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Hic finis Antoninorum nomini in re publica fuit.
Assassination of Emperor Elagabalus and Condemnation
of His Memory*

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Śmierć cesarza Heliogabala i potępienie jego pamięci

ABSTRACT

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 paper¹ 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 murdered³. 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 history⁵ 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 times⁶, 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.

³ Cf. *Prosopographia Imperii Romani saec. I. II. III., editio altera* [hereinafter: PIR²] V no. 273; M. Lambert, *Varius Avitus*, RE VIII A.1, 1955, Sp. 391–404; D. Kienast, W. Eck, M. Heil, *Römische Kaisertabelle. Grundzüge einer römischen Kaiserchronologie*, 6. überarbeitete Auflage, Darmstadt 2017, pp. 165–166; G. Ray Thompson, *Elagabalus: Priest-Emperor of Rome*, Kansas 1972; the latest biographies of the princeps: L. de Arrizabalaga y Prado, *The Emperor Elagabalus: Fact or Fiction?*, Cambridge 2010; M. Icks, *The Crimes of Elagabalus. The Life and Legacy of Rome's Decadent Boy Emperor*, London–New York 2013; K. Altmayer, *Elagabal. Roms Priesterkaiser und seine Zeit*, Nordhausen 2014. The emperor was called Elagabalus in late antiquity (such naming was used by Aurelius Victor and the author of 'Historia Augusta', among others); however, we do not know whether he was called as such during his lifetime – cf. L. de Arrizabalaga y Prado, *op. cit.*, pp. 6–7. As for the time of death of the emperor, there is no agreement among scholars; 12 March 222 is the most likely date – see the arguments by K. Altmayer, *op. cit.*, pp. 175 and 227, note 726. Other suggested dates of the murder: 6 March (G. Ray Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 120); 11 March (M. Frey, *Untersuchungen zur Religion und zur Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal*, Stuttgart 1989, p. 100), 13 March (M. Icks, *op. cit.*, p. 41), 11 or 12 March (D. Kienast, W. Eck, M. Heil, *op. cit.*, p. 165).

⁴ PIR² I, no. 704; D. Kienast, W. Eck, M. Heil, *op. cit.*, p. 168; E. Kettenhofen, *Die syrischen Augustae in der historischen Überlieferung: Ein Beitrag zum Problem der Orientalisierung*, Bonn 1979, p. 37 nn.; E. Wallinger, *Die Frauen in der Historia Augusta*, Wien 1990, pp. 97–105.

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 204⁷ in a family of priests of the Syrian god of the sun – Ela(h)gabalus⁸. Upon becoming the ruler in May 218⁹, 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 son¹⁰. 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*¹¹ and also disregarded the equites¹². He was completely disinterested in internal and foreign policies. However, he was fond of dancing¹³ and cultivating worship of a Syrian god Elagabalus, of which he was a hereditary priest (*sacerdos amplissimus dei invicti solis Elagabali*)¹⁴ and after whom he

⁷ Such date has been deduced from information provided by Cassius Dio, saying that Elagabalus was murdered at the age of 18: Cassius Dio, Ῥωμαϊκὴ ἱστορία = 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, Ἡρωδιανοῦ τῆς μετὰ Μάρκον βασιλείας ἱστορίας βιβλία ὀκτώ = Herodiani ab excessu divi Marci 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 PIR² V, no. 273, p. 143).

⁸ Until recently, a group of scholars believed that Elagabalus' birth place was Emesa in Syria (cf. D. Kienast, W. Eck, M. Heil, *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, *op. cit.*, pp. 196 and 357; K. Altmayer, *op. cit.*, p. 65; PIR² V, no. 273, p. 143; doubts regarding Emesa as the place of birth were already brought forth by J. Stuart Hay, *op. cit.*, p. 35 nn.).

⁹ *Dies imperii* of Elagabalus took place on 16 May 218; cf. Cass. Dio 79(78).31.4; P. Herz, *Kaiserfeste der Prinzipatszeit, 'Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt'* [hereinafter: ANRW] II 16.2, 1978, p. 1185.

