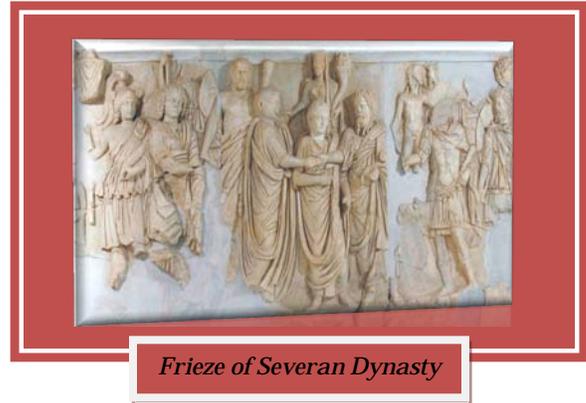


The Roman Augustae: The Most Powerful Women Who Ever Lived

A Collection of Six Silver Coins



Frieze of Severan Dynasty

All coins in each set are protected in an archival capsule and beautifully displayed in a mahogany-like box. The box set is accompanied with a story card, certificate of authenticity, and a black gift box.



The best-known names of ancient Rome are invariably male, and in the 500 years between the reigns of Caesar Augustus and Justinian I, not a single woman held the Roman throne—not even during the chaotic Crisis of the Third Century, when new emperors claimed the throne every other year. This does not mean that women were not vital to the greatest empire the world has ever known. Indeed, much of the time, the real wielders of imperial might were the wives, sisters, and mothers of the emperors.

Never was this more true than during the 193-235, when three women—the sisters **Julia Maesa** and **Julia Domna**, and Julia Maesa's daughter **Julia Avita Mamaea**—secured the succession of their husbands, sons, and grandsons to the imperial throne, thus guaranteeing that they would remain in control. The dynasty is known in the history books as “**the Severan**,” for Julia Domna's husband **Septimius Severus**, but it was the three Julias—and none of the men—who were really responsible for this relatively transition of power. These remarkable women, working in a patriarchal system that officially excluded them from assuming absolute power, nevertheless managed to have their way.

Our story begins in Emesa, capital of the Roman client kingdom of Syria, in the year 187 CE. The 42-year-old widower **Septimius Severus**, a tribune of the plebs, had been told by astrologers that he would find his future wife in the province. He met with Julius Bassianus, the pagan high priest and aristocrat, who introduced him to his brilliant 17-year-old daughter, **Julia Domna**, a prodigy who was well versed in philosophy—and a great beauty. The two wed the following year.

It did not take long for Julia Domna to acclimate to her new life. She was instrumental in guiding her husband through the perilous Year of the Five Emperors, which began with the murder of Commodus on New Year's Eve, 192, and saw four rival claimants to the throne: Pertinax, Didius Julianus, Pescennius Niger, and Clodius Albinus. It took four years to eliminate his rivals, but by 197, Septimius Severus was the unquestioned emperor of all Rome—and Julia Domna, his chief advisor.

Unlike her predecessors, Julia Domna accompanied her husband on his military campaigns, and was known as the Lady of the Camp. The troops adored her, and she dispensed sage military advice. She bore Septimius two sons, Geta and **Caracalla**, who became co-emperors upon Septimius' death in 211. After Geta was assassinated by his brother's agents, Julia Domna served as Caracalla's advisor until his own assassination in 211. When his enemy Macrinus became emperor, she committed suicide by starvation.

Her sister **Julia Maesa**, who lived with her in Rome, was not ready to admit defeat. Returning to her native Syria, she wasted no time, orchestrating a plot to overthrow Macrinus and replace him with her grandson Elagabalus, son of her daughter Julia Soaemias. The patrilineal link was not strong, so mother and daughter floated the rumor that the 14-year-old boy was the illegitimate son of Caracalla. This was enough to quiet senatorial reservations, as Macrinus was of the equestrian class, the first Roman emperor not of the senatorial class.

