



RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Pertinax and Plots in the *Historia Augusta*: A Dismissal in 170 and Two Conspiracies in 193 CE

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## Abstract

This article examines two attempted senatorial coups against Pertinax during his brief reign in 193 CE. By examining literary and epigraphic evidence related to these coups, I argue that Pertinax's political opponents in 193 should be understood to come from a particular political and dynastic network, and that this network represents the final attempt of the connections of Lucius Verus to compete for the imperial power. Further support for this argument is adduced via an analysis of Pertinax's dismissal from a procuratorial post in 170, where there is circumstantial and prosopographical evidence to suggest opposition deriving from connections of this same network earlier in his career. I conclude by discussing how, through the analysis of these coups and similar incidents, we may gain insights into socio-political conflicts at a crisis point for the imperial aristocracy, and how they illustrate the ongoing importance of Antonine dynastic politics, ever-present but sometimes difficult to see.

**Keywords:** Pertinax; Roman political history; conspiracies; *Historia Augusta*; Antonine history

## Introduction

The 87-day reign of Pertinax in 193 CE, even before it ended in his assassination by the praetorian guard, was marked by two failed coup attempts. These involved members of the senatorial aristocracy. Via literary and epigraphic evidence, it is possible to construct a prosopographical framework which permits analysis of these failed coups, and to suggest that they represented a final, desperate gambit on the part of an alternative imperial line. I shall argue that the plots against Pertinax were mounted by a group of senatorial families with connections to Lucius Verus, and regional connections to each other in Africa. Through analysis and discussion of their attempts to seize the imperial power it is possible to reveal more fully the Antonine dynastic politics of the period, which were played out ruthlessly against a backdrop of internal instability.

Analysis of the events of 193 is preceded by a discussion of an incident much earlier in Pertinax's career. Around 170 his relatively smooth advancement, initially through the equestrian *militiae* and thence to a procuratorial career, hit an obstacle: the *Historia Augusta* records that he was dismissed from his post as a procurator in Dacia (*Pert.* 2.4). There is circumstantial and prosopographical evidence which indicates that this dismissal is connected by socio-political and dynastic factors to the events of 193, lending a broader context to the aristocratic rivalries of the period and their social as well as political origins. Following a brief outline of Pertinax's career up to 170 and the historical context of the events of the period (1), I will examine his dismissal around 170 (2) and the two unsuccessful senatorial conspiracies against him in 193 (3). I conclude with a discussion of the motivations for the attempted coups and their implications for our understanding of the political history of the late Antonine period (4).

## 1. Historical Context and Pertinax's Career up to 170

In the two decades after the death of Marcus Aurelius in 180, the imperial aristocracy endured a period of socio-political crisis. The contemporary work of Cassius Dio, recording the events he lived through, is characterised by an increasing anxiety and concern for aristocratic status and identity.<sup>1</sup> Herodian, from the vantage point of somewhere close to the middle of the third century, looks back at the same decades and portrays an imperial society in transition, uncertain and unmoored from previously held values.<sup>2</sup> The *Historia Augusta* – full of verifiable information for the Antonine period – transmits biographies larded with scandals and conspiracies.<sup>3</sup> This period of crisis, glimpsed in our sources, manifested itself in intrigues and plots against successive emperors. Lurking beneath these were Antonine dynastic politics, not always apparent but never absent.

Pertinax's career straddles this period, taking place mostly under Marcus, though by seniority – and survival – he was more prominent under Commodus. Before 170, he had mostly experienced success and promotion. After being trained as a *grammaticus* and finding little joy or profit in the profession, he requested the assistance of his father's patron, Hediud Lollianus, to gain a commission as a centurion. His request was at least partially successful: around 160, he took up the less stable but more prestigious post as the

<sup>1</sup> Hose (2007) 461–7; Gleason (2011) 33–86; Kemezis (2012) 387–414, (2014); Davenport (2012) 796–815.

<sup>2</sup> Sidebottom (1998) 2775–836; Kemezis (2014) 227–72; cf. Kemezis (2010) 285–325 on the wider historiographical context. On the dating see Polley (2003) 203–8.

<sup>3</sup> The *HA*'s main source for the verifiable information in the 'primary lives' of the second century (Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Marcus, Verus, Commodus, Pertinax, Didius Julianus, Severus, and Caracalla) is usually thought to be Marius Maximus, supplemented on occasion by the lost *Kaisergeschichte* (which itself perhaps used Marius Maximus as a source) and the breviarists who in turn used the *Kaisergeschichte*: Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, and the *Epitome de Caesaribus*. For a modern discussion and bibliography, see Rohrbacher (2013) 149–56; Birley (1997) 2679–757.

equestrian prefect of the *cohors VII Gallorum equitata* in Syria.<sup>4</sup> But his military career did not start well. Upon his arrival in Syria, he drew opprobrium for having used the imperial courier service without permission. As punishment he was ordered by the governor to travel on foot from Antioch to his post.<sup>5</sup> Soon after he arrived, however, simmering regional tensions came to a head. The Parthians in 161 removed the pro-Roman king of Armenia and destroyed a Roman legion.<sup>6</sup> Pertinax was commended for his service in the resulting conflict, reversing the inauspicious start to his career. From the Parthian War he was transferred to Britain around 165 to serve as a military tribune in the *VI Victrix*.<sup>7</sup> There are some indications of trouble in Britain at this time, and Pertinax was either retained in his original post or promoted, remaining in Britain in either case.<sup>8</sup> He was then moved to the command of an *ala* in Moesia c. 167, and continued his rise with a post as procurator in charge of the alimentary schemes along the *via Aemilia* around 168. This was followed in 169 by a position as the prefect of the German fleet.<sup>9</sup> He was then appointed the fiscal *procurator* in Dacia Apulensis, an important position with a commensurately high salary.<sup>10</sup> It was from this post that he was dismissed in late 169 or early 170.

Turning to the wider historical context, in early 169 the emperor Marcus Aurelius returned to Rome from Aquileia, having organised the defences of northern Italy against the looming danger of invasion by the Marcomanni and the Quadi. His co-emperor and adoptive brother Lucius Verus had died on the journey back to Rome, shortly after their departure from Aquileia, near the modern hamlet of Altino.<sup>11</sup> This created something of a structural vacuum in the imperial family: Lucius had commanded wars in person on behalf of Marcus, and he was married to Marcus' daughter Lucilla. Lucius' death also meant that many of his connections lost prestige. There was now only one emperor and could be only one imperial household, one set of imperial *amici* and relatives. The *fasti* of the final years of Antoninus Pius' reign and the eight years of Marcus and Lucius' co-rule show numerous relatives of

<sup>4</sup> *Pert.* 1.5–6. On the differing prospects of the commission, cf. Dobson (1972) 193–207; Tully (2004) 139–50. On his first command, cf. Birley (2005<sup>2</sup>) 172–4; Devijver (1988) 207–14; Roxan (1972) 246–7. On his father, Helvius Successus, cf. *PIR*<sup>2</sup> H 77.

