

School # 7843
Mac L.
Age 14

Elagabalus

The year was 218 A.D. Elagabalus was walking thorough the halls of his imperial palace. He had just been woken by a vehement knocking at the doors of his bedroom. Since Macrinus' subversion in 218, he had never really gotten a full night sleep. He was only fourteen at the time, and he was already given the title of Emperor. The knocks on his door resonated through his mind, arousing memories of his past war experiences. The poundings sounded like his soldiers spears colliding with those of his enemies at the Battle of Antioch. The thought of what had happened that day on those fields hung on his mind like a droplet of sweat resting on the brow of a workhorse, hard at labor in the fields, reaping Autumn's harvest. He rose from his bed and began to walk to the door. The thunderous knocks continued. He rose from bed like a young suckling rises from the spring soil. On his way to the door, he noticed lions being led from their large, steel cages into the Colosseum. This saddened him greatly, for he knew they were being led to their ultimate demise.

When he opened the door, he saw his assistant, Minimus, waiting. Elagabalus liked Minimus. He was faithful, got his work done, and seemed to be rather intelligent.

"Master, your grandmother requests your presence in the courtyard. She says it's rather urgent," said Minimus.

"Thank you, Minimus. Tell her I will be right there," he responded.

Minimus bowed and left the room. Elagabalus, having closed the door, began to get dressed. He took one of the purple togas traditionally worn by the emperor out of the press in the far side of the room and put it on.

After he dressed himself, he proceeded through the doorway, along the hall, down the flight of stairs, and into the large courtyard that overlooked the entirety of Rome. It was a beautiful day, a day that reminded him of when he was a young boy growing up in his villa in the small town of Emesa.

The breeze was rustling the trees that lined the walkways around the courtyard. It combed through his hair like long, slender fingers, caressing his cheeks as it moved. The silence was broken by the piercing voice of his grandmother, Julia Maesa.

"Come, Elagabalus, this way," she said.

She motioned to a bench on the opposite side of where they stood, under a colonnade. He proceeded to it cautiously.

"I would like to discuss your inheritance," said Julia. "I have been thinking about it quiet often as of late, and I am very concerned. I feel your cousin should be your heir."

"Which heir?"

"Severus Alexander. He may only be thirteen years of age, but he is a very bright boy, and I think he would be an adequate replacement if some tragedy were to befall you."

Elagabalus remained seated, pondering the request she had put in front of him. He sat like this for several minutes, before responding.

“While at first thought this would be totally out of the question, you have convinced me,” said Elagabalus. “I will see to it at once that he is made heir to the throne. Come, we shall have breakfast.”

This pleased Julia immensely. A smile crept across her face, a smile which seemed to be harboring some sinister qualities. They rose from the bench and walked back into the palace, where they were led into the dining room.

In the following year, the attitudes of Elagabalus’ counterparts toward him changed considerably. They began to notice his eccentricities and his disdain toward pure Roman morals. He had been married five times, including once to a Smyrnan athlete named Zoticus. It had also been reported that he had been seen in several brothels throughout Rome, often dressed in women’s clothing. This troubled them. These same people had recently showed a fondness to the newest “Caesar,” the young Severus Alexander, cousin to the Emperor.

Elagabalus had noticed this change also. When he and Alexander would walk into a room, people seemed to flock towards the latter. This did not please him, for even the Praetorian guards seemed to prefer Severus more than himself.

As a result of his desirability, Alexander soon became the target of many assassination attempts, all of which were arranged by the emperor himself. In the following weeks, his mother prohibited him from eating any food the emperor had expressly ordered for him.

The next step in the emperor’s plots against his cousin was to remove him from power. So one day, in the middle of the night, he ordered that Severus Alexander be stripped of his consulship. He also began spreading rumors that he was close to death, and would not live out the month. The people were not sure of the validity of this news, and began to riot in the streets of Rome. The praetorian guards, who had been bribed heavily by Julia Maesa, ordered Alexander, accompanied by the emperor, to be brought to the Praetorian camp to see what condition he was in.

Elagabalus, observing the rioters through his window, was startled by the poundings on the door of his bedroom. They once again brought back memories of Antioch. He wondered if, just as a new emperor was crowned on those battle fields, a new one would be ushered in at this moment. He proceeded to the door, where, not surprisingly, he found Minimus.

“Master, the praetorian guards have requested you accompany Severus to their tents across the forum.”

“Very well. I shall be ready in a moment.”

On this note, Minimus exited the bedroom, leaving the emperor to ponder his fate. He thought about escaping, but the only escape he could think of was suicide. With all hope lost, Elagabalus solemnly dressed and proceed to the praetorian camp.

When he reached the entrance to the palace, he found his cousin, accompanied by two guards. They made their way to the camp, harassed by angry Romans they whole way. On arrival, the large mob that surrounded the praetorian’s headquarters opened, and they were led to the entrance of the tent, where a few guards stood next to his mother, Julia Soaemias.

As soon as the emperor and his companion arrived, a loud cheer was heard from the crowd. However, it was clear that it was meant for the younger of the two. Enraged, Elagabalus began shouting at the guards.

“Arrest this man! Arrest this man at once! I order you! Scoundrel! He shall be executed, and his body shall be dragged through the streets of Rome! And arrest all who have partaken in this treason against the emperor! They shall be executed along with him!”

The guards, hearing this, rushed towards the two men. But Severus remained calm. Rather than completing the emperor’s orders, they grabbed Elagabalus by the neck, along with his mother, and dragged them through the city to the forum. On the way, they passed the temples of Rome, where Elagabalus had removed Jupiter from power and replaced him with “Deus Sol Invictus” (the Unconquered Sun God). Their bodies were stripped of clothing, and they were both beheaded, while they clung to each other. Then their lifeless bodies, after being dragged through the streets of Rome, were thrown into the Tiber river.

Thus ended the reign of Elagabalus.

Bibliography

1. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elagabalus>
2. <http://www.roman-emperors.org/elagabal.htm>
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