The following article discusses the events that took place in Rome on 12th March 222 AD. On that day, the Roman emperor M. Aurelius Antoninus, also known as Elagabalus or Heliogabalus, was assassinated. Together with him perished his mother, Julia Soaemias, as well as some persons from his nearest circle. However, Elagabalus’ death did not put an end to the spiral of violence: the city of Rome saw then, for the second time in its history, the maltreatment of the emperor’s body, which was denied the right of a worthy burial. Elagabalus was not only brutally murdered, but he also became a victim of the policy of condemnation of memory (so called damnatio memoriae) which was ordered by the Roman senate. The senators decided that the part of emperor’s name, i.e. the nomen Antoninus, had to be removed from all official documents and inscriptions. The portraits of the emperor were also destroyed. Shortly afterwards, Elagabalus was stylized as a personification of all kinds of evil and as a true monster on the throne, and thus immortalized in the historical memory of Rome.

Key words: Roman Empire, Elagabalus, Heliogabalus, Julia Soaemias, damnatio memoriae

*The following text is an improved and significantly extended version of an article which was published in Polish in 2017 (see K. Królczyk, Śmierć cesarza Heliogabala, in: Przemoc w świecie starożytnym. Źródła – struktura – interpretacje, eds. D. Słapek, I. Łuć, Lublin 2017, pp. 269–279). In relation to the original it mostly involves adding detailed considerations on the topic of so called damnatio memoriae of Elagabalus, omitted in the original version.
The Latin phrase brought up in the title of this paper\(^1\) was taken from the late ancient collection of imperial biographies now referred to as ‘Historia Augusta’ or ‘Scriptores Historiae Augustae’\(^2\). The unknown author of the work, writing under a fictional name of Aelius Lampridius, used these words to comment on the chain of tragic events which took place in Rome on 12 March 222 AD when emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, also known as Elagabalus (or Heliogabalus), was murdered\(^3\). Along with the princeps, also killed was his mother, Julia Soaemias (granddaughter of empress Julia Domna)\(^4\), as well as certain other people in close relation to Elagabalus. Their death did not prevent the spiral of violence: the city of Rome was for the second time in its history\(^5\) a witness of desecrating emperor’s remains, which were denied the right to dignified burial.

Before proceeding with the analysis of surviving source testimonies describing the assassination of Elagabalus, one of Roman rulers who were particularly infamous even in the ancient times\(^6\), I would like to briefly present his profile. The original name of the then upcoming emperor was

\(^{1}\) Historia Augusta [hereinafter: HA], Vita Heliogabali 33.8.

\(^{2}\) The number of studies devoted to ‘Historia Augusta’ is enormous; among the newer works cf. M. Thomson, Studies in the Historia Augusta, Bruxelles 2012; R. Suski, Jowisz, Jahwe i Jezus. Religie w Historia Augusta, Warszawa 2014, also here are references to older literature on the subject. Recently, an extensive commentary on emperor Heliogabalus’ biography was published: S.Ch. Zinsli, Kommentar zur Vita Heliogabali der Historia Augusta, Bonn 2014.


\(^{5}\) The first such occurrence was in relation to Vitellius – cf. below.

\(^{6}\) The development of the view of Elagabalus as a bad ruler and tyrant is interestingly presented by M. Sommer in Elagabal – Wege zur Konstruktion eines ‘schlechten’ Kaisers, ‘Scripta Classica Israelica’ 2004, 23, pp. 95–110.
most likely Varius Avitus Bassianus. He was most likely born in 204\textsuperscript{7} in a family of priests of the Syrian god of the sun – Ela(h)gabalus\textsuperscript{8}. Upon becoming the ruler in May 218\textsuperscript{9}, the young princeps officially assumed the name of M. Aurelius Antoninus. It was an obvious reference to emperor Caracalla (officially also M. Aurelius Antoninus), as Varius Avitus wished to consider himself his son\textsuperscript{10}. Elagabalus was the youngest of all Roman emperors at the time – he was only 14 when he became the ruler. In ancient texts the young Elagabalus was depicted as an embodiment of all evil. In unanimous opinions of ancient authors he supposedly humiliated, persecuted and murdered the representatives of ordo senatorius\textsuperscript{11} and also disregarded the equites\textsuperscript{12}. He was completely disinterested in internal and foreign policies. However, he was fond of dancing\textsuperscript{13} and cultivating worship of a Syrian god Elagabalus, of which he was a hereditary priest (sacerdos amplissimus dei invicti solis Elagabali)\textsuperscript{14} and after whom he

\textsuperscript{7} Such date has been deduced from information provided by Cassius Dio, saying that Elagabalus was murdered at the age of 18: Cassius Dio, Ρωμαϊκή ιστορία = Historia Romana [hereinafter: Cass. Dio] 80(79).20.2, , as well as from the report of Herodian stating that in 218 the upcoming emperor was 14 (Herodianos, Ἡερωδιανοῦ τῆς μετὰ Μάρκον βασιλείας ιστορίας βιβλία οκτώ = Herodianus ab excessu divi Marcii libri octo [hereinafter: Hdn.] 5.3.3). It is difficult to figure out how J. Stuart Hay, The Amazing Emperor Heliogabalus, London 1911, p. 35, managed to obtain accurate date of birth of the emperor (1 October 204), allegedly contained in Cassius Dio’s text. Some authors do not exclude the possibility that Elagabalus could have been born in 203 (see PIR\textsuperscript{2} V, no. 273, p. 143).