<sup>5</sup> *Pert.* 1.6. The governor who censured him was probably Attidius Cornelianus, *PIR*<sup>2</sup> A 1342.

<sup>6</sup> *Marc.* 8.6; *Verus* 6.7–9; Dio Cass. 71.1.1–3. For the war more generally see *CAH*<sup>2</sup> 11, 158–65.

<sup>7</sup> *Pert.* 2.1; Kolbe (1962) 407–20; *AE* 1963, 52 = *AE* 1988, 894. This inscription, which corresponds almost exactly to the information in the *HA*, records Pertinax's career up to c. 170. As it was first published in 1962, it supersedes the entry on Pertinax at *PIR*<sup>2</sup> H 73, which is from 1958. In the decades since, it has enabled more work on the details of this period of Pertinax's career and its context, cf. Alföldy (1974); Lippold (1980) and (1983); Pflaum (1960–82) no. 179.

<sup>8</sup> The promotion was either to the command of one of the two milliary cohorts (cohorts with a nominal strength of one thousand men rather than the usual five hundred, and thus more important), the command of an *ala*, or some other assignment. On the organisation and significance of the milliary cohort in this period, cf. Breeze (1969) 50–5; Frere (1980) 51–60.

<sup>9</sup> *Pert.* 2.2–3; *AE* 1963, 52 = *AE* 1988, 894.

<sup>10</sup> *Pert.* 2.2. He would be a *procurator ducenarius*, thus paid the salary of 200 000 sesterces. The post was usually centenary, cf. Alföldy (1979) 254 n. 17.

<sup>11</sup> *Marc.* 14.6–8; *Ver.* 9.10–11.

Lucius occupying the honoured position of *consul ordinarius*. After his death they are almost entirely absent.<sup>12</sup> It is true that counting consuls is a blunt instrument for constructing a definitive list of political winners and losers. What the *fasti* does demonstrate, however, via a glimpse from the summit of imperial society, is that individuals or groups close to Lucius received fewer official honours after his death. Their social and physical proximity – and, in the cases of members of Lucius’ family, their consanguinity – to the imperial power was reduced. This meant a loss of access to imperial *beneficia*, the cultivation of which was greatly assisted by personal connections to the emperor or his family.

In a politically integrated society such as imperial Rome, this was essentially a loss of socio-political status as well as a material loss. It was felt not only by the aristocratic connections of Lucius, but by their prominent freedmen as well.<sup>13</sup> The beneficiaries of these losses were new men: in 169, after Marcus returned to Rome, Lucilla was quickly re-married to a general of provincial equestrian origins, Tiberius Claudius Pompeianus. Importantly for the present context, Pompeianus was by early 169 a patron of Pertinax, who was at this time not especially prominent.

Late in 169 Marcus departed Rome and returned north. For the forthcoming campaigns he was probably based at Sirmium.<sup>14</sup> It is not clear when the fighting began in 170, but it was to prove a difficult year for Roman arms. The most likely course of events is that a Roman expedition across the Danube met with a heavy defeat. Subsequently Italy was invaded by the Marcomanni and Quadi, who laid siege to Aquileia in the latter part of 170.<sup>15</sup> Marcus and his army were in no position to oppose them, being out of place downriver while the invaders

<sup>12</sup> The difference in the honours accorded to Lucius’ relatives is striking before and after his death. Lucius himself was *consul ordinarius* in 154, 161, and 167 (but at an older age than Marcus was granted the same honours). Lucius’ cousin Ceionius Silvanus was *ordinarius* in 156 (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 610), his uncle Vettulenus Civica Barbarus in 157 (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 602, in error), his brother-in-law and cousin Plautius Quintillus in 159 (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 473), his cousin Plautius Aquilinus in 162 (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 460), and his brother-in-law Servilius Pudens in 166 (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> S 595, with stemma on 233). This was the high watermark of the Ceionii – Lucius’ biological family – and their connections. After the death of Lucius in 169 none of his immediate relatives gained the honour of serving as *consules ordinarii* until his nephew Peducaeus Plautius Quintillus in 177, who was by that year co-opted through marriage into the family of Marcus, cf. Jarvis (2017) 1–20.

<sup>13</sup> Marcus, after Lucius’ death, cashiered his brother’s freedmen. He apparently regarded them with distaste, refusing to attend the wedding of his cousin’s widow to Agaclytus, who had been a freedman of Lucius, and later passing a law forbidding the marriage of freedmen to women of the senatorial order (*Marc.* 15.2; *Verus* 9.3–6, 10.5; *Dig.* 23.2.16). On imperial *beneficia* generally see Saller (1982) 42–50, 63–6.

<sup>14</sup> Birley (1987<sup>2</sup>) 163.

<sup>15</sup> The exact date of the siege of Aquileia – and indeed the course of the war from 169–75 – cannot be fixed precisely. Birley notes that since Verus died in 169, and Pompeianus married Lucilla in the latter part of this year, it is less likely that in 169 Pompeianus and Pertinax were engaged in expelling the invaders from Dacia and Italy. For a further summary of the problems of the chronology and possible solutions, see Kovács (2009) 181–99, who prefers late 169 or early 170 for the date of the invasion of Italy. Cf. also *Amm. Marc.* 29.6.1; Birley (2012) 15–18 (an argument for dating the invasion to late 169 or 170 based on the textual tradition of Dio); Birley (1987<sup>2</sup>) 163–5, 249–55; Fitz (1966) 336–67.

probably passed through Pannonia and into Italy. In the same period the Costoboci, descending from the eastern marches of the Carpathians, pillaged their way to Achaëa through Moesia Inferior, Macedonia, and Thrace. They reached as far as Eleusis.<sup>16</sup>

