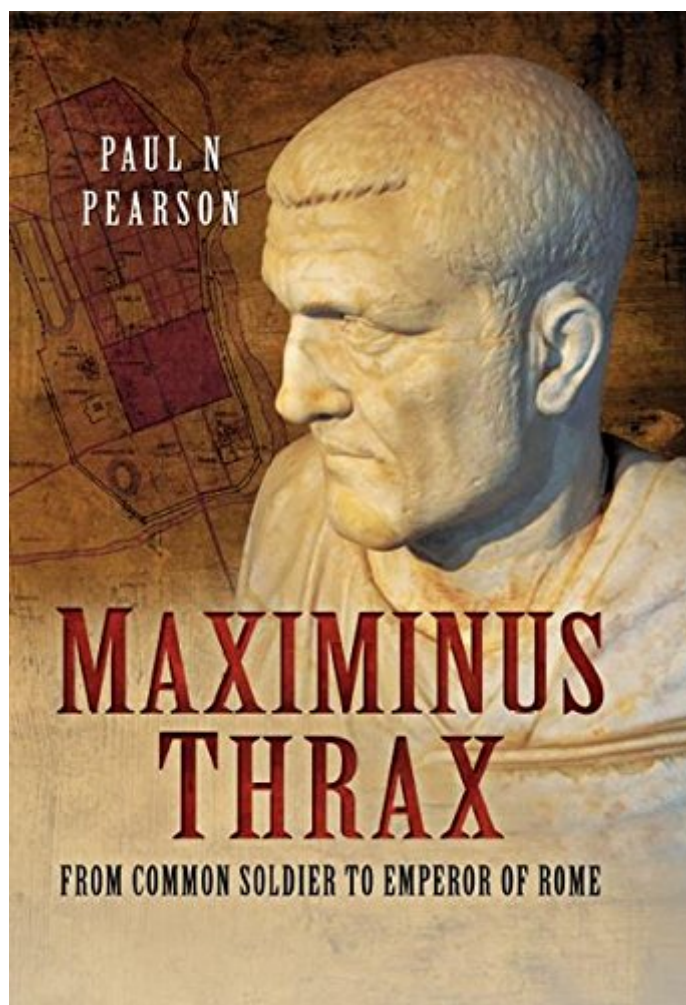


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# Maximinus Thrax: Strongman Emperor Of Rome



## Synopsis

Maximinus was a half-barbarian strongman of frightening appearance and colossal size (supposedly over seven feet tall). From humble origins he rose through the ranks, achieved senior command during the invasion of Persia in 232 and ultimately became Emperor due to a military coup in 235. As Emperor he campaigned across the Rhine and Danube for three years until a rebellion in Africa triggered a civil war. This is an accessible narrative account of the life and times of one of Rome's most remarkable emperors.

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## Customer Reviews

Maximinus Thrax is the stuff of legend, the 8-foot tall giant who overthrew the Severan dynasty, he was a kind of evil supervillain in Roman historiography. But folks who know the historians of this era understand that they are largely unreliable. What are modern people who are attempting to piece together a picture of the Roman Crisis of the Third Century supposed to think about this reviled