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, *Vita Caracallae* 9.2; HA, *Vita Caracallae* 11.7; HA, *Vita Heliogabali* 1.4; HA, *Vita Macrini* 7.6, 8.4, 9.4 and 15.2; HA, *Vita Diadumeniani* 9.4; HA, *Vita Maximini* 4.6. Selected epigraphic *testimonia*, in which Elagabalus appears officially as *divi Antonini Magni filius*: *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* [hereinafter: CIL] 3, 3675; CIL 12, 4348; CIL 13, 8811; CIL 16, 139; CIL 17.2, 644; CIL 17.2, 652; *L'Année Epigraphique* [hereinafter: AE] 1983, 778; AE 2001, 2165; Roman Military Diplomas [hereinafter: RMD] III 192.

¹¹ See Cass. Dio. 80(79).3.4 – 5.6; Hdn. 5.6.1; HA, *Vita Heliogabali* 20.1 (senate called *mancipia togata*); cf. R. Bering-Staschewski, *Römische Zeitgeschichte bei Cassius Dio*, Bochum 1981, pp. 105–108; S.Ch. Zinsli, *op. cit.*, pp. 603–605.

¹² HA, *Vita Heliogabali* 20.1: *equestrem ordinem in nullo loco habens*.

¹³ Cass. Dio 80(79).14.3; Hdn. 5.6.1 i 5.6.10; HA, *Vita Heliogabali* 32.8.

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 times¹⁵. By the order of the emperor two temples to the Syrian deity were erected in Rome: one (called *Heliogabalium*) in the centre of the City, on Palatine Hill, where the princeps ordered a black stone from Emesa to be brought¹⁶, the second in an uncertain place, located somewhere on the edge of the city¹⁷. A certain black legend involved immoral scandals, mostly of sexual nature, which Elagabalus supposedly caused with his behaviour¹⁸.

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 218¹⁹, 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

RMD IV 307; RMD IV 308; B. Pferdehirt, *Römische Militärdiplome und Entlassungsurkunden in der Sammlung des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums*, Mainz 2004, no. 54. For more about religious policy of emperor Elagabalus see T. Optendrenk, *Die Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal im Spiegel der Historia Augusta*, Bonn 1967; M. Pietrzykowski, *Die Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal*, ANRW II 16.3, 1986, pp. 1806–1825; M. Frey, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ C. Rowan, *Under Divine Auspices. Divine Ideology and the Visualisation of Imperial Power in the Severian Period*, Cambridge 2012, pp. 213–214.

¹⁶ Hdn. 5.5.8, HA, *Vita Heliogabali* 1.6 and 3.4. Scholars now agree that the temple was located in the area of so called Vigna Barberini in north-eastern part of Palatine Hill. See H. Broise, Y. Thébert, *Élagabal et le complexe religieux de la Vigna Barberini*, 'Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité' 1999, 111, pp. 729–747; C. Rowan, *Becoming Jupiter: Severus Alexander, the Temple of Jupiter Ultor, and Jovian Iconography on Roman Imperial Coinage*, 'American Journal of Numismatics. Second Series' 2009, 21, pp. 124–126. The possible image of the temple: M.L. Popkin, *The Architecture of the Roman Triumph. Monuments, Memory, and Identity*, Cambridge 2016, p. 164.

¹⁷ Hdn. 5.6.6.

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

¹⁹ Hdn. 5.3.2 (and hereinafter); HA, *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 men²⁰. 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 Mamaea, mother of the imperial cousin, Elagabalus started regretting the fact that he agreed to grant him the position of co-ruler²¹. As reported by Cassius Dio, Herodian and *Vita Heliogabali*, the princeps first tried to deprive Alexander of the title of the *caesar*²², and when that did not succeed – kill him; several attempts on the life of Alexander were made, allegedly orchestrated by Elagabalus²³. 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 consulate²⁴. 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, ἐσώζετο²⁵. 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

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 Dio²⁶, Herodian²⁷, Aurelius Victor²⁸) we see information that the scene of the crime was the camp of imperial guard (*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 soldiers²⁹.