The situation in Dacia, where Pertinax would be based, was also volatile through the winter of 169 and spring of 170. Claudius Fronto was at this time the consular governor of Moesia Superior and Dacia Apulensis. This Pergamene veteran of the Parthian War had been rewarded for his service with a suffect consulship in 165 and was the governor of Moesia Superior in 168 when the governor of the united Dacian province, Sex. Calpurnius Agricola, vacated his post suddenly.<sup>17</sup> He perhaps perished from the plague or fell in battle; either fate underlines the danger of the opening years of the conflict. Claudius Fronto subsequently first assumed responsibility for Dacia Apulensis, and then later for the whole province. One of the other procurators of Dacia, M. Macrinus Avitus Catonius Vindex, initially took over the military responsibilities for Dacia Malvensis.<sup>18</sup> But the precarious situation in the region was once more emphasised by Claudius Fronto's own death in battle, probably in late 170. A commemorative inscription erected in Rome records a valiant death: *ad postremum pro re publica fortiter pugnans ceciderit* ('He fell, fighting bravely to the last for the Republic').<sup>19</sup> Other prominent men were also lost in the first years of the Marcomannic War: in 167–8 one of the praetorian prefects, Furius Victorinus, fell to enemy action or the plague, and before the end of 172 another praetorian prefect, Macrinus Vindex (the father of the procurator of Dacia Malvensis), fell in battle.<sup>20</sup>

Pertinax's dismissal occurred in the midst of this period. As we have seen, he had been promoted to an important post as *procurator* for Dacia Apulensis.

<sup>16</sup> Two inscriptions from Tropaeum Traiani (Adamklissi) record victims of this incursion: *CIL* 3.14214.12 = *ILS* 8501 (Daizus Comozous, *interfectus a Castabocis*), and *AE* 1964 252 (a *duumvir*, Lucius Fufidius Lucianus, *deceptus a Castabocis*). The Costoboci were defeated the following year by L. Julius Vehilius Gratus Julianus, who was sent as *praepositus* to Achaëa, cf. *CIL* 6.41271 = *CIL* 6.31856 = *ILS* 1327; Smith (1979) 267–8; Pflaum (1960–82) no. 180. On the issues of dating the incursion, cf. Scheidel (1990) 493–8.

<sup>17</sup> Claudius Fronto: Alföldy (1977) 179; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 874. He is not related to Marcus' tutor and confidant, Cornelius Fronto, who is referred to in this article by his *cognomen* alone. Calpurnius Agricola: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 249, esp. *ILS* 2311; Birley (2005<sup>2</sup>) 155–7.

<sup>18</sup> Macrinus' appointment was presumably made on the same basis as that of Pertinax; that is, with the expectation of military action on the region. *PIR*<sup>2</sup> M 22; Pflaum (1960–82) no. 188. He was obviously an exceptional soldier and pursued a 'bliksemcarrière die zeker stoelde op de loyale inzet en de bekwaamheid van Macrinus zelf' ('A lightning-fast career that was surely based on the loyal devotion and ability of Macrinus himself', Devijver (1974) 129). He began his military career as an equestrian officer at the age of eighteen (c. 158), and by the age of 29 he had won military decorations for expelling the Langobardi and Obii from Pannonia in c. 167. He was a procurator by the age of 30, and adlected to the praetorian rank by 33. His command at 18 indeed must have required more than talent; as Devijver notes his father was praetorian prefect after the death of Furius Victorinus in 168, but clearly both father and son had gained the notice of Marcus a decade before.

<sup>19</sup> *CIL* 6.41142.

<sup>20</sup> Furius Victorinus: *Marc.* 14.5; *ILS* 9002; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> F 584. Macrinus Vindex the elder: Dio Cass. 71.3.5; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> M 25.

Although the position was nominally a fiscal one, his initial appointment was probably made in the knowledge that military action was likely in that region.<sup>21</sup> This was not the first time he had been transferred to an area in which serious trouble was expected. When he became prefect of the German fleet in c. 169, he had likely been responsible for the organisation and effectiveness of the provincial fleet as it transitioned from more civil and logistical functions and returned to a primary role of defence. Before that, his service in the Parthian War in c. 160–5, for which he had been commended and promoted, was probably strikingly similar: the re-organisation of the defences of Syria under the command of Julius Verus, following an earlier military catastrophe.<sup>22</sup> His appointment in Dacia, however, was cut short when he was removed from his post.

## 2. The *Historia Augusta* and Pertinax's Dismissal in 170

The *HA* hints at a political reason for Pertinax's dismissal. It records that he was removed by Marcus, who had grown to distrust him because of the crafts employed against him by a certain group (*Pert.* 2.4): *inde ad ducenum sestertiorum stipendium translatus in Daciam suspectusque a Marco quorundam artibus remotus est* ('From there [sc. Germany] he was transferred to Dacia at a salary of two hundred thousand sesterces, but due to the manoeuvres of certain persons he was mistrusted by Marcus and dismissed').<sup>23</sup> He was however shortly restored to favour by the efforts of Pompeianus, who required his military skills (*Pert.* 2.4–5). He proved himself a skilful commander and was enrolled in the senate. Later, after further military successes, the group (*factio*, 2.6) who had plotted

<sup>21</sup> Trouble was probably foreseeable some years in advance, especially when considering the transfer of three legions to the Parthian War. *Marc.* 8.7–9, 12.13–13.2, 14.1, 22.1. On Pertinax's appointment, cf. *AE* 1963, 52 = *AE* 1988, 894; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> H 73; Pflaum (1960–82) no. 179; Birley (1987<sup>2</sup>) 161. The post was based in Sarmizegetusa, a town of increasing importance under the Antonines, cf. Abdy (2007) 383–4.

<sup>22</sup> *Pert.* 1.6–2.1; Cn. Julius Verus: *CIL* 3.2732 (*ad.* p. 1035) = *CIL* 3.8714 = *ILS* 1057 = *ILS* 8974, cf. Alföldy (1977) 191–2, n. 215; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> J 618. Pertinax's apparent skill in the organisation and re-organisation of provinces has an interesting institutional counterpart. There is evidence for increasing use of *beneficarii* at *stationes* under Antoninus and Marcus, and that the *beneficarii* themselves were attached to the governor's office rather than the individual, allowing for greater efficiency in a time of urgent and sometimes forced gubernatorial appointments. Dise (1997a) 273–83; Dise (1997b) 284–99.