\textsuperscript{8} Until recently, a group of scholars believed that Elagabalus’ birth place was Emesa in Syria (cf. D. Kienast, W. Eck, M. Heil, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 165, but with the question mark in text), even though no sources unambiguously confirm that. However, most suggestions point to Rome or nearby Velitrae (L. de Arrizabalaga y Prado, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 196 and 357; K. Altmayer, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 65; PIR\textsuperscript{2} V, no. 273, p. 143; doubts regarding Emesa as the place of birth were already brought forth by J. Stuart Hay, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 35 nn.).


\textsuperscript{10} Elagabalus as (alleged) son of Caracalla: Cass. Dio 79.31.3 and 79.32.2-3; Hdn. 5.3.10 and 5.4.4; Eutropii Breviarium ab Urbe condita [hereinafter: Eutrop.] 22; HA, \textit{Vita Caracallae} 9.2; HA, \textit{Vita Heliogabali} 1.4; HA, \textit{Vita Macrini} 7.6, 8.4, 9.4 and 15.2; HA, \textit{Vita Diadumeniani} 9.4; HA, \textit{Vita Maximini} 4.6. Selected epigraphic testimonia, in which Elagabalus appears officially as \textit{divi Antonini Magni filius}: \textit{Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum} [hereinafter: CIL] 3, 3675; CIL 12, 4348; CIL 13, 8811; CIL 16, 139; CIL 17.2, 644; CIL 17.2, 652; \textit{L’Année Epigraphique} [hereinafter: AE] 1983, 778; AE 2001, 2165; Roman Military Diplomas [hereinafter: RMD] III 192.


\textsuperscript{12} HA, \textit{Vita Heliogabali} 20.1: equestrem ordinem in nullo loco habens.

\textsuperscript{13} Cass. Dio 80(79).14.3; Hdn. 5.6.1 i 5.6.10; HA, \textit{Vita Heliogabali} 32.8.

\textsuperscript{14} Source testimonies of the function of the high priest of Elagabalus exercised by Varius: Hdn. 5.3.3 and 5.3.5; Eutrop. 22; also CIL 6, 1077; CIL 7, 585; CIL 16, 140; RMD I 75;
received the name of Elagabalus still in ancient times\textsuperscript{15}. By the order of the emperor two temples to the Syrian deity were erected in Rome: one (called \textit{Heliogabalium}) in the centre of the City, on Palatine Hill, where the princeps ordered a black stone from Emesa to be brought\textsuperscript{16}, the second in an uncertain place, located somewhere on the edge of the city\textsuperscript{17}. A certain black legend involved immoral scandals, mostly of sexual nature, which Elagabalus supposedly caused with his behaviour\textsuperscript{18}.

It is quite probable that the image of a madman on the throne created in ancient times is not quite reliable. It is therefore probable that besmirching the name of the predecessor was the most advantageous to Severus Alexander (the successor of Elagabalus) or his closest associates. After all, it was Alexander who was a direct and greatest beneficiary of the murder of Elagabalus. In spite of that, there is no doubt that the young emperor during his short rule managed to annoy, to put it as mildly as possible, many influential Romans, in particular his grandmother, Julia Maesa, who – as we know well – initiated his way to the throne in 218\textsuperscript{19}, and by that time she was more in favour of an alternative solution – handing over the power to the second grandson, Alexander. He also angered soldiers of the Praetorian Guard which, as we shall soon find out, had a key impact on his future. What is interesting, as stated in almost all surviving source accounts, the hatred of praetorians towards the ruler was not caused by his eccentric, immoral and promiscuous behaviour, as it would appear at first glance. Although the reports of ancient authors about the end of Elagabalus are different in many details, almost all of them highlight one


\textsuperscript{17} Hdn. 5.6.6.

\textsuperscript{18} See e.g. Cass. Dio 80(79).13.2-4 and 80(79).16.7; HA, \textit{Vita Heliogabali} 33.1; M. Sommer, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 100–101.

\textsuperscript{19} Hdn. 5.3.2 (and hereinafter); HA, \textit{Vita Macrini} 9.
issue in unison. The main reason why praetorians decided to openly defy the emperor was his animosity towards the imperial cousin, Alexianus, the later emperor Severus Alexander. The latter was officially adopted by Elagabalus in 221 and made a co-ruler of Imperium Romanum holding the title of Caesar. The key role in these activities was played by the aforementioned Julia Maesa, grandmother of both young men. However, seeing how the sympathy of Praetorian Guard soldiers slowly shifted in favour of Alexianus, which was likely caused by the actions of Maesa and the growing rivalry between Julia Soaemias and her sister Julia Mamæa, mother of the imperial cousin, Elagabalus started regretting the fact that he agreed to grant him the position of co-ruler. As reported by Cassius Dio, Herodian and Vita Heliogabali, the princeps first tried to deprive Alexander of the title of the Caesar, and when that did not succeed – kill him; several attempts on the life of Alexander were made, allegedly orchestrated by Elagabalus. Further escalation of the conflict occurred on 1 January 222 when the young emperor refused to accompany Alexander to Capitoline Hill to make offering and launch a joint consulate. Ultimately, the hatred Elagabalus manifested towards his cousin could have been the direct cause of the emperor’s death, who, as claimed by Cassius Dio, could feel safe as long as he was sympathetic to his stepson: ἕως μὲν οὖν ὁ Σαρδανάπαλλος τὸν ἀνεψιὸν ἐφίλει, ἐσώζετο. It is difficult to know for sure whether the above messages are completely reliable. There is a possibility, as mentioned above, that they are the result of the official version of the events, promoted after 222 by the victorious circle of Severus Alexander, who was given the title of Augustus after the death of Elagabalus and became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire.

