

# THE LATE ROMAN EMPIRE



The late Roman Empire covers the period of Roman history from the 3rd century CE, through to the decline and fall of the Roman Empire in the West in the 5th century CE

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# IMPORTANT TIMELINE

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- 193 CE: Death of Commodus, year of the five emperors, start of the Severen Dynasty.
  - 235 CE: End of the Severen Dynasty, first of the barracks emperors.
  - 284-306 CE: Diocletian re-establishes central power and founds the Tetrarchy
  - 303-305 CE: Great persecution of the Christians
  - 312 CE: Constantine wins battle of Milvian Bridge under the sign of the Cross: Christianity declared official state religion.
  - 324 CE: Foundation of Constantinople
  - 360-363 CE: Julian the Apostate Emperor
  - 410 CE: Sack of Rome by Alaric the Visigoth. Rome formally renounces Britain.
  - 476 CE: End of Roman Empire in the West
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# LATER EMPIRE

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Edward Gibbon was an English historian writing in the 18th century. He was one of the first to write in English about the end of the Roman Empire in his book 'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire'

He puts the split of early and later Roman Empire with the death of Commodus.

The death of Commodus led to a power vacuum in 193 CE.

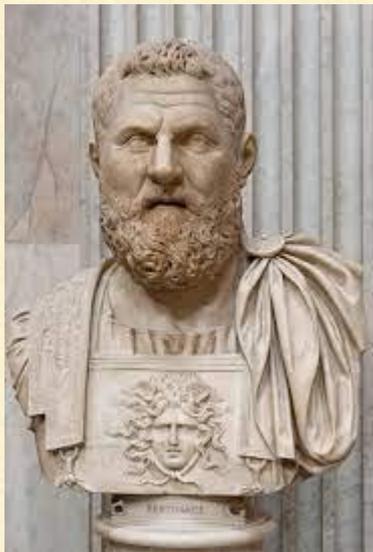
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# 193 CE

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Pertinax



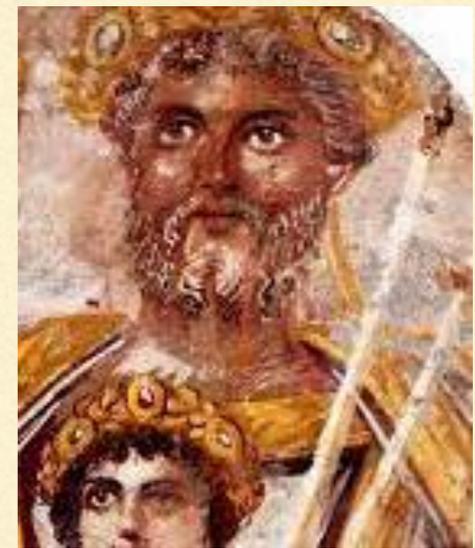
Didius  
Julianus

Pescennius  
Niger



Clodius  
Albinus

Septimius  
Severus



# BARRACKS EMPERORS



What is a Barracks Emperor?—  
A barracks emperor was a Roman Emperor who seized power by virtue of his command of the army.

Who was the first?—  
Maximimus Thrax, who gained power after the assassination of Severus Alexander.

What problems did they cause?—  
This system led to 14 emperors in 33 years. On average, they ruled for around two years each. This created instability and constant civil war. This led to the Roman Empire weakening from within and made it vulnerable to external threats.



# Maximinus Thrax

Ruled from 235–238 CE

Background– He was born in Thrace, which is modern day Bulgaria. He was the first Emperor from outside the two upperclasses– he was not an Equastrian (middle class) or a Patrician (upper class)

He was a soldier who rose through the ranks of the army until Severus Alexander was assassinated. His troops declared him emperor to ensure they would get paid. Other soldiers saw this, and a pattern emerged. If soldiers felt they were not going to be paid, they would declare their general emperor.