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 Xyphilinos³⁰, 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 *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 τύλλον³¹), 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 details³². 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

²⁶ Cass. Dio 80.20.1.

²⁷ Hdn. 5.8.5-6.

²⁸ Aurelius Victor [hereinafter: Aur. Vict.], *Liber de Caesaribus* 23.2.

²⁹ HA, *Vita Heliogabali* 17.1.

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, *op. cit.*, pp. 30–31), but the information about his death is known to us only from excerpts.

³¹ A Greek word ὁ τύλλος, usually translated as 'chest', is *hapax legomenon*; cf. S.Ch. Zinsli, *op. cit.*, p. 561.

³² Hdn. 5.8.5-10.

temple (ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τοῦ στρατοπέδο³³), 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' obscenities³⁴.

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 scholars³⁵. 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 Antiochianus, who managed to appease the soldiers against murdering the ruler³⁶. The description of the murder of the princeps itself³⁷ 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*)³⁸. The conspirators initiated their plan with methodical elimination of people involved in the emperors's orgies. They were murdered very brutally, by disembowelment or piercing their genitalia³⁹. 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 well⁴⁰. The precise location of that place was not mentioned by the author of the biography. C.R. Whitteker is convinced that the location of Elagabalus' death was the imperial palace⁴¹, which would suggest that the aforementioned toilet was located in the imperial

³³ According to C.R. Whittaker, it was the camp's temple of Mars (C.R. Whittaker, *Herodian in Two Volumes*, vol. II: *Books V–VIII*, London–Cambridge (Mass.) 1970, pp. 70–71, note 1).

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.

³⁶ HA, *Vita Heliogabali* 14.2–8. Cf. S.Ch. Zinsli, *op. cit.*, pp. 524–530.

³⁷ HA, *Vita Heliogabali* 16.1–17.1.

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 camp⁴². 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 meaning⁴³.

Not much more is revealed in late ancient *breuiaria* 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 mentioned⁴⁴. 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*)⁴⁵. 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 lifestyle⁴⁶.

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 naked⁴⁷. The mutilated body was then most shamefully (*sordidissime*) dragged on hooks through the streets of Rome, including a circus (most likely the *circus maximus*)⁴⁸, whereas *Epitome de Caesaribus* report compared the dragging of the emperor's corpse to ripping a dead dog apart⁴⁹. All Romans, should they so desire, could unleash their anger and join in the profanation of the emperor's remains⁵⁰. Then, the desecrated body of the murdered Elagabalus was thrown directly into the Tiber as claimed by Herodian⁵¹, or into a sewage channel (*in cloacam*; it was most likely, as theorised by G. Alföldy, the *Cloaca Maxima*⁵²), and then it would flow into

⁴² K. Altmayer, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

⁴³ See. S.Ch. Zinsli, *op. cit.*, p. 562.

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.

⁴⁸ HA, *Vita Heliogabali* 17.3, 33.7; S.Ch. Zinsli, *op. cit.*, pp. 565-566.

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.

⁵¹ Hdn. 5.8.9.

⁵² G. Alföldy, *Zwei Schimpfnamen des Kaisers Elagabal: Tiberinus und Tractatitius*, in: Ders., *Die Krise des Römischen Reiches. Geschichte, Geschichtsbetrachtung und Geschichtsschreibung. Ausgewählte Beiträge*, Stuttgart 1989, p. 222.

the Tiber; the latter version is provided by Cassius Dio⁵³, *Vita Heliogabali*⁵⁴ and the author of *Epitome de Caesaribus*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 (*Pons Aemilius*), encumbered and yet again discarded, this time directly into the river⁵⁶. 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 Tiber⁵⁷.

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 (*maxime maiestatis causa*), who – as said in Roman law – was not granted to have his own grave⁵⁸. 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 grave⁵⁹. Disregarding the fact that the author of these words was the apparently familiar with *casus* of Vitellius whose remains were also dragged with hooks from Palatine Hill to the Tiber⁶⁰, 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

⁵³ Cass. Dio 80.20.2.

⁵⁴ HA, *Vita Heliogabali* 17.1.

⁵⁵ *Epit. de Caes.* 23.6.