However, regardless of whether we consider this version reliable or not, one thing is clear. Emperor Elagabalus was murdered by rebelling soldiers of the Praetorian Guard, which most likely happened on

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20 Cass. Dio 80.17.2-3; Hdn. 5.7.1-3 and 5.7.4; HA, Vita Heliogabali 5.1 and 10.1 (wrong date here); also HA, Vita Alexandri Severi 2.4. Accurate date of Severus Alexander’s proclamation as Caesar is provided by Feriale Duranum calendar (col. II, ver. 16). Also on the topic see S.Ch. Zinsli, op. cit., pp. 382–384.

21 Cass. Dio 80.19.11; Hdn. 5.7.5.

22 Hdn. 5.8.4; HA, Vita Heliogabali 13.1-2 and 13.7; HA, Vita Alexandri Severi 2.4 and 4.6.

23 Cass. Dio 80.19.12 and 80.20.1; Hdn. 5.8.3; HA, Vita Heliogabali 13.4-8 and 16.1.

24 HA, Vita Heliogabali 5-7, cf. S.Ch. Zinsli, op. cit., pp. 538–541, who expresses his doubts regarding the historicity of that event, taking into account the silence of Cassius Dio and Herodian in the aforementioned affair.

25 Cass. Dio 80.19.11: ‘so long as Sardanapalus continued to love his cousin, he was safe’ (translation by E. Cary).
12 March 222. In most of the surviving source records (by Cassius Dio\textsuperscript{26}, Herodian\textsuperscript{27}, Aurelius Victor\textsuperscript{28}) we see information that the scene of the crime was the camp of imperial guard (\textit{castra praetoria, στρατόπεδον}), where the emperor went in company of Alexander, and his mother, Julia Soaemias. However, the biography of the emperor in ‘Historia Augusta’ provides a different place of the murder, which we shall revisit later: apparently the emperor was to die in an unspecified toilet in which he hid in fear of the soldiers\textsuperscript{29}.

Let us then take a look on each source testimony which describe the last moments of emperor Elagabalus, directing our attention both to similarities and differences between them.

In the account by Cassius Dio, surviving in a medieval extract by Ioannes Xyphilinos\textsuperscript{30}, the young emperor, after another attempt on Alexander’s life, was forced to go to the praetorian encampment to appease the anger of the guardsmen. He was accompanied by Alexander and – as stated later in ‘Historia Augusta’ – Julia Soaemias and his friends and followers. In \textit{castra praetoria} the princeps apparently noticed that he is surrounded by guardsmen. Fearing for his life he tried to flee and he hid in a special chest (ἐς τύλλον\textsuperscript{31}), in which he was to be carried out of the camp. The attempt proved unsuccessful: the escapee was exposed and murdered by the praetorians shortly afterwards. In context of this fragment of Dio’s report it also seems that in the failed flight of Elagabalus his mother accompanied him. Her fate is described further in this study.

Herodian presented to us a somewhat similar version of events, with slightly different details\textsuperscript{32}. He also informs us that Elagabalus, after he had spread the rumour about the imminent death of his cousin, seeing the unrest among the imperial guard, went with Alexander to the praetorians who locked themselves in their camp beforehand. He was greeted coldly there, as opposed to Alexander who was welcomed enthusiastically. This angered the emperor, who, after spending the night at the camp’s

\textsuperscript{26} Cass. Dio 80.20.1.
\textsuperscript{27} Hdn. 5.8.5-6.
\textsuperscript{29} HA, \textit{Vita Heliogabali} 17.1.
\textsuperscript{30} Cass. Dio 80.20.1 – 21.3. Out of ‘The Roman History’ by Cassius Dio an original part of the book remains, which describes the beginnings of Elagabalus’ rule (cf. L. de Arrizabalaga y Prado, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 30–31), but the information about his death is known to us only from excerpts.
\textsuperscript{31} A Greek word ὁ τύλλος, usually translated as ‘chest’, is \textit{hapax legomenon}; cf. S.Ch. Zinsli, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 561.
\textsuperscript{32} Hdn. 5.8.5-10.
temple (ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τοῦ στρατοπέδο), ordered to seize those soldiers who were cheerfully greeting Alexander and then punish them as rebels. The remaining praetorians wished to defend their companions, and immediately decided to murder the despised princeps, his mother and the imperial followers – collaborators in Elagabalus’ obscenities.