emperor? Paul N. Pearson's new book offers a narrative biography of a man who is largely the object of odium of the ancient historians, but was revered by the men he led into battle. His brutal reign was only ended in the sorry spectacle of a year of six Caesars in 238 CE. Recently, Oxford historian and novelist Harry Sidebottom has fictionalized the reign of Maximinus in his *Iron and Rust: Throne of the Caesars: Book 1 (Throne of Caesars) Trilogy* and in his afterword promoted this then yet unpublished book. Given the fragmentary and unreliable nature of ancient sources, it is nearly impossible to have an objective account of the reign of Maximinus, however, archaeology has given us much to ponder in recent years. Michael Speidel's book on the Imperial Horse Guard, *Riding for Caesar: The Roman Emperors' Horse Guard*, also gave a tantalizing clue that Maximinus was a member of that elite unit. Pearson has done a lot of homework with the literary evidence (beyond what you can find in the Penguin and Loeb imprints) and educated guesswork as well as epigraphy and numismatics. Two real standouts in terms of new material on Maximinus are Pearson's description of a relatively recent archaeological find in Harzhorn, Germany; where evidence of a major Roman vs. German battle has been unearthed dating to a period no earlier than the reign of Severus Alexander. Pearson posits that this findsite is the physical evidence of a Roman army, likely from the era of Maximinus, extricating itself from a Germanic ambush while returning from battle deep in German territory. The full tale of the shovel of this site has yet to be told, but Pearson whets the appetite of historians and Roman history aficionados. Let's just say that the topography and vegetation of the site makes comparisons to the opening of the movie *Gladiator* unavoidable. Also, a few statements made by Herodian and the dodgy *Historia Augusta* that were thought to be fantastic have now been verified with physical evidence. Another interesting conjecture Pearson makes is that the heroically scaled bronze at the Met, commonly considered a nude portrait of Trebonianus Gallus, is in fact a life-sized portrait of Maximinus Thrax. Pearson gives a good line of reasoning for his supposition. Although this book is more of a popular and narrative biography (a modern scholarly biography of this fascinating emperor has yet to be written in English to the best of this reviewer's knowledge) it is well footnoted with a good chapter describing and evaluating the sources. Although Gibbon and most modern historians echo the hatred that the ancients had for Maximinus, Pearson reflects that Maximinus could have had a very rational policy in terms of wanting to conquer Germanic tribes and shorten the Roman frontiers, we cannot make any anti-historical arguments, other than to say the reversal of his gains was followed some three decades later by a flood of Germanic invasions across the Rhine, Danube and Black Sea. I have to add that Pearson has also done readers a favor by keying comments in the text to specific relevant

pages in the photos, a trend I hope future authors will follow. Although this book could not possibly answer the question as to whether Maximinus was the cause or a symptom of the Crisis of the Third Century, it is the best and most up-to-date review of his career as an extraordinary footsoldier who became the most powerful man in the known world during his age. This book was long overdue. I can only hope that Pearson or someone of similar caliber produces a similar biography of Valerian and Gallienus in the near future.

This long-overdue biography of one of Rome's lesser known, yet pivotal emperors is both enlightening and engaging. Pearson does a respectable job with telling the narrative of the political climate in Rome during the latter Severan Dynasty that contributed to the rise of Maximinus Thrax through the Roman military ranks that ultimately led to Thrax seizing the imperial purple. The unprecedented collection of artefactual evidence and historical sources in this book for the re-construction of the life and reign of Maximinus Thrax will be a valuable resource to historians and scholars wishing to study the early stages of the "Crisis of the Third Century". Aside from detailing the life and career of Thrax, Pearson also goes into some detail in terms of describing the inner workings of Alexander Severus's regime as well as the actions of the Senate and Thrax's imperial successors Pupienus, Balbinus, and the Gordians. The book also sheds light on the possible locations and activities of Thrax during the reign of Elagabalus, which up to this point has been rather mysterious with the exception being just a few vague references in the unreliable *Historia Augusta*. Pearson frequently delves into speculation on actions and motives where there is a lack of supporting artefactual evidence or historical sources, which is inevitable when writing such ancient biographies, but he does so both cautiously and with well-reasoned arguments. His writing style is steady and he keeps the reader engaged with the storyline. Pearson seems to have been quite meticulous when writing this book, with minor exceptions being just a couple typos such as on pg. 33 where the word "it" should have been typed "its". This reviewer found the inclusion of the very recent discovery of an ancient Roman battlefield on the Harzhorn in Germany, possibly occurring under the direction of Thrax, fascinating. Pearson also compellingly argues for the possibility that the ancient colossal bronze statue in the Met ("The Ogre in the Met") is actually a surviving statue of Maximinus Thrax. Certainly, these present new areas for scholars to follow-up.

This was an excellent overview of this Roman Emperor and his times. Not a lot known, but the author did a very good job of sorting through the info and presenting Maximinus Thrax in a personal way, the good, the bad, and the ugly. Recommended for all.

Written well considering lack of written records

who is churning this stuff out all of a sudden and why?

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