Succeeded by– An uprising in Africa led to the Senate, who did not like Maximinus, declaring a new emperor Gordian. This led to the army losing hope in Maximinus and so they murdered him and his son.



# The Third Century BC Crisis



# THE FIRST BREXIT

- During this time, the Empire fractured into three under various userpers.
- The western provinces of Gaul, Britain and Hispania broke off to become the Gallic Empire in 260. Postumus was the first lead
- The eastern provinces of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt also became independent as the Palmyrene Empire in 267. The Pamyrene Empire was ruled by the Empress Zenobia.



Postumus



Zenobia

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# DIOCLETIAN AND THE TETRARCHY

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The **Tetrarchy**- The term used to describe the system of government of the ancient Roman Empire established by Roman Emperor Diocletian in 293, marking the end of the Crisis of the Third Century.

How it worked- The government of the empire was divided between the two senior emperors, the *augusti*, and their juniors and designated successors, the *caesares*.

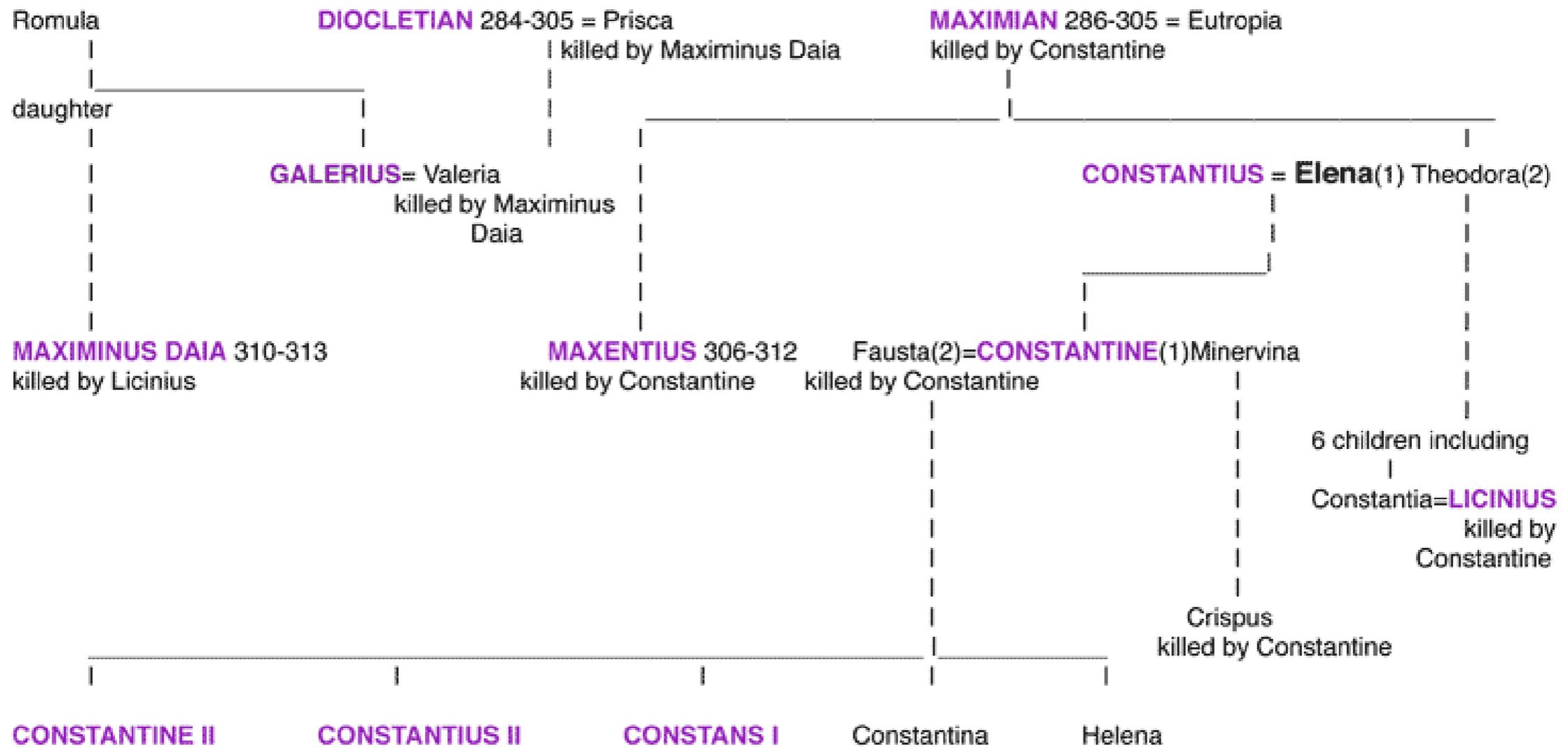
The rule of the Empire was split. Diocletian ruled in the eastern regions of the empire while Maximian similarly took charge of the western regions.