There are significant differences in Vita Heliogabali in comparison to the sources mentioned above; in the parts describing Elagabalus’ death its author most likely referred to the lost work of Marius Maximus and therefore the text is considered quite reliable by most scholars. Most importantly, the author of the biography informs us that before the murder of the emperor took place, there was another, earlier attempt on the life of Elagabalus. Back then the life of the emperor was saved by prefect Antiohianus, who managed to appease the soldiers against murdering the ruler. The description of the murder of the princeps itself is somewhat different from the version brought up by Cassius Dio and Herodian. Whereas the authors mentioned here speak more of a spontaneous reaction of milites praetorii, the report of ‘Historia Augusta’ informs about a conspiracy (conspiratio) preconceived by the soldiers beforehand, with the intent of slaying the emperor and ‘liberating the state’ (ad liberandam rem publicam). The conspirators initiated their plan with methodical elimination of people involved in the emperors’ orgies. They were murdered very brutally, by disembowelment or piercing their genitalia. Finally, the assassins, soldiers of the Praetorian Guard, attacked the emperor himself who hid from them in a toilet (in latrina); which is where he was murdered as well. The precise location of that place was not mentioned by the author of the biography. C.R. Whittaker is convinced that the location of Elagabalus’ death was the imperial palace, which would suggest that the aforementioned toilet was located in the imperial palace.

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34 Hdn. 5.8.8.
35 See i.a. T.D. Barnes, Ultimus Antoninorum, in: Bonner Historia-Augusta-Colloquium 1970, Bonn 1972, pp. 53–74; passim; however, scepticism regarding that was recently expressed by S.Ch. Zinsli, op. cit., especially pp. 55–83.
38 HA, Vita Heliogabali 16.5.
39 HA, Vita Heliogabali 16.5.
40 HA, Vita Heliogabali 17.2; 33.7 (occisus est per scurras or – in E. Hohl’s emendation – per scutarios); cf. S.Ch. Zinsli, op. cit., p. 810.
41 C.R. Whittaker, op. cit., p. 72, note 1.
residence on Palatine Hill. K. Altmayer, in turn, claims that the latrine in which the emperor was murdered was located in the Praetorian Guard camp. Although we cannot definitely exclude any of the aforementioned versions, we have no convincing source arguments confirming (or denying) these hypotheses. On the other hand, it should be noted that the emperor dying in a latrine could have had a certain symbolic meaning.

Not much more is revealed in late ancient breviāria and other later source accounts. In Aurelius Victor’s report only the mere fact of the emperor’s death at the Praetorian Guard camp is mentioned. Eutropius and anonymous author of Epitome de Caesaribus mention, in turn, that Elagabalus died during the riots conducted mostly by soldiers (tumultu militari interfectus est). Eutropius’s Breviarium also mentions the murder of the emperor’s mother, Julia Soaemias, alongside him. We can also mention ‘New History’ by Zosimos where we can learn that Elagabalus was torn apart by Romans because of his arrogance, religious profanations and disgraceful lifestyle.

Further sequence of events, already after the emperor’s death, was depicted by all authors in a mostly similar way. The murdered Elagabalus was punished in a specific manner known as poena post mortem, which in this particular case primarily, but not exclusively, involved desecrating his corpse. First, he was decapitated while the rest of his body was left naked. The mutilated body was then most shamefully (sordidissime) dragged on hooks through the streets of Rome, including a circus (most likely the circus maximus), whereas Epitome de Caesaribus report compared the dragging of the emperor’s corpse to ripping a dead dog apart. All Romans, should they so desire, could unleash their anger and join in the profanation of the emperor’s remains. Then, the desecrated body of the murdered Elagabalus was thrown directly into the Tiber as claimed by Herodian, or into a sewage channel (in cloacam; it was most likely, as theorised by G. Alföldy, the Cloaca Maxima), and then it would flow into

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44 Aur. Vict., Caes. 23.3.
45 Eutrop. 8.22; Epitome de Caesaribus [hereinafter: Epit. de Caes.] 23.5.
46 Zosimos, Ζώσιμου ιστορία νέα = Historia Nova 1.11.1.
47 Cass. Dio 80.20.2.
49 On the topic see Cass. Dio 80.20.2; Hdn. 5.8.9; HA, Vita Heliogabali 17.1; Epit. de Caes. 23.6.
50 Hdn. 5.8.9.
the Tiber; the latter version is provided by Cassius Dio\textsuperscript{53}, Vita Heliogabali\textsuperscript{54} and the author of Epitome de Caesaribus\textsuperscript{55}. The emperor’s biography in ‘Historia Augusta’ also contains additional information that the remains of the emperor, as opposed to the common expectations, did not sink in the channel. They were recovered, transported onto the Aemilius’ Bridge (\textit{Pons Aemilius}), encumbered and yet again discarded, this time directly into the river\textsuperscript{56}. In Epitome de Caesaribus we find information that the opening in the cloaca proved too narrow, therefore after appropriately encumbering the body of the emperor it was thrown into the Tiber\textsuperscript{57}.

The assassins and all partaking in this cruel ceremony of humiliating the body of Elagabalus did not just want to unleash their negative emotions accumulated during the rule of the emperor but most importantly to make it impossible to bury his remains. Elagabalus was therefore treated like a criminal executed for treason (\textit{maxime maiestatis causa}), who – as said in Roman law – was not granted to have his own grave\textsuperscript{58}. As claimed by the author of the biography of the emperor in the ‘Historia Augusta’ collection, of all emperors of Rome only Elagabalus was submitted to such a punishment because any ruler who did not deserve the love of the senate, Roman people and the army could not have his own grave\textsuperscript{59}. Disregarding the fact that the author of these words was the apparently familiar with \textit{casus} of Vitellius whose remains were also dragged with hooks from Palatine Hill to the Tiber\textsuperscript{60}, one thing is clear: emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, known as Elagabalus, was treated the worst of all previously murdered emperors after his death.