⁵⁶ HA, *Vita Heliogabali* 17.2.

⁵⁷ *Epit. de Caes.* 23.6.

⁵⁸ *Digesta* 48.24.1 (Ulpianus); also see F. Vittinghoff, *Der Staatsfeind in der römischen Kaiserzeit. Untersuchungen zur 'damnatio memoriae'*, Berlin 1936, pp. 43–45.

⁵⁹ HA, *Vita Heliogabali* 17.7.

⁶⁰ Suetonius, *De vita Caesarum, Vita Vitellii* 17.2; Tacitus, *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: *sepulchra eorum nulla extant*; cf. S.Ch. Zinsli, *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 tightly⁶¹. Her body was also desecrated, decapitated and then dragged along the city streets and then abandoned⁶², or – as said in an alternative account – thrown into the Tiber⁶³. 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 misdeeds⁶⁴. Details regarding individual people are provided by Cassius Dio⁶⁵. 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 lovers⁶⁶.

Directly after the committed murder the senate decided to condemn the memory of Elagabalus (so called *damnatio memoriae*⁶⁷). 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'⁶⁸. 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 out⁶⁹, and in some the entire name of the emperor was

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.

⁶⁵ Cass. Dio 80(79).21.1.

⁶⁶ Cass. Dio 80(79).21.1; Hierokles as Elagabalus' inamorato: Cass. Dio 80(79).15.1-4; HA, *Vita Heliogabali* 6.5; cf. S.Ch. Zinsli, *op. cit.*, pp. 395–396.

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. Gałaj-Dempniak, D. Okoń, M. Semczyszyn, 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 (*Altava, Maur. Caes.: Pro salute domini n(ostri) / Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) M(arci) / Aurelii [[Antonini]] Pii / Felicis Augusti deo Soli [[Elagabali]] / possessores Altavenses ex sua collatilone templum fec(erunt) procurante / Iulio Cestillo proc(uratore) Aug(usti) (!) prov(inciae) / CLXXXII*).

removed⁷⁰. On the other hand, it is worth noting that there are also surviving inscriptions in which Elagabalus' name is preserved in full⁷¹. This, in turn, led S. Ch. Zinsli to express certain doubts regarding the historicity of the formal imposition of *damnatio memoriae* on Elagabalus⁷². 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 princeps were destroyed. At that time a gold statue, the erection of which was mentioned in excerpts from the work by Cassius Dio⁷³, was most certainly destroyed. A large portrait of the emperor depicting him in god Elagabalus' priest garb, which was commissioned by the princeps 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 fate⁷⁴. A number of imperial statues, in accordance with an old

⁷⁰ Among others: CIL 6, 41190 (Rome: [[T(ito) Messio Ext]r[ic]ato]] / [co(n)s(uli) II ord(inario?) a s]tudi(i)s leg(ato) leg(ionis) / [--- c]omiti amico / [fidissimo p]raef(ecto) ann(onae) / [[[pontifici mino]ri praef(ecto) praet(orio)]] / [[[Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) M(arci) A]jurelli]] / [[[Antonini P]ii Felicis Aug(usti)]] / [[[pontificis] maximi]] / [[sacerdotis] amplissimi] / [[Hermog[en]es]] / [ob insignem] eius erga se / [benevolen]tiam qua / [sibi impetr]avit in / [dulgentia]m sacram / [beneficii divini honore] / [--- prolatis] / [commentariis ---]; AE 1984, 432 (Aquileia: [[[Imp(eratori) Caes(ari)]]] / [[[Marco Aure]lio]] / [[[Antonino P(iao) Felici) Aug(usto)]]] / [[pont(ifici) max(imo) tr(ibunicia) pot(estate) co(n)s(uli) p(atr)ia p(atr)iae]]] / [divi Magni An]t(oni)ni Pii / [fil(io) indulgenti]ssim(o) / [principi res pub]lic[a] / [Aquileiensis]; AE 1986, 644 (Claudiopolis, Pont.-Bith.: B(ona) F(ortuna) / Imp(eratori) Caes(ari) divi Antonin[i] Pii / Ma[g]ni filio di(vi) Severi nepoti / [[[M(arco) Aurelio Antonino]]] Pio / [F]elici Augusto pontif(ici) max(imo) / tribuniciae potest(atis) co(n)s(uli) / patri patriae proco(n)s(uli) / mil(ia) [VIII] ad fines); Inscriptions grecques et latines de Novae (Mésie Inférieure) n° 33 (Novae, Moes. inf.: Marti Victori leg(ionis) I Ital(icae) / Antoniniana pro salute / Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) [[M(arci) Aur(eli) Anton(ini)]] / Pii Felicis Aug(usti) / divi Antonini fil(ii) / M(arcus) Val(erius) M(arci) Val(eri) Mucacenti / fil(ius) Quir(ina) Flavianus domo / Circa p(rimus) p(ilus) ex eq(uite) Romano / Aquilae d(onum) d(edit)).