In 293, Diocletian thought that more focus division was needed on both civic and military problems, so he expanded the imperial college by appointing two *caesares* (one responsible to each *augustus*)—Galerius and Constantius I.

This system did not survive past Diocletian. He retired to a cabbage farm in 305 CE, making him the only emperor to abdicate. He died in 311 CE.

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The Tetrarchy and the Rise of Constantine the Great



# THE EMPERORS OF THE TETRARCHY

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# THE BATTLE OF MILVIAN BRIDGE IN 312 CE

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The Tetrarchy ended when Constantine came to power and decided he did not want to share.

The **Battle of the Milvian Bridge** between Constantine I and Maxentius on 28 October 312. Constantine won.

According to chroniclers such as Eusebius of Caesarea and Lactantius, the battle marked the beginning of Constantine's conversion to Christianity. Eusebius of Caesarea recounts that Constantine and his soldiers had a vision sent by the Christian God. This was interpreted as a promise of victory if the sign of the Chi Rho, the first two letters of Christ's name in Greek, was painted on the soldiers' shields.

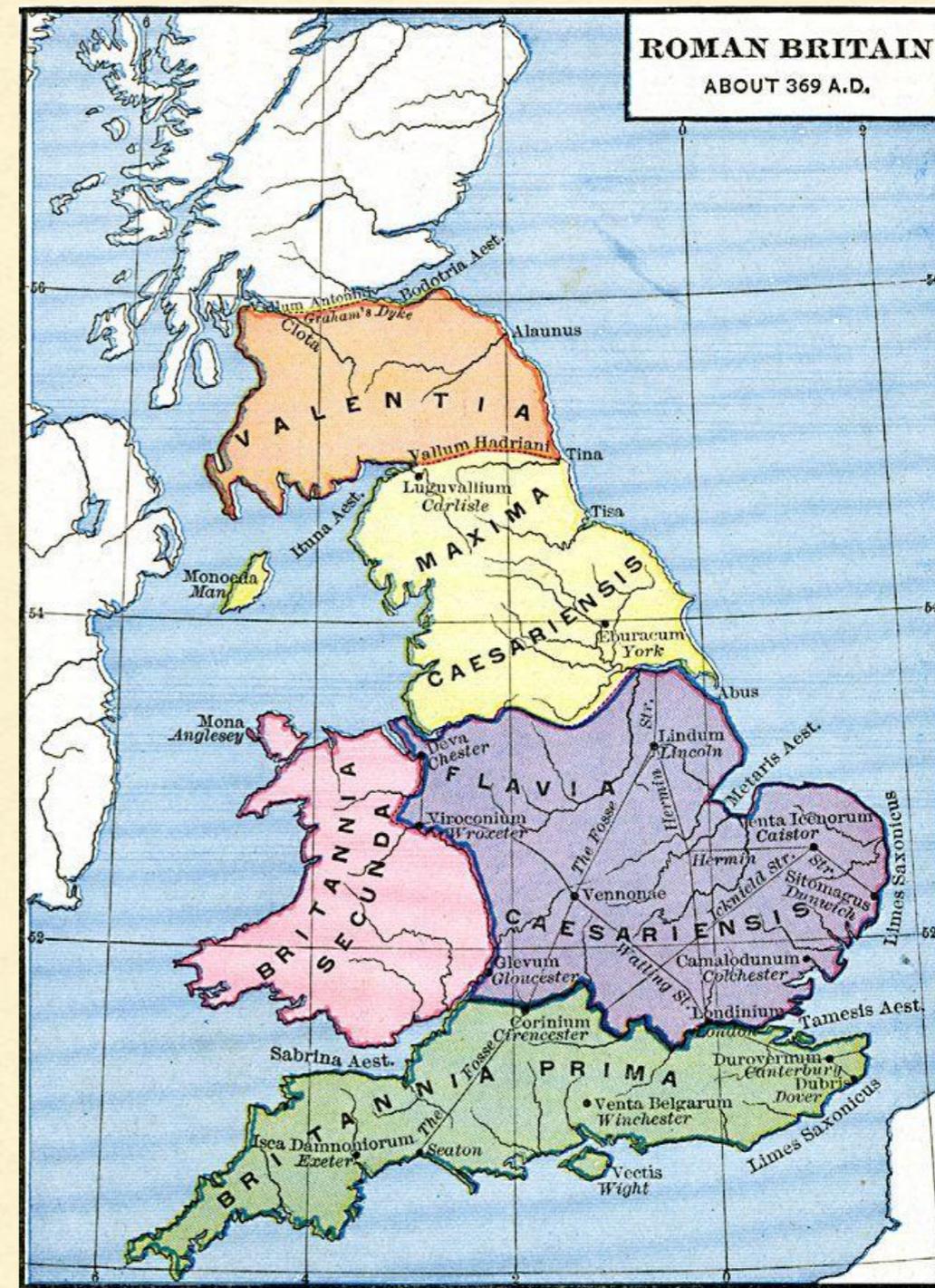
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A triumphal arch in Rome dedicated to the emperor Constantine the Great. The arch was commissioned by the Roman Senate to commemorate Constantine's victory over Maxentius at the Battle of Milvian Bridge in AD 312. The Arch of Constantine, erected in celebration of the victory, certainly attributes Constantine's success to divine intervention; however, the monument does not display any overtly Christian symbolism.