Murdered together with Elagabalus was his mother, as already mentioned, Julia Soaemias, who accompanied his son during his visit at the camp

\textsuperscript{53} Cass. Dio 80.20.2.
\textsuperscript{54} HA, Vita Heliogabali 17.1.
\textsuperscript{55} Epit. de Caes. 23.6.
\textsuperscript{56} HA, Vita Heliogabali 17.2.
\textsuperscript{57} Epit. de Caes. 23.6.
\textsuperscript{58} Digesta 48.24.1 (Ulpianus); also see F. Vittinghoff, \textit{Der Staatsfeind in der römischen Kaiserzeit. Untersuchungen zur ‘damnatio memoriae’}, Berlin 1936, pp. 43–45.
\textsuperscript{59} HA, Vita Heliogabali 17.7.
\textsuperscript{60} Suetonius, \textit{De vita Caesarum}, Vita Vitellii 17.2; Tacitus, \textit{Historiae} 3.85. Similar treatment was intended also for the body of the murdered Commodus: senators and the people of Rome called for dragging the body of the emperor towards the banks of the Tiber and throw it into the river; the intent was foiled by Pertinax who ordered the emperor to be secretly buried in Hadrian’s Mausoleum (HA, Vita Commodi 17.4). The author of ‘Historia Augusta’ also mentioned that in his time the tombs of Maximinus Thrax and his son did not exist (HA, Vita Maximini 31.5: \textit{sepulchra eorum nulla extant}; cf. S.Ch. Zinsli, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 571). This does not necessarily mean that both rulers were denied the right to burial; the tombs might have been destroyed at a later time.
of the Praetorian Guard and in the moment of the attack of the soldiers on her son, as said in one of the reports (by Cassius Dio), embraced him tightly. Her body was also desecrated, decapitated and then dragged along the city streets and then abandoned, or as said in an alternative account – thrown into the Tiber. It is possible that the wife of Elagabalus, at the time it was Vestal Virgin Aquilia Severa, faced the same fate. We have no certain information about her from the period after 222 due to which we can only cautiously assume that she also suffered the wrath of the Praetorian Guard soldiers.

Whereas the fate of Aquilia Severa is uncertain, we are absolutely sure that a certain group of supporters also perished alongside the emperor and his mother. In the report by Herodian, the soldiers murdered all companions of Elagabalus and Julia Soaemias in the praetorian camp regarded as accomplices in imperial misdeeds. Details regarding individual people are provided by Cassius Dio. Among the dead were, i.a., praefectus Urbi Fulvius, treasurer Aurelius Eubulus (procurator summarum rationum), and finally, prefects not mentioned by name and charioteer Hierocles, whom Elagabalus made one of his lovers.

Directly after the committed murder the senate decided to condemn the memory of Elagabalus (so called damnatio memoriae). Senators resolved that in documents and inscriptions where the name of the murdered emperor was visible the title Antoninus would be removed. The analysis of surviving epigraphic testimonies mostly confirm the information relayed by the author of ‘Historia Augusta’. It is therefore the only literary account regarding the condemnation of memory imposed on the emperor. However, we know many inscriptions in which the imperial name Antoninus was chiselled out, and in some the entire name of the emperor was

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61 Cass. Dio 80.20.2; also Hdn. 5.8.8; HA, Vita Heliogabali 18.2; Eutrop. 8.22.
62 Cass. Dio 80.20.2.
63 Hdn. 5.8.9.
64 Hdn. 5.8.8.
67 I am aware that the term damnatio memoriae is a modern terminology item, however, due to its presence in literature I shall use it in my considerations. About the so called damnatio memoriae (also in terms of terminology) cf. e.g. L. Mrozewicz, Damnatio memoriae w rzymskiej kulturze politycznej, in: Damnatio memoriae w europejskiej kulturze politycznej, eds. R. Galaj-Dempniak, D. Okoń, M. Sempczyszn, Szczecin 2011, p. 11–16.
68 HA, Vita Heliogabali 17.4 and 18.1; HA, Vita Alexandri Severi 1.1.
69 Cf. e.g. AE 1985, 976 (Altavia, Maur. Caes.: Pro salute domini nostri / Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) M(arci) / Aureli [[Antonini]] Pii / Felicis Augusti deo Soli [[Elagabali]] / possessores Altavenses ex sua collati/one templum fec(erunt) procurante / Iulio Cestillo proc(urate) Aug(usti) (!) prov(inciae) / CLXXXII).
removed. On the other hand, it is worth noting that there are also surviving inscriptions in which Elagabalus’ name is preserved in full. However, I am absolutely certain that the fact that a number of inscriptions with the full name of the murdered Elagabalus is in no way a contra argument especially since there are other arguments confirming the condemnation of emperor’s memory which will be mentioned below.