Elagabalus, also called Heliogabalus, is legendary for his life of depravity. In his pursuit of pleasures of the flesh, he was on par with Caligula. Although Julia Maesa served as de facto administrator of the Empire during his reign, his behavior was so offensive that the Senate would not countenance it. Faced with the prospect of losing power, Julia Maesa engineered yet another coup. Elagabalus, aged just 18, was assassinated and replaced by his cousin **Severus Alexander**, son of her other daughter, **Julia Avita Mamaea**. Julia Maesa died in 226 of natural causes.

Because Severus Alexander was 14 when he took the throne in 222, his mother Julia Avita Mamaea served as regent—and de facto Emperor. She reversed Elagabalus's unpopular policies, made savvy political appointments, and presided over an era of relative peace and prosperity. She was named imperial consort when Alexander reached adulthood, and like her grandmother accompanied the Emperor on his military campaigns. Severus Alexander, however, was not as effective a ruler as his mother proved to be. When he attempted to deal with the Germanic tribes by diplomacy and bribery instead of all-out war in 235, he lost favor with the Senate, and his fate was sealed.

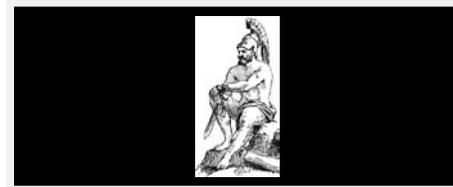
The Praetorian Guard sent to dispatch Alexander found him in his mother's tent, cowering behind her leg. They put them both to the sword. Thus the Severan dynasty came to a violent end, and Rome would be plunged into the Crisis of the Third Century, when the Empire nearly collapsed due to invasion, civil war, plague, and economic upheaval.

This collection celebrates three of the most powerful women in the history of Rome—and, therefore, three of the most powerful women in the history of the world. Portrait and legend are on the obverse; reverses vary, but tend to feature religious or military themes. Septimius Severus's dying words to his son Caracalla—"Pay the troops"—necessitated a quick influx of cash, which was accomplished by further debasing the silver content of the coinage. In 215, Caracalla introduced a new denomination, the *antoninianus*. Purportedly worth two denarii, the new coin only had the silver content of one denarius and a half, which led to a period of inflation, as the old coins were hoarded.

The Coins



Ruler	1. Julia Domna
Year of issue	196-211 AD
Country	Rome
Denomination	Denarius
Material	Silver
Weight	2.5-3.5 g
Diameter	18-19.8 mm
Obverse	Portrait and legend
Reverse	Various personifications or military themes



Ruler	2. Septimius Severus
Year of issue	193-211 AD
Country	Rome
Denomination	Denarius
Material	Silver
Weight	2.2-3.4 g
Diameter	16.5-19.5 mm
Obverse	Portrait and legend
Reverse	Various personifications or military themes



Ruler	3. Julia Maesa
Year of issue	218-222 AD
Country	Rome
Denomination	Denarius
Material	Silver
Weight	2.3-3.3 g
Diameter	18-19.5 mm
Obverse	Portrait and legend
Reverse	Various personifications or military themes



Ruler	4. Caracalla
Year of issue	198-217AD
Country	Rome
Denomination	Denarius
Material	Silver
Weight	1.8-3.0 g
Diameter	17-19.5 mm
Obverse	Portrait and legend
Reverse	Various personifications or military themes



Ruler	5. Julia Avita Mamaea
Year of issue	222-235 AD
Country	Rome
Denomination	Denarius
Material	Silver
Weight	1.9-3.3 g
Diameter	18-19 mm
Obverse	Portrait and legend
Reverse	Various personifications or military themes



Ruler	6. Severus Alexander
Year of issue	222-235AD
Country	Rome
Denomination	Denarius
Material	Silver
Weight	1.8-3 g
Diameter	17.8-19.5 mm
Obverse	Portrait and legend
Reverse	Various personifications or military themes

Box data: Box measures: 7.25" x 5.5"
Order code: 6SEVERANDYNASTYSLBOX
Image shows typical coins, not to scale