It was built to encourage Constantine to stay in Rome. However, he still moved the capital of the Empire to Constantinople (Istanbul now)

# THE ARCH OF CONSTANTINE



410 ROME FORMALLY RENOUNCES BRITAIN

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# WHY DID THE ROMANS LEAVE BRITAIN?

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By 410 CE the Romans withdrew from Britain. This was because of the growing powers of the Germanic Tribes such as the Goths, the Visigoths, the Franks and the Vandals, which threatened the rest of the Empire. They had to withdraw to protect the centre.

## The Fall of Rome in 410 CE

The reasons behind leaving Britain were proved necessary when Rome was sacked in 410 CE by the Visigoths led by their king, Alaric.

Whilst Rome was no longer the capital of the Western Roman Empire at the time, having been replaced in by Ravenna in 402 CE, it retained a paramount position as "the eternal city" and a spiritual center of the Empire.

The Sack was a major shock as it was the first time this had happened in almost 800 years that Rome had fallen to a foreign enemy.

Despite fears, Aleric ordered his troops to not damage the city.

St. Jerome wrote; "the city which had taken the whole world was itself taken."



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# AFTER THE FALL OF ROME

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- After Rome fell, the Western Empire lingered on until 476 CE. The final emperor, Romulus Augustus (ironically named for the founder of Rome and the first emperor), was deposed by Odoacar. He was the leader of the Germanic Tribes
  - The Eastern Empire evolved to become the Byzantine Empire. In this form it survived until 1453 CE.
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ANY QUESTIONS?