Traditionally, the depictions of the murdered and condemned princes were destroyed. At that time a gold statue, the erection of which was mentioned in excerpts from the work by Cassius Dio, was most certainly destroyed. A large portrait of the emperor depicting him in god Elagabalus’ priest garb, which was commissioned by the princes shortly after defeating Macrinus (the painting was sent to Rome shortly afterwards and hung in curia over the statue of Victoria) must have met a similar fate. A number of imperial statues, in accordance with an old

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74 Hdn. 5.5.6-7.
Roman tradition, were somewhat ‘improved’ and made to depict the new ruler, Severus Alexander\textsuperscript{75}. The large scale and meticulousness in destroying imperial statues could be confirmed by the fact that only six of them can be unambiguously identified as a clear depiction of Elagabalus\textsuperscript{76}. This concerns, among others, the well-known head of Elagabalus from the Capitoline Museums, which in 222 was most likely thrown off the toppled body of the emperor’s statue anyway. Also destroyed were statues of Julia Soaemias. We also know a heavily damaged statue of the last wife of Elagabalus; the destruction of the statue’s face could have been the result of damnatio memoriae\textsuperscript{77}.

Traces of damnatio memoriae of Elagabalus can also be observed in numismatic and papyrological material. Some coins with the head of the emperor on the obverse were restruck e.g. with a monogram A – for Severus Alexander. In others the head of the princeps was defaced with a sharp tool\textsuperscript{78}. Particularly interesting conclusions can be reached through the analysis of certain papyri, which was announced some time ago by Adam Łukaszewicz. In documents referring to Elagabalus’ rule the name of the emperor is often omitted, referring to his predecessor (Caracalla), or replaced with other forms such as Ἀντόνινος μικρός – i.e. ‘little Antoninus’, ‘boy Antoninus’. What is interesting, these papyri are largely private documents, thus we have a chance of observing how the condemnation of Elagabalus’ memory was seen by groups of people not associated with Roman ruling elites\textsuperscript{79}.

An element of condemnation of Elagabalus’ memory was also using, after his death, derogatory epithets such as Tiberinus, Tractatitius or Impurus\textsuperscript{80}. As convincingly presented by Géza Alföldy, the first two expressions had dual meaning. The nickname of Tiberinus referred both to the act of throwing emperor’s corpse into the Tiber as well as the name


\textsuperscript{76} Ibidem, p. 189.

\textsuperscript{77} It is the statue displayed in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens, which is identified as a depiction of Aquilia Severa. The damage done to it is most likely the result of damnatio memoriae, though there are hypotheses linking it to the activity of Christian iconoclasts (e.g. L.A. Riccardi, The Mutilation of the Bronze Portrait of a Severan Empress from Sparta: ‘Damnatio memoriae’ or Christian Iconoclasm?, MDAI, Ath. Abt. 113, 1998, pp. 259–269).


\textsuperscript{80} HA, Vita Heliogabali 17.5; Cass. Dio 80(79).1.1; Epit. de Caes. 23.7.
of a fish which could be found near the outlet of Cloaca Maxima and fed on the faecal matter being released there. The second of the aforementioned terms on the one hand referred to the act of dragging the emperor’s corpse through the streets of Rome as described earlier, and on the other, it distinctively ‘commemorated’ the way in which Elagabalus was ‘treated’ or perhaps ‘touched’ by his inamorati.81

We also need to state that most of the ancient authors who wrote about Elagabalus did not want to call the emperor by his official name (M. Aurelius Antoninus). Anyway, Cassius Dio never considered the princeps to be M. Aurelius Antoninus – only ‘False Antonine’ (Ψευδαντωνίνος), ‘Assyrian’ (Ασσύριος) or finally ‘Sardanapalus’ (Σαρδανάπαλλος)82 and ‘Tiberinus’83 (cf. above). The author of ‘Historia Augusta’ preferred to call him Gabalus84, Heliogabalus85 or Varius Heliogabalus86, instead of referring to him as Antoninus87, because – as he believed – the emperor, through his behaviour, was in no way related to ‘the real Antonine emperors’ whose name he defiled anyway (pollueret)88. Only sporadically the form Antoninus Heliogabalus (or Heliogabalus Antoninus) shows up in ‘Historia Augusta’89. Also in that work the young princeps was called a ‘False Antonine’ (subditivus Antoninus90, Antoninus falsus91), just as Ausonius, a 4th century poet, informed his readers that Elagabalus carried a false name of Antonine emperors.92 For emperor Julian (the Apostate), Elagabalus was ‘a little boy from Emesa’ (τὸ ἐκ τῆς Ἐμέσης παιδάριον)93. Among ancient authors only Herodian consistently referred to the princeps as Antonine (Ἀντονῖνος).

To the author of Epitome de Caesaribus, Elagabalus was ‘a bitch with a wild and explosive sex drive’ (indomitae rabidaeque libidinis catula). The author of the emperor’s biography in ‘Historia Augusta’ also informs us that many derogatory nicknames of the emperor (apart from the ones