<sup>23</sup> Understanding *artes* here as meaning something like 'manoeuvres' or 'crafts' in a political sense. The Latin text of Hohl's 1965 Teubner edition of the *Historia Augusta* is used throughout this article, with a single exception: the Codex Palatinus in *Pert.* 2.4 reads *a partibus*. Eysenhardt and Jordan in 1864 suggested *artibus*, which was followed by Peter in the Teubner of 1865. Hohl in 1927 proposed *ap-p>ar<a>artibus*, which is retained in the later editions. This has not met with much favour in modern times. Mayer-Olivé (2008) 172 concedes that *artibus* is the simplest solution though he suggests *ab artibus* as an alternative more faithful to the lesson ('más fiel a la lección') of the Codex Palatinus. For the current argument, the distinction is one of nuance rather than of meaning; we may leave the devil undisturbed in the details. The reading of *artes* will do better than the more overtly political – and to the prosopographer, perhaps more tempting – *partes* ('parties') of the manuscript. Note, however, that in *Pert.* 2.6 the group of persons who had brought about Pertinax's dismissal are referred to explicitly as a group or faction: *prodita est factio, quae illi concinnata fuerat* ('the faction, which had been concocted against him, was revealed').

against him was revealed, and he was adlected by Marcus to the rank of praetor. This was apparently both as compensation for his earlier unjust dismissal, and to recognise his continuing effectiveness as a commander (*Pert.* 2.5–6).

Before proceeding further, it is worth adding a caveat concerning the historicity of anecdotes in the *HA*. In the present case at least, some points may be offered in its defence. In every detail it is possible to check via recourse to other forms of evidence, the *HA* is almost always accurate concerning the particulars of Pertinax's career.<sup>24</sup> The *Vita* as a whole also falls into the period for which the author had access to a well-informed source or sources. On the question of Pertinax's dismissal, it is not possible from literary evidence alone to know who these enemies of Pertinax may have been, or what manoeuvres they employed against him to cause Marcus to distrust and dismiss him. It has been suggested that Pertinax was now prominent enough to become embroiled in aristocratic rivalries or was drawn in by the rivalries of his patron, Ti. Claudius Pompeianus, newly created the son-in-law of Marcus.<sup>25</sup> This is an eminently reasonable proposition; Pompeianus, who subsequently intervened on Pertinax's behalf, was almost certainly acquainted with him before this period.<sup>26</sup> As yet, no attempt has been made to identify specifically these rivals of Pompeianus and Pertinax, but there is prosopographical evidence which permits some further investigation.

Such evidence must be set in a broader context. Any political rivals of Pompeianus and Pertinax were probably motivated by socio-political factors as well as decreased influence at the imperial court. The death of Lucius and the subsequent re-marriage of Lucilla to Pompeianus represented a huge jump in prestige for the equestrian-born Pompeianus, and perhaps occasioned resentment among the aristocratic circles around Marcus. Dio, who usually passes over or plays down Pertinax's origins,<sup>27</sup> records that in 175 when Pertinax gained the suffect consulship his promotion occasioned sneering

<sup>24</sup> As noted above, *HA*'s account of Pertinax's early career is largely confirmed by *AE* 1963, 52 = *AE* 1988, 894. There are in addition numerous other smaller details within the *Vita* that point to excellent sources, such as the anecdote that during his reign as emperor he is said to have dined with a certain Valerianus, a friend from his teaching days (*Pert.* 12.7–8). This Valerianus, resembling at first glance another cipher in the *HA*, is in fact identifiable as a connection of Fronto, and a Roman African, cf. *ad Am.* 1.20.1; Champlin (1980) 36.

<sup>25</sup> Potter (2014<sup>2</sup>) 74–6, esp. n. 157; Birley (1988<sup>2</sup>) 66. Neither Potter nor Birley attempt to identify the persons who schemed for Pertinax's dismissal, though Potter suggests that such an incident is unlikely to be unique. Cf. also Lippold (1983) 181–2, who remains ambiguous and distrusts the authenticity of the anecdote.

<sup>26</sup> In 167 Pompeianus was the governor of Pannonia Inferior. On the timing and circumstances of his consulship, in 162, cf. Eck and Pangerl (2010) 223–6. Alföldy (1977) 184–5 places Pompeianus rather as suffect consul in the second half of 167, as does Pflaum (1961) 32. Pertinax around 167 was the dedicator of an inscription in Sirmium (thus he was also in Pannonia Inferior at this time) as *praefectus*. He was then *praefectus alae* (*AE* 1963, 52 = *AE* 1988, 894). Dio notes the connection between the two men when Pertinax was a tribune in the cavalry, and in fact attributes Pertinax's post to Pompeianus' influence (74.3.1). The *HA* places Pertinax in Moesia as *praefectus alae* (*Pert.* 2.2) so is either incorrect on the geography or Pertinax placed the inscription when he was not in his assigned province for military or logistical reasons, cf. Fitz (1966) 343–4.

<sup>27</sup> Kemezis (2012), 397–402.

quotations from a tragedy by Euripides.<sup>28</sup> The *HA* records a similar sentiment concerning Pompeianus, who was considered by Lucilla and her mother Faustina to be an unsuitable husband on the grounds of age and status.<sup>29</sup> We thus glimpse through the *HA* and Dio a trace of the aristocratic *hauteur* that existed in the court of Marcus, perhaps recorded in the case of the *HA* via the writing of a procurator's son, Marius Maximus,<sup>30</sup> who was likely an important source for the *Vita* of Pertinax.<sup>31</sup> But in this period, military acumen was an asset that accelerated the promotion of certain individuals. Marcus was bound by necessity to make the best use of the commanders available, and he had shown himself willing to promote talented individuals and bring them into his court, if not always into his inner circle or family.<sup>32</sup> The dismissal of Pertinax shows that discontent perhaps existed among some elements of the court at this policy, and that even during a military emergency aristocratic sensibilities remained a political factor.

At this point more specific speculation may be advanced regarding the incident itself: Pertinax was dismissed, according to the *HA*, because of manoeuvres against him by certain persons, who are also subsequently called a faction or group (*factio*, 2.6). If such persons succeeded in making Marcus suspicious of Pertinax's character or abilities, it follows that they had some manner of influencing the emperor. With the evidence available the attempt to identify these persons is yet worthwhile, and we find the same confluence of families and connections which are central to the events of 193, which are analysed below in sections 3 and 4.