⁷¹ E.g. CIL 2, 742 (Norba, Lusit.: C[n(aeo?)]) [A]vito Saeco / [L(ucius)] Auf(idius) Celer et Cornelia Flavina sacerdotes a=d=T>iutorio parentu(m) imp(eratore) Anto(nino) P(iao) Au[g(usto)] I]I et Tineio Sacerdot[ea] co(n)s(ulibus); Inscriptionum Lapidarium Latinarum Provinciae Norici usque ad annum MCMLXXXIV repertarum indices n° 747 (Virunum, Noric.: [Imp(erator) Caes(ar) M(arcus) Aurel(ius) / [A]ntoninus Pius Felix / [In]victus Aug(ustus) co(n)s(ul) III p(ater) p(atr)iae] / [sac]erdos amplissimus et / [[[M(arcus) Au]rel(ius) Alexander C]aes(ar)]]]; AE 1985, 808 (Tavium, Galat.: Imp(erator) Caesar di(vi) Seve<=P>i nepo/s divi Antonini / filius M(arcus) Aur(elius) A/ntoninus Piu/s Felix Aug(ustus) trib(unicia) / potest(ate) co(n)s(ul) p(ater) p(atr)iae rest(ituit)).

⁷² S.Ch. Zinsli, *op. cit.*, pp. 566–567.

⁷³ Cass. Dio. 80(79).12.2.

⁷⁴ Hdn. 5.5.6-7.

Roman tradition, were somewhat 'improved' and made to depict the new ruler, Severus Alexander⁷⁵. 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 Elagabalus⁷⁶. 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*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 tool⁷⁸. 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 Ἀντωνῖνος 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 elites⁷⁹.

An element of condemnation of Elagabalus' memory was also using, after his death, derogatory epithets such as *Tiberinus*, *Tractatitius* or *Impurus*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

⁷⁵ E.R. Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation. Damnatio Memoriae and Roman Imperial Portraiture*, Leiden 2004, pp. 189–190 (destruction of Elagabalus' statues) and pp. 191–192 (remade into Severus Alexander's statues).

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 189.

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).

⁷⁸ Cf. A. Kindler, *The damnatio memoriae of Elagabal on City-Coins of the Near East*, 'Schweizer Münzblätter' 1980, 30, pp. 3–7.

⁷⁹ For more information on the topic see A. Łukaszewicz, *Antoninus the ΚΟΡΥΦΟΣ* (Note on. P. Oxy. XLVI 3298.2), 'Journal of Juristic Papyrology' 1992, 22, pp. 43–46; idem, *Ergänzende Bemerkungen zu P. Oxy LXVI 3298.2*, 'Journal of Juristic Papyrology' 1993, 23, pp. 115–118.

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 innamorati⁸¹.

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' (Ἀσσύριος) 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 Antoninus*⁹⁰, *Antoninus falsus*⁹¹), just as Ausonius, a 4th century poet, informed his readers that Elagabalus carried a false name of Antonine emperors⁹². 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 (Ἀντωνίνος).

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*.

⁸² Cass. Dio 80(79).1.1.

⁸³ Cass. Dio 80(79).1.1; 80(79).21.3.

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.

