , and enjoyed watching him perform rituals and ceremonies there . On one such occasion , Julia Maesa took the opportunity to inform the soldiers , either truthfully or not , that Elagabalus was Caracalla 's son . Simultaneously , she may have seen the opportunity to use her family 's wealth and prestige to set in motion her plot .

On the night of 15 May 218 , Elagabalus was taken , by either Julia Maesa or Gannys , to the camp of the Legio III Gallica at Raphanaea and presented to the soldiers stationed there . Some accounts claim that upon being presented to them , Elagabalus was immediately hailed Antoninus after Caracalla . Enhanced by Julia 's monetary contributions , the legion proclaimed Elagabalus emperor on 16 May 218 .

Macrinus might have been able to stop the rebellion in this early stage , but could not decide on a course of action and remained at Antioch .

= = = Rebellion = = =

Now that Elagabalus had the support of an entire legion , other legionnaires , prompted by discontent over pay , moved to join Elagabalus ' ranks as well . In response , Macrinus sent a cavalry force led under the command of Ulpinus Julianus to regain control of the rebels . Instead , the cavalry killed Ulpinus and joined Elagabalus .

Following these events , Macrinus traveled to Apamea to ensure the loyalty of Legio II Parthica before setting off to march against Emesa . Macrinus appointed his son Diadumenian the position of Imperator , and promised the soldiers 20 @,@ 000 Sesterces each , with 4 @,@ 000 of these to be paid on the spot . Macrinus also hosted a dinner for the residents of Apamea in honour of Diadumenian . At the dinner , Macrinus was presented with the head of Ulpinus Julianus who had been killed by his defecting soldiers . This forced Macrinus to leave , according to Dio in retreat , while Downey asserts that Macrinus left in order to launch an attack .

Macrinus ' and Elagabalus ' troops met somewhere near the border of Syria Coele and Syria Phoenice , Macrinus ' efforts here , however , were in vain and the whole legion defected to the challenger , forcing him to retire to Antioch . This allowed Elagabus to take the offensive and march on Antioch .

= = = Senatorial response = = =

During and after Caracalla 's reign the position of the Senate had been considerably weakened . The balance of power had been transferred from the Senate to the army ; as such the emperor of Rome was decided by the soldier while the Senate existed solely to officiate state affairs without any real authority . Thus , both Macrinus and later Elagabalus would attempt to secure the favour of the military while generally disregarding the opinion of the Senate . Macrinus , now in dire circumstances , would have no choice but to turn to the Senate . Thus , while at Antioch , Macrinus would make one more attempt at securing support , this time from Rome . However , a combination of distrust from the Senate , the impending approach of Elagabalus 's legions and insufficient funds meant that Macrinus would have to face the approaching Elagabalus with only his Praetorian Guard

. Had time been available , Marius Maximus , prefect of Rome , would have been able to muster troops and send reinforcements to Macrinus . Despite all of this , the Senate would still declare war against the usurper and his family , regardless of their relative powerlessness .

= = Battle = =

The battle took place on 8 June 218 at a defile outside of a village , believed to be Immae , approximately twenty @-@ four miles or so by road between Antioch and Beroea . Herodian challenges this assertion , suggesting that the battle took place closer to the border at Syria Coele and Syria Phoenice , possibly near Emesa . Other sources either agree with Dio that the battle took place near Antioch , with one source , Downey , suggesting that both battles occurred separately or make no claim as to where the battle occurred .

The armies of Elagabalus , led by Gannys , a novice but determined commander , met with the Praetorian Guard of Macrinus in a narrowly fought pitched battle . Prior to battle Macrinus had the Praetorian Guard set aside their scaled armour breastplates and grooved shields in favour of lighter oval shields , thus making them lighter and more manoeuvrable and also negating the advantage of light Parthian lancers ( lanciarii ) . Despite the numerical superiority of Gannys ' army of at least two full legions , faced with what levies Macrinus was able to accrue , the engagement had begun in Macrinus ' favour with the soldiers led by Gannys turning to flee after the Praetorian Guards had managed to break through the enemy line . At some point during the retreat , Julia Maesa and Soaemias Bassiana ( Elagabalus ' mother ) joined the fray , rallying the forces while Gannys , who was on horseback , charged headlong at the enemy thus ending the retreat and renewing the assault . At this point Macrinus , fearing defeat , fled back to the city of Antioch . Had Macrinus remained in battle it is plausible that he might have won the battle and thus secured his position as emperor .

= = Aftermath = =

Having been defeated in battle , Macrinus sent his son along with attendants to Artabanus V of Parthia , while he himself returned to Antioch , proclaiming victory over Elagabalus in battle . News of Macrinus ' defeat broke out and many civilians in the city and on the roads were slain because they had favoured Macrinus . Macrinus shaved off his beard and hair to disguise himself as a member of the military police and fled the city at night on horseback . He reached Cilicia along with a few companions ; while masquerading as a military courier he successfully secured a carriage , which he subsequently drove to Eribolon , near Nicomedia , before setting sail for Chalcedon .

In Chalcedon , Macrinus was arrested after revealing his whereabouts by making a request for money to a Procurator . While being transported back to Antioch , " like the commonest criminal " according to Dio , he injured himself in an escape attempt . He was beheaded in Cappadocia by the centurion Marcianus Taurus . His body remained unburied until Elagabalus had the chance to inspect it . Macrinus ' son Diadumenian faced a similar fate after being captured at Zeugma by the centurion Cladius Pollio . Dio concludes that Macrinus might have been praised for his deeds , rather than ridiculed and later slain , had he shown temperance and passed the title of emperor onto somebody else . He further concludes that Macrinus was the master of his own demise , which he felt was truly deserved .

In the interim period between the battle and the capture of Macrinus , Elagabalus declared himself emperor with the support of the military , though he would not return to Rome for several months . This news , upon reaching Rome , was met with dismay by both the Senate and the Roman people , though both submitted through necessity . Elagabalus ' reputation would not improve during his reign ; his worship of Elagabal and the sacrilegious performance of religious rituals would generate anger among the Romans . In an attempt to prevent disaster , his cousin would be elevated to the position of caesar , co @-@ ruler . This appeased the Romans for a time , however envy caused further problems culminating in the death of Elagabalus at the hands of the Praetorian Guard . This was followed by a short period of stability for Rome .