At Marcus' side as *comites Augusti* in 169–70 were several prominent aristocrats. These are Dasumius Tullius Tuscus, Pompeius Sosius Priscus, Pontius

<sup>28</sup> Dio Cass. 72.22.1 (Text and translation from the Loeb edition of Cary): Τοῦ δὲ Περτινάκου ἐπὶ ταῖς ἀνδραγαθίας ὑπατεῖαν λαβόντος, ὅμως ἦσαν οἱ νεμεσῶντες ἐπὶ τῷ εἶναι αὐτὸν τὸ γένος ἐξ ἀφανῶν τὸ τῆς τραγωδίας ἐπέλεγον, “τοιαῦθ’ ὁ τλήμων πόλεμος ἐξεργάζεται,” οὐκ εἰδότες ὅτι καὶ μοναρχήσῃ. (‘When Pertinax as a reward for his brave exploits obtained the consulship, there were nevertheless some who showed displeasure in view of the fact that he was of obscure family, and they quoted this line from tragedy: “Such things accursed war brings in its train.” Little did they realize that he should be emperor as well.’) The quotation in the passage is from Euripides *Suppliants* l. 119, spoken by Theseus when commiserating with Adrastus. In Petrus Patricius the same line is quoted but spoken by Marcus concerning his recurring illnesses: Fragment 130, Peter *Excerpta de Sententiis* (ES) 118, cf. Banchich (2015) 89.

<sup>29</sup> *Marc.* 20.6–7. Pompeianus married Lucilla in 169 and was probably marked out then to be a principal general in the Marcomannic Wars, cf. Pötter (2014<sup>2</sup>) 75–6; Birley (1988<sup>2</sup>) 66; Alföldy (1974) 200–1.

<sup>30</sup> The author of the *HA* mentions that some sources suggested Marcus was not so guileless as he seemed (*fuisset nec tam simplex quam videretur*), and that others were critical of the arrogance (*adrogantia*) of Marcus' court, cf. *Marc.* 29.6–7. Earlier in the life the author also mentions that the account of Marius Maximus recorded Marcus' harshness in private towards the citizens of Antioch – contrasted with his more public gestures of reconciliation – following their participation in the rebellion of Avidius Cassius (*Marc.* 25.10).

<sup>31</sup> *Pert.* 2.6–9; 15.8.

<sup>32</sup> Pompeianus was certainly part of Marcus' group of closest advisors. However, Marcus' other sons-in-law do not seem to have reached the same degree of closeness with Marcus, nor did he employ them as generals. They were all (with the possible exception of Claudius Severus) at least a generation younger.



Laelianus Larcius Sabinus, and probably Julius Verus.<sup>33</sup> Of these individuals, it is unlikely that Julius Verus was part of the group who caused Marcus to distrust Pertinax's conduct or character. Under his command, Pertinax had been commended for his service in the Parthian War. There is also little circumstantial evidence for opposition on the part of the aristocratic general Dasumius, though his imperial connections may have rendered him hostile to new men on a socio-political level. His connections are, if nothing else, a clear contrast to those of Pompeianus or Pertinax.<sup>34</sup> He may serve here briefly as a broader example, too: if it is sometimes difficult to quantify and define the extent of the influence of the aristocracy on or within the imperial court, it is fair to suggest that aristocratic generals possessed not only the traditional currency of rank and ancestry, but also the capabilities and connections required to obtain influential positions, formal and informal. For the remaining two *comites* of Marcus in 169–70, Pompeius Sossius and Pontius Laelianus, it is possible to suggest some strands of hostility towards Pompeianus and Pertinax.

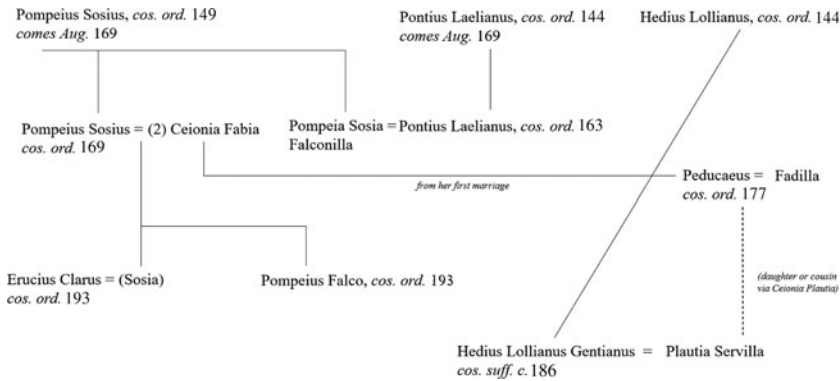
### Q. Pompeius Sossius Priscus

The connections of Pompeius Sossius and Pontius Laelianus to each other,<sup>35</sup> and Pompeius Sossius' connections to Lucius, suggest that they suffered a loss of prestige and influence due to Lucius' death in early 169. Each is worth examining in turn. Pompeius Sossius was *consul ordinarius* in 149 and the *comes* of Marcus in 169–70. His father, Pompeius Falco, was suffect consul in 108 and was Hadrian's first governor of Britain in 118, an important

<sup>33</sup> M. Pontius Laelianus Larcius Sabinus: *CIL* 6.41146 = *CIL* 6.1497 = *CIL* 6.1549 = *ILS* 1094 = *ILS* 1100, esp. ll. 10–13: *comiti Imp(eratoris) Anto[/n]ini Aug(usti) et divi Veri bello Germanic(o) / item comiti Imp(eratoris) Antonini Aug(usti) Germanici Sar/matici*; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 806. Q. Pompeius Sossius Priscus: *CIL* 6.41129 = *CIL* 6.31753. The restoration given in the *PIR* of this inscription (*[comes imp(eratoris) Mar]ci Antonini [Aug(usti) et divi Veri...d]onis*) cannot stand if, as Vidman suggests in the *PIR* entry, the inscription were to be dated to 167–8 (when Lucius was still alive). Alföldy's correction in *CIL* 6.41129, with a suggested date of between 169/75 and 180, is to be preferred (*[...comiti Imp(eratoris) Caesaris Mar]ci Antonini / [Augusti bello Germanico et Sarmatico d]onis...*); *PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 656. Cn. Julius Verus: *CIL* 3.2732 (Add. p. 1035) = *CIL* 3.8714 = *ILS* 1057 = *ILS* 8974, cf. Alföldy (1977) 191–2, n. 215; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> J 618. Another imperial connection perhaps at the emperor's side in 169–70 was Pomponius Proculus Vitrasius Pollio, the husband of Marcus' cousin Annia Fundania Faustina. He had been a *comes* of the emperors in 168 and may have returned to the war with Marcus in 169. His career is preserved on *CIL* 6.41145 = *CIL* 6.1540 = *CIL* 6.31675 = *ILS* 1112. It is worth noting his possible presence to underline the high status of many of Marcus' advisors and companions in these years.