⁹² Ausonius, *Caesares* 24: *Antoninorum nomina falsa gerens*; cf. M. Icks, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

⁹³ Iulianus (imperator), *Caesares* 313a.

mentioned above) began circulating in Rome⁹⁴. He himself called Elagabalus a ‘scourge’ (*clades*)⁹⁵ or ‘disgrace’ (*pestis illa*)⁹⁶, ‘foul beast’ (*impura illa bestia*)⁹⁷, a ‘man most unclean’ (*homo impurissimus*⁹⁸, *homo omnium impurissimus*⁹⁹), a ‘man most rotten, and born by a harlot’ (*homo sordidissimus et ex meretrice conceptus*)¹⁰⁰, as well as a ‘slave of eunuchs’ (*mancipium eunuchorum*)¹⁰¹.

The policy of Severus Alexander in relation to the cult of god Elagabalus was also, in a sense, an element of *damnatio memoriae* imposed onto the already dead M. Aurelius Antoninus. The black stone symbolising Elagabalus was sent back to Emesa¹⁰², 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 Avenger¹⁰³. 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 (*M. Aureli Antonini Pii Felici. Aug. fil. divi 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’ (*divi Antonini Magni filius; divi Severi nepos*)¹⁰⁵.

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

⁹⁵ HA, *Vita Heliogabali* 34.1.

⁹⁶ HA, *Vita Heliogabali* 10.1.

⁹⁷ HA, *Vita Alexandri Severi* 53.6.

⁹⁸ HA, *Vita Maximini* 5.1.

⁹⁹ HA, *Vita Diadumeniani* 9.5.

¹⁰⁰ HA, *Vita Macrini* 7.6.

¹⁰¹ HA, *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, *Becoming Jupiter*, pp. 126–128. This is shown on the coin of Severus Alexander (RIC IV.2, *Alex. Sev.*, no. 412); M.L. Popkin, *op. cit.*, p. 165. God Jupiter with the title Avenger (*Iuppiter Ultor*) was also immortalised in many monetary issues of imperial coins (*Roman Imperial Coinage* [hereinafter: RIC] IV.2, *Alex. Sev.*, no. 142–145; 203; 560–561).

¹⁰⁴ Cf. e.g. AE 1966, 339.

¹⁰⁵ Example epigraphic testimonies: CIL 13, 9113; CIL 13, 9118; AE 1966, 339; AE 2002, 1739.

Whether a similar procedure also involved Julia Soaemias¹⁰⁶ 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 wife¹⁰⁷. 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’ (*meretrix*)¹⁰⁸ or a person ‘living like a prostitute’ (*meretricio more vivens*)¹⁰⁹, as well as a ‘woman bearing the greatest infamy’ (*probrosissima mulier*), therefore – as regarded by the author of Elagabalus’ biography – she deserved to die as she was ‘worthy of her son’ (*digna filio*), of course in the pejorative use of the phrase¹¹⁰. There was also a hypothesis that the condemnation of memory was also applied to the third wife of the emperor, Annia Faustina¹¹¹.

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 house¹¹²), it was the grisly string of subsequent events that left a mark on the Roman public domain. It was a real *finis Antoninorum nominis* – both in actual and symbolic aspect. In particular, we should focus on one of the elements of the *damnatio memoriae* imposed on the emperor – the inscriptions were deprived of the most important part of the imperial name, the name

¹⁰⁶ This possibility is supported by D. Kienast, W. Eck, M. Heil, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

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, *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.

¹⁰⁸ HA, *Vita Macrini* 7.6.

¹⁰⁹ HA, *Vita Heliogabali* 2.1.

¹¹⁰ HA, *Vita Heliogabali* 18.3. Cf. S.Ch. Zinsli, *op. cit.*, p. 581, who points out interesting parallels in relation to Constantine and his mother.

¹¹¹ See D. Kienast, W. Eck, M. Heil, *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.

¹¹² Murder of Commodus: Cass. Dio 73(72).22.4-6; Hdn. 17.1-11; HA, *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!*

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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*.

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STRESZCZENIE

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 Soemias, 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, który 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 Soemias, damnatio memoriae

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