81 See G. Alföldy, op. cit., passim.
84 HA, Vita Alexandri Severi 1.2. Latin term gabalus meant i.a. a person who should be hanged; in this context it was meant to be a form of word play; cf. G. Alföldy, op. cit., p. 217.
85 For example: HA, Vita Alexandri Severi 2.4; 4.2; 4.6; 17.3; 18.3; 21.9; 22.1; 23.5-6; 24.2.
86 HA, Vita Macrini 4.1; 7.6; 8.2; HA, Vita Heliogabali 10.1; 17.4; HA, Vita Alexandri Severi 1.1; 5.4.
87 Cf. HA, Vita Alexandri Severi 1.1.
88 HA, Vita Heliogabali 9.2.
89 HA, Vita Caracallae 9.2 and 11.7; HA, Vita Macrini 15.1; HA, Vita Heliogabali 1.1 and 18.3; HA, Vita Alexandri Severi 49.5.
90 HA, Vita Heliogabali 17.9; S.Ch. Zinsli, op. cit., pp. 573–574.
91 HA, Vita Heliogabali 33.8.
93 Iulianus (imperator), Caesares 313a.
mentioned above) began circulating in Rome\(^{94}\). He himself called Elagabalus a ‘scourge’ (\textit{clades})\(^{95}\) or ‘disgrace’ (\textit{pestis illa})\(^{96}\), ‘foul beast’ (\textit{inpura illa bestia})\(^{97}\), a ‘man most unclean’ (\textit{homo impurissimus}\(^{98}\), \textit{homo omnium impurissimus})\(^{99}\), a ‘man most rotten, and born by a harlot’ (\textit{homo sordidissimus et ex meretrice conceptus})\(^{100}\), as well as a ‘slave of eunuchs’ (\textit{mancipium eunuchorum})\(^{101}\).

The policy of Severus Alexander in relation to the cult of god Elagabalus was also, in a sense, an element of \textit{damnatio memoriae} imposed onto the already dead M. Aurelius Antoninus. The black stone symbolising Elagabalus was sent back to Emesa\(^{102}\), and the temple on the Palatine Hill was most likely rebuilt and dedicated to a new deity. From that point on it was to Jupiter Ultor, the Avenger\(^{103}\). That title of Jupiter, usually associated with god Mars, was not chosen randomly. Unfortunately we do not know anything about the fate of the second temple of Elagabalus in Rome.

Finally, the last question, being one of the elements – one of the most important, we should add – of condemning the memory of the murdered princeps: the new ruler of Rome, M. Aurelius Severus Alexander, proclaimed as princeps on 13 March 222, was no longer formally referred to as a son of M. Aurelius Antoninus, i.e. Elagabalus and as a grandson of Caracalla (\textit{M. Aureli Antonini Pii Felici. Aug. fili Antonini Magni Pii nep.})\(^{104}\). Now, in official state documents, he was titled as a son of ‘the divine Antoninus the Great’ and a ‘grandson of the divine Severus’ (\textit{divi Antonini Magni filius; divi Severi nepos})\(^{105}\).

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\(^{94}\) HA, \textit{Vita Heliogabali} 17.5: \textit{apellatus est post mortem (...) et multa}. Cf. also G. Alföldy, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 218, who enumerates most (but not all of) epithets used to describe the emperor.

\(^{95}\) HA, \textit{Vita Heliogabali} 34.1.

\(^{96}\) HA, \textit{Vita Heliogabali} 10.1.

\(^{97}\) HA, \textit{Vita Alexandri Severi} 53.6.

\(^{98}\) HA, \textit{Vita Maximini} 5.1.

\(^{99}\) HA, \textit{Vita Diadumeniani} 9.5.

\(^{100}\) HA, \textit{Vita Macrini} 7.6.

\(^{101}\) HA, \textit{Vita Alexandri Severi} 23.5.

\(^{102}\) Cass. Dio 80(79).21.2; Hdn. 6.1.3. Cf. also the coin of usurper Uranius Antoninus (253-254 A.D.), in which the temple of Emesa with the reattached black stone was depicted (http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/uranius_antoninus/_emesa_AE34_BMC_24.jpg [accessed on: 7 IX 2019]).

\(^{103}\) C. Rowan, \textit{Becoming Jupiter}, pp. 126–128. The is shown on the coin of Severus Alexander (RIC IV.2, \textit{Alex. Sev.}, no. 412); M.L. Popkin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 165. God Jupiter with the title Avenger (\textit{Iuppiter Ultor}) was also immortalised in many monetary issues of imperial coins (\textit{Roman Imperial Coinage} [hereinafter: RIC] IV.2, \textit{Alex. Sev.}, no. 142–145; 203; 560–561).

\(^{104}\) Cf. e.g. AE 1966, 339.

Whether a similar procedure also involved Julia Soaemias\textsuperscript{106} and Aquilia Severa remains an open question. There is a lack of unambiguous source information, but in the surviving epigraphic material, beside the martelation of the name of Elagabalus, there are also traces – in the vast majority of cases – of removed names of his mother and his last wife\textsuperscript{107}. This could indicate that they too were sentenced to the condemnation of memory, especially since in literary sources, namely in ‘Historia Augusta’, pejorative terms were often used in relation to Julia Soaemias, just as in case of Elagabalus. She was called a ‘prostitute’ (\textit{meretrix})\textsuperscript{108} or a person ‘living like a prostitute’ (\textit{meretricio more vivens})\textsuperscript{109}, as well as a ‘woman bearing the greatest infamy’ (\textit{probrosissima mulier}), therefore – as regarded by the author of Elagabalus’ biography – she deserved to die as she was ‘worthy of her son’ (\textit{digna filio}), of course in the pejorative use of the phrase\textsuperscript{110}. There was also a hypothesis that the condemnation of memory was also applied to the third wife of the emperor, Annia Faustina\textsuperscript{111}.

To conclude: in spring 222, Rome witnessed a cruel spectacle of murdering the emperor and his mother, and a public, hours-long desecration and humiliation of their corpses. Although out of all murders committed on Roman emperors this one might not have been the most brutal (e.g. the murder of Commodus involved more ruthlessness: at first there was an attempt to poison him, and then he was strangled in a bath house\textsuperscript{112}), it was the grisly string of subsequent events that left a mark on the Roman public domain. It was a real \textit{finis Antoninorum nominis} – both in actual and symbolic aspect. In particular, we should focus on one of the elements of the \textit{damnatio memoriae} imposed on the emperor – the inscriptions were deprived of the most important part of the imperial name, the name

\textsuperscript{106} This possibility is supported by D. Kienast, W. Eck, M. Heil, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 168.
\textsuperscript{107} Examples of martelation of the name of Julia Soaemias: CIL 8, 18052 (= 2564), CIL 8, 2715; both Julia Soaemias and Aquilia Severa: CIL 6, 40679. As noted by E. Kettenhofen, in epigraphic material an intact name of Julia Soaemias is present in only two instances – these are inscriptions CIL 6, 1079 and CIL 10, 6569; cf. E. Kettenhofen, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 151. Even if the data provided here are no longer completely up-to-date over time (e.g. we now know that the name of the emperor’s mother survived also in inscription AE 1987, 1130, and partially in inscription AE 1948, 212), the proportions have certainly been maintained.
\textsuperscript{108} \textit{HA}, \textit{Vita Macrini} 7.6.
\textsuperscript{109} \textit{HA}, \textit{Vita Heliogabali} 2.1.
\textsuperscript{110} \textit{HA}, \textit{Vita Heliogabali} 18.3. Cf. S.Ch. Zinsli, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 581, who points out interesting parallels in relation to Constantine and his mother.
\textsuperscript{111} See D. Kienast, W. Eck, M. Heil, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 167. It is worth mentioning that we know about the inscription with removed name of Annia Faustina (AE 1937, 24), which could support the hypothesis in a way.
\textsuperscript{112} Murder of Commodus: Cass. Dio 73(72).22.4-6; Hdn. 17.1-11; \textit{HA}, \textit{Vita Commodi} 17.1–2.
of Antoninus, as well as the fact that Elagabalus was frequently referred to as ‘the last of the Antonines’ (*ultimus Antoninorum*)113. There is also another thing to be pointed out: the assassination of the emperor was an absolutely unusual occurrence during the rule of the Antonine dynasty, with the only victim of violence being emperor Commodus. During Severan rule, who considered themselves the heirs of the Antonine dynasty, it was a far more common occurrence and during the so-called 3rd century crisis it was something Romans saw almost all the time. Suffice to say that among all successors of Elagabalus ruling until the times of introduction of tetrarchy in Rome almost all emperors were murdered – with the only exception being Claudius Gothicus114.

Elagabalus himself, who was also – as we learned above – brutally murdered and publicly shamed after death, by the decision of the senate was sentenced to the condemnation of memory and then stylised as the personification of all evil and a true monster on the throne. That is how he was immortalised in Roman history and such is the image we still see today with hardly any changes. It is no doubt a great success of the policy of destroying all mentions of good memories about the young emperor, conducted since 12 March 222. It is also accurately expressed in words from ‘Historia Augusta’, where Elagabalus is regarded as a tyrant and compared to Caligula, Nero, Vitellius, or finally in a sentence from Severus Alexander’s biography, which should be considered a quintessence of the ancient assessment of the murdered princeps: ‘Only Elagabalus was worse than Commodus, he was neither an emperor, nor an Antonine, nor a citizen, nor a senator, nor a noble, nor a Roman’115. He was just a nobody. *Vae victis!*

**REFERENCES**


113 The author of the ‘Historia Augusta’ repeats that several times in various parts of Elagabalus’ *vita*: *HA, Vita Heliogabali* 1.7; 18.1; 34.6.

114 We do not know what would have happened if he had not died due to plague.

115 *HA, Vita Alexandri Severi* 7.4: *peior Commodo solus Heliogabalus, nec imperator nec Antoninus nec civis nec senator nec nobilis nec Romanus.*
Hic finis Antoninorum nomini in re publica fuit...


W artykule omówiono wydarzenia, które rozegrały się w Rzymie w dniu 12 marca 222 r. Został wówczas zamordowany cesarz M. Aurelius Antoninus, zwany również Heliogabalem. Razem z nim zabito jego matkę, Julię Soaemias, a także pewną liczbę osób z jego najbliższego otoczenia. Śmierć Heliogabala nie zakończyła jednak spirali przemocy, a Rzym po raz drugi w swojej historii stał się świadkiem pohańbienia zwłok cesarza, którym odmówiono prawa do godnego pochówku. Heliogabal nie tylko został brutalnie zamordowany, ale również pośmiertnie potępiony za pomocą ogłoszonej przez senat damnatio memoriae. Senatorowie zdecydowali, że z dokumentów i napisów, w których występowało nazwisko władcy, zostanie usunięty człon Antoninus. Zostały również zniszczone wizerunki cesarza. Sam Heliogabal po śmierci został wystylizowany jako uosobienie wszelkiego zła i jako prawdziwy potwór na tronie, i w taki sposób uwieczniony w historycznej pamięci w Rzymie.

Słowa kluczowe: Imperium Rzymskie, Heliogabal, Julia Soaemias, damnatio memoriae

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