<sup>34</sup> *CIL* 11.3365 = *ILS* 1081; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> D 16. Dasumius Tullius Tuscus was a senatorial general of aristocratic origins. His father, P. Dasumius Rusticus (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> D 15), was related to Hadrian and shared the consulship with him in 119. There is also a probable connection to Marcus' mother, through Dasumius' relative the elder Domitia Lucilla, Marcus' maternal grandmother (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> D 182; Raepsaet-Charlier (1987), no. 328; Chausson (2007) 136–40). The will of his forebear Domitius Tullus also mentions a Pontius Laelianus (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 804), no doubt a connection of one of his fellow *comites*. Dasumius' career was accelerated but still involved military commands: after a term as quaestor and as *praefectus aerarii Saturni*, he gained the suffect consulship in 152, and thereafter was the legate of Germania Superior and then Pannonia Superior.

<sup>35</sup> See the stemma at fig. 1, below.



**Fig. 1:** Pompeius Sossius, Pontius Laelianus, and their connections

post.<sup>36</sup> His son was the famously polyonymous *consul ordinarius* of 169.<sup>37</sup> Pompeius Sossius’ ancestry shows a similar pattern to that of Dasumius: the rise of a family through an ancestor favoured by an emperor. Pompeius Sossius’ career, however, is dissimilar to Dasumius’, and it exemplifies the problem in estimating the influence of aristocrats. He does not seem to have served in a military capacity, but he is an attested *comes* of Marcus, and his son was one of the *consules ordinarii* for 169. His daughter, Pompeia Sosa Falconilla, was married to the son of his fellow *comes*, to whom we will turn below.<sup>38</sup> Pompeius Sossius was clearly a prominent individual in the workings of the imperial court, and Champlin has suggested convincingly that his son was married to Ceionia Fabia, a sister of Lucius.<sup>39</sup> By this argument he would be her second husband, after Plautius Quintillus.<sup>40</sup>

There are some indications that Ceionia Fabia herself was politically active. She certainly gained an imperial marriage for her son Peducaeus Quintillus, probably before 176,<sup>41</sup> and is alleged to have suggested a marriage between herself and Marcus after the death of the Faustina; a marriage that would, in fact, fulfil the original design of Hadrian of some forty years before (*Marc.* 29.10). The *HA* records also that she had earlier incurred the enmity of Lucilla due to her influence over her brother Lucius (*Verus* 10.3–4). Although it is difficult to date the marriage of Ceionia Fabia and Pompeius Sossius the younger precisely, there are two reasons to suppose that it almost certainly occurred before 169, in which year Pompeius Sossius would, on this argument,

<sup>36</sup> *PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 602. Hadrian’s accession acquired a grim aspect from the executions of four consulars. In this context it was essential for Hadrian that a close associate was sent to Britain.

<sup>37</sup> *PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 651. *CIL* 14.3609 = *ILS* 1104 records his 38 names.

<sup>38</sup> *PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 681.

<sup>39</sup> Champlin (1979: 303–4) presents strong evidence for the connection on both prosopographical and textual grounds; but cf. Raepsaet–Charlier (1987) no. 204. Discussed more fully below in the context of the conspiracies of 193.

<sup>40</sup> *PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 473.

<sup>41</sup> Jarvis (2017) 1–20.

feel keenly the loss of his close connection to Lucius. First, the last record of Ceionia's first husband, Plautius Quintillus, is in his consulship, which was in 159. Secondly, and more importantly, the son of Pompeius Sossius the younger's marriage to Ceionia Fabia, Q. Pompeius Sossius Falco, was *consul ordinarius* in 193. Assuming for the third generation of a consular family a consulship *suo anno*, this allows a date of birth c. 161, which suggests a marriage by c. 160. In 169, then, the death of Lucius represented for this family a sharp loss of prestige: in January, Pompeius Sossius the younger had opened the year as *consul prior* and as the brother-in-law of an emperor.<sup>42</sup> There is a suggestion too that his wife Ceionia Fabia held great influence with her brother Lucius. His father was a *comes* of the emperors. Within a month, however, Lucius was dead, and some months after Marcus returned to Rome Lucilla was married to Pompeianus.

The Pompeii Sosii were thus no longer connected directly to the imperial family, and resentment directed at Pompeianus through the year 169 is a possible consequence. Pompeius Sossius the elder, the consul of 149, did remain a *comes* of Marcus when he returned to the north of Italy in the autumn of 169, indicating that the family retained for the moment some influence and prestige. This was of the traditional and patrician kind, more elusive in strictly evidentiary terms: no great military commands, but consulships *suo anno* for father and son (and eventually grandson), and a high place in the imperial war-time court. But this manner of informal position depended to a large extent on the cultural and political weight of traditional rank and proximity to the emperor, and these factors were affected by the death of Lucius and the onset of the Marcomannic wars. The primacy of traditional rank – and of Lucius' relatives – faded by necessity in the years of constant war and attrition. Proximity to the emperor, a great currency of influence, depended more and more on the exigencies of circumstance rather than the socio-political rituals of the senate and aristocracy in Rome.

#### M. Pontius Laelianus Larcus Sabinus

The position of Pompeius Sossius' close connection, Pontius Laelianus Larcus Sabinus, was at first glance similar to that of the aristocratic general Dasumius. Pontius Laelianus had previously governed both the Pannonian provinces on either side of a consulship in 144, then Syria, and had also been an active *comes* of Lucius in the Parthian War. For the present purpose, his direct ties to the Pompeii Sosii are the focus. His son, *cos. ord.* 163, governed Moesia Superior under Marcus and Lucius, and was married to Pompeia Sossia Falconilla, the daughter of his fellow *comes* in 169–70. Pontius Laelianus' son, in other words, was the brother-in-law of the consul of 169, and the son and son-in-law of *comites* of the emperor. Not much is known of his grandson (thus the son of the consul of 163, grandson of both of the *comites* of 169–70), Sossius Laelianus Pontius Falco. He was admitted to the *salii Palatini* in 170 and replaced in 171 by Hediuf Rufus Lollianus Gentianus (the son of

<sup>42</sup> Numerous inscriptions attest to his status as *consul prior*, see e.g., ILS 5490; ILS 405.

Pertinax's former patron, who will enter the discussion more fully below).<sup>43</sup> It is not clear whether the younger Sosius Laelianus was replaced due to death or advancement.

The ties between the Pontii Laeliani and the Pompeii Sosii thus predate 163 (supposing the consul of 163, M. Pontius Laelianus, to be married by the time of his consulship, as was usual). Considering the above connections, an explanation of Pertinax's dismissal in 169–70, then, might run thus: the Pontii Laeliani and the Pompeii Sosii, connected by marriage, after the death of Lucius (who was the brother-in-law of Pompeius Sossius the younger) opposed the elevation in late 169 of a parvenu such as Pompeianus into the highest circle of the imperial family and Marcus' court. Both families felt Pompeianus' rise sharply: the Pompeii Sosii in particular would lose influence and prestige by the death of Lucius, being no longer directly connected to the imperial family. Their close connections the Pontii Laeliani may have felt similarly confronted by Pompeianus' elevation. Subsequently they, and perhaps others as well, used their proximity to Marcus – socio-political, cultural, and physical – to move against Pertinax, by this year a known protégé of Pompeianus. As a result of this aristocratic opposition, at some point around late 169 or early 170, Marcus dismissed Pertinax from his procuratorial post. However, due to the growing military emergency in the north, Pompeianus was able to use his influence with Marcus to recall Pertinax, already a decorated officer and administrator, to assist him in the salvation of the overrun northern part of Italy.

Though admittedly speculative, such a reconstruction makes sense of the anecdote in the *HA* in a socio-political and historical context. The more direct and dramatic evidence of 193 explored below may be drawn on in support, though it stands readily enough on its own as a dynastic drama, unfolding amidst the confusion following Commodus' assassination. At any rate, the same families who had good reason to oppose Pompeianus and Pertinax in 169–70 formed a core of open senatorial opposition to the new emperor during his brief reign in 193.

### 3. Two Senatorial Conspiracies against Pertinax in 193

The 23 years between Pertinax's dismissal in Dacia and his short reign in 193 were difficult ones for the imperial aristocracy. The rebellion of Avidius Cassius, the recurring plague, the seemingly endless Marcomannic wars, and the purges and executions which marked the reign of Commodus: all of these had combined to shatter their sense of security. Pertinax himself had survived and prospered, however, even as old acquaintances and erstwhile allies alike were pulled down by the swirling political currents.<sup>44</sup> In 192 he served his second consulship as *ordinarius* alongside Commodus, who was rapidly reaching the apogee of his hostility to the senatorial aristocracy. Tensions

<sup>43</sup> M. Sosius Laelianus Pontius Falco: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 798. Q. Hadius Rufus Lollianus Gentianus: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> H 42.

<sup>44</sup> Pertinax's career under Commodus encompassed a period of exile from c. 182–5. He was recalled after Perennis' death and continued to rise in prominence. *Pert.* 3.1–4.4.

apparently reached a head when the incoming consuls for 193, Erucius Clarus and Pompeius Falco (the grandson of Pompeius Sossius the elder, the son of the consul of 169, and the nephew of Lucius Verus), discovered that the emperor planned to have them killed. Events moved swiftly and, in an atmosphere of danger and confusion on the final day of 192 and the first day of 193,<sup>45</sup> Commodus was assassinated and Pertinax claimed the imperial power with the consent of the senate.<sup>46</sup>

### *The Incident of Maternus*

Opposition to Pertinax, who was apparently despised by the praetorian guard, manifested itself almost immediately. The guard on the third of January attempted to lead Triarius Maternus, a senator of some distinction, to their camp. The goal was apparently to invest him with the imperial power. This rather confusing attempt at a coup, recorded only in the *HA*, fizzled out when the man in question fled, apparently quite naked, to Pertinax (*Pert.* 6.4–5). He then departed from the city, or was exiled.<sup>47</sup> This was the first of two apparent unsuccessful coups against Pertinax, and both seem connected to the opposition of a section of the senatorial aristocracy. Prosopographical work restores some meaning to the participation of Maternus in this somewhat farcical incident. Champlin has reconstructed the stemma of the family: Maternus was the uncle of Erucius Clarus, the *consul ordinarius* of 193, through his sister, Pomponia Triaria, who had married Erucius Clarus' homonymous father, the *consul ordinarius* of 170.<sup>48</sup> Pomponia's son – that is, the Erucius Clarus who was the *consul ordinarius* of 193, and thus Maternus' nephew – was married to the sister of his colleague in the consulship, Pompeius Falco. Sosia and Falco were then the granddaughter and grandson of the *comes* of Marcus in 169. Sosia's identity and family are adduced by Champlin on the basis of an inscription from Diana Veteranorum, dedicated to the son of the Erucius Clarus, who was consul in 193.<sup>49</sup> This marriage thus places the Erucii among the connections of Lucius.<sup>50</sup> For his part, Erucius Clarus' brother-in-law

<sup>45</sup> *Comm.* 17.1–2; Dio Cass. 73.22.1–6; Hdn. 1.16–17.12.

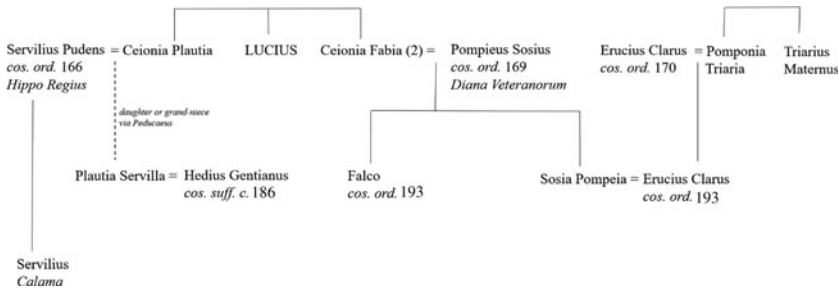
<sup>46</sup> The *HA* clearly implicates him in the assassination of Commodus (*Pert.* 4.3–4), whereas Dio and Herodian disingenuously imply his innocence, cf. Dio Cass. 74.1.2–3; Hdn. 2.1.3–4. For the prosopographical and circumstantial evidence of Pertinax's involvement, cf. Birley (1969) 252–74.

<sup>47</sup> Pasek (2013) 222.

<sup>48</sup> Champlin (1979) 297–300.

