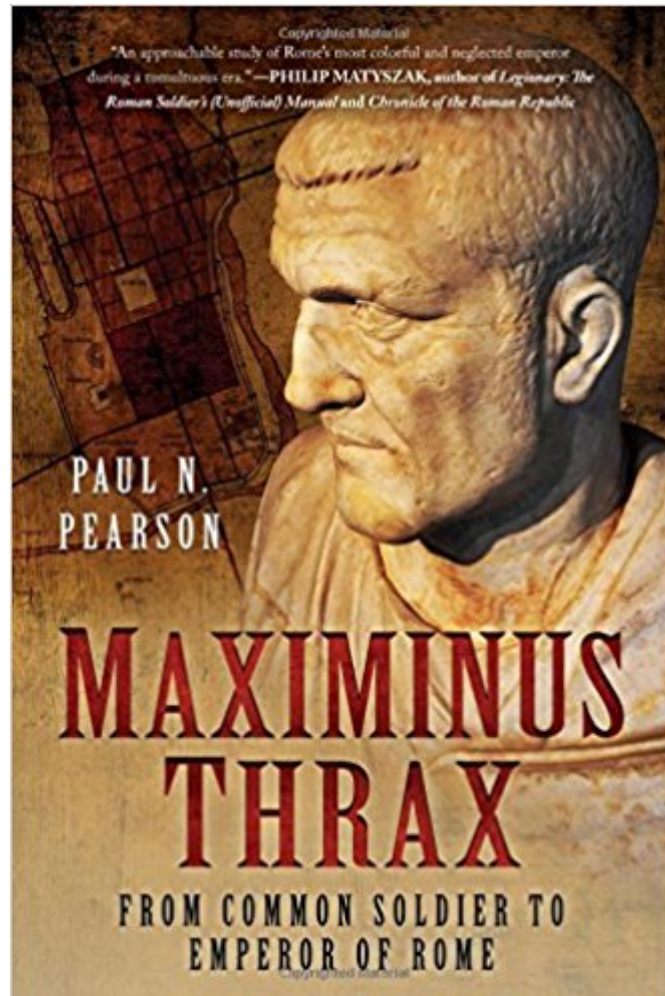




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# Maximinus Thrax: From Common Soldier To Emperor Of Rome



## Synopsis

The first full-length biography of the half-barbarian emperor. Maximinus was a Thracian tribesman 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 Maximinus 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 AD, and three years later he became emperor himself in a military coup; the first common soldier ever to assume the imperial throne. Supposedly more than 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 the Thracian giant, from his humble origins up to and beyond the civil war of 238 AD. Replete with accounts of treachery, assassination, and civil war, Maximinus Thrax is written for enthusiasts of Roman history and warfare. Skyhorse Publishing, as well as our Arcade imprint, are proud to publish a broad range of books for readers interested in history--books about World War II, the Third Reich, Hitler and his henchmen, the JFK assassination, conspiracies, the American Civil War, the American Revolution, gladiators, Vikings, ancient Rome, medieval times, the old West, and much more. While not every title we publish becomes a New York Times bestseller or a national bestseller, we are committed to books on subjects that are sometimes overlooked and to authors whose work might not otherwise find a home.

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## Customer Reviews

• An approachable and study of Rome's most colorful and neglected emperor during a tumultuous era. • Philip Matyszak, author of *Legionary: The Roman Soldier's (Unofficial) Manual and Chronicle of the Roman Republic* • If Maximinus had not been a real flesh and blood character, Hollywood would probably have invented him • a physically massive man who rose from shepherd to emperor of Rome via the legions. In giving us the first modern biography of Maximinus, Paul Pearson delivers a lively and well-constructed account of a giant of a life, framed by the social, political and military upheavals of the age and informed by recent archaeological finds. •

• Stephen Dando-Collins, author of *Legions of Rome, The Ides, and The Big Break* • With prodigious research and verve, Paul Pearson gives us the first modern biography of the giant soldier of Thrace who rose during turbulent times to become one of Rome's least understood emperors. •

• Adrienne Mayor, author of *The Poison King: The Life and Legend of Mithradates* • The Crisis of the Third Century • the Roman empire's near-death experience • deserves to be better understood by the general public. In telling the story of a literally larger-than-life emperor, Paul N. Pearson makes a strong case that Maximinus Thrax was a pivotal player in that crisis, as well as an intriguing figure in his own right. •

• Rob Goodman, author of *Rome's Last Citizen* • Impressively documented, written with insight and wry humor, and perfectly pitched for interested non-specialists, this lively biography describes the fascinating circumstances and significance of the career of a literal giant of the later Roman Empire. Displaying a scientific skill for sifting diverse evidence, Pearson shows how the short but eventful reign of Maximinus Thrax as Roman emperor is a linchpin for unlocking a historical mystery • the extended crisis of the third-century Roman Empire that changed the Western world. •

• Thomas R. Martin, Jeremiah O'Connor Professor in Classics, Holy Cross, author of *Ancient Rome: from Romulus to Justinian* • A solidly researched and wide-ranging re-appraisal of a controversial figure in Roman history who is too often caricatured and cavalierly dismissed as a cruel, barbarian thug. Pearson's book is written for the non-specialist, is appropriately critical in its assessments of conflicting source material, and does a fine job of contextualizing what little is actually known of the rise to absolute power of this extraordinary career soldier. •

• Jeremy B. Rutter, Professor of Classics Emeritus, Dartmouth College • An enjoyable and accessible biography of a fascinating emperor. An excellent popular introduction to the third century crisis of the Roman Empire. •

• Harry Sidebottom, author of the *Throne of the Caesars* series • Pearson has written a much-needed book on the emperor who was the first 'low-born barbarian' to rule Rome. Packed with information, this much-needed book sheds light on the beginning of what has become known as the

the third-century crisis.™ Maximinus Thrax delves deep into this shadowy period of Roman history. • Ian Hughes, author of *Patricians and Emperors: The Last Rulers of the Western Roman Empire* • Maximinus Thrax is a welcome addition to the growing number of scholarly works on the crisis of the soldier-emperors in the third century CE. Although the author describes his work as a narrative of events, this description does not quite do it justice: Pearson's discusses a multitude of topics in his book, ranging from the authorship of the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (one of our main sources for the reign of Maximinus Thrax) to recent archaeological discoveries which shed new light on the military campaigns undertaken by the emperor during his brief reign. • Christopher Epplert, author of *Gladiators: Deadly Arena Sports of Ancient Rome* • In this first comprehensive biography, a work of extensive research, Pearson draws on ancient histories, coins, statues, and archaeology to create a commendably fluid narrative that will intrigue Roman history enthusiasts. Steeped in his subject, Pearson successfully illuminates this long-overlooked Roman emperor. • Booklist

Paul N. Pearson is a professor at Cardiff University in the UK. This book is the product of years of research, including personal study of the battlefields and other key sites in Germany and Italy. He lives in Cardiff, Wales.

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' 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

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