<sup>49</sup> Champlin (1979) 304, cf. *AE* 1954, 139. His full nomenclature was C. Iulius Rufinus Laberius Fabianus Pomponius Triarius Erucius Clarus Sossius Priscus. Champlin notes the two points in support of the identification of his mother as Falco's sister, thus sister and wife respectively to the two *consules ordinarii* of 193. Firstly, that the African connection of this Erucius is explained by the connections of the Pompeii Sossii to Diana Veteranorum; and secondly, that a lady of the period married to a consul was called Laberia Pompeiana. If the mother of the dedicatee were the sister of Falco, the consul of 193, and married to his colleague Erucius, the full nomenclature and African connection of Erucius' son can thus be explained, excepting only 'Fabianus'. This might then come from his maternal grandmother, which coincides with Champlin's argument that Falco himself was the son of Ceonia Fabia, outlined below.

<sup>50</sup> Lucius' connections to the senators opposing Pertinax in 193 are set out in [fig. 2](#), below.



**Fig. 2:** Lucius' connections

Falco was the centre of the next attempted coup against Pertinax, to which we now turn.

### Laetus and Falco's Attempted Coup

When Pertinax was initially saluted as emperor by the senate and thanked Laetus, Falco accused him of being tainted by the crimes of Laetus and Marcia (*Pert.* 5.2): *Qualis imperator es futurus, hinc intellegimus, Laetum et Marciam, ministros scelerum Commodi, post te videmus* ('From this we understand what sort of emperor you will be, we see behind you Laetus and Marcia, the agents of Commodus' crimes'). It bears repeating that Falco was the nephew of a deified emperor, and his reported remark bears directly upon the manner of Pertinax's accession. Pertinax's reply was relatively mild for such an accusation, suggesting that Falco's youth meant that he did not understand what had been required to survive under Commodus.<sup>51</sup> Subsequently Falco made another complaint about Pertinax in the senate, and this is followed by the strange account of the attempted coup (*Pert.* 10.1–10). Falco's involvement is curious. He was, according to the *HA*, *volens imperare*, and seemed to be motivated by nothing other than his own ambition (*Pert.* 10.1). Dio reports that he was in fact selected by Laetus and the praetorians as a replacement for Pertinax because of his family and wealth (Dio Cass. 74.8.2). If Laetus were involved it suggests he had turned against Pertinax, underlining the fast-shifting political currents in 193. The plan was apparently to bring Falco to the camp while Pertinax was away at Ostia, inspecting the grain supply. The *HA* likewise reports that Pertinax took a great interest in the grain supply (*Pert.* 7.6). This is not surprising given the events of previous years.<sup>52</sup> Commodus' proposed trip to Africa, reported as false for the purposes of extracting money under the guise of travel expenses, has been linked by Hekster to a concern for the grain supply from Africa.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Pert.* 5.3: *iuvenis es, consul, nec parendi scis necessitates. Paruerunt inviti Commodo, sed ubi habuerunt facultatem, quid semper voluerint ostenderunt* ('You are young, consul, and do not know the necessity of obeying. They obeyed Commodus against their will, but when they had the chance, they showed what they always desired').

<sup>52</sup> E.g., the revolt of Papirius Dionysius, cf. Whittaker (1964).

<sup>53</sup> Hekster (2002) 84–5, cf. *Comm.* 9.1.

There is no reason, then, to doubt a basic outline of the conspiracy: while Pertinax was away at Ostia, Falco had some part in an attempted coup. In a corrupt passage in the *HA*, one of Falco's slaves attempts to claim the palace as if he were the son of Fabia and an unknown man, but his absurd claim is unsurprisingly disregarded. He is recognised as a slave belonging to Falco, punished, and returned (*Pert.* 10.2–3). At this point the guilt of Falco by association seems to be assumed by the senate – but Pertinax shows him mercy.<sup>54</sup> The *HA* also notes that there existed rumours that Falco's knowledge of the plot was questionable, and there were furthermore stories that his slaves had made up the charges (*Pert.* 10.7).

However, as Champlin noted, the account in the *HA* makes little sense unless the slave were claiming the palace on behalf of his master Falco, by announcing that his master was the rightful heir.<sup>55</sup> This seems to be the only explanation for a story that is unbelievable not merely by its fanciful nature, but by its own lack of internal logic. This lack of logic derives from the textual problems of the passage, which are severe. The suggestion that the palace was claimed on behalf of Falco, rather than by a slave belonging to him, might permit Champlin's reading that Falco was *Fabiae Sosique filius, ex Ceioni Commodi familia* ('a son of Fabia and Sosius, from the family of Ceionius Commodus'), and is one basis for his suggestion that Falco was the son of Ceionia Fabia by her second husband.<sup>56</sup> On this argument, this second husband was the consul of 169, Pompeius Sosius the younger, whose full nomenclature ran to over 30 names. Strong prosopographical evidence is adduced in support.<sup>57</sup>

Dio's account of the episode, via Xiphilinus, is more straightforward. Pertinax returns in haste from Ostia, having been warned of the plot. Speaking to the senate, he exaggerates the donative he gave to the soldiers and blames the freedmen for the penury of the state coffers (74.8). It was a political choice to conciliate the senate, but it further alienated the praetorians and the imperial freedmen, present in large numbers on this occasion. Presumably there was also a discussion of Falco's plot on this same occasion, not preserved in the epitome. Dio's report as it exists implies the connection between the discontent of the soldiers and the palace freedman on the one hand, and Laetus and Falco on the other. The senate, on the point of declaring Falco a public enemy, is forestalled by Pertinax requesting mercy (74.8).

### *Falco's Connections and the Link to 169–70*

The roots of Falco's disdain for Pertinax may acquire some context from the events of 169–70. As we have seen, Falco was the grandson of the *comes* of

<sup>54</sup> *Pert.* 10.5; cf. Pasek (2013) 263, who suggests that Falco may in fact have been exiled by Pertinax.

<sup>55</sup> Champlin (1979) 302–3.

<sup>56</sup> Champlin (1979) 302–3. He also notes (303) that even if such a reading were rejected, in the accepted reading the slave announces himself as a member of Ceionian household. If the slave belonged to Falco, the logical inference is that he was inherited through Ceionia Fabia.

<sup>57</sup> Champlin (1979) 303–4.

Marcus in 169, and the son of the consul of 169.<sup>58</sup> As discussed above, there are some reasons to believe that his father and grandfather had, a generation earlier, conspired to have Pertinax dismissed from his post in Dacia. At a minimum, given the family's connections to Lucius, they had certainly lost prestige in 169 and witnessed the concomitant rise of Pompeianus and Pertinax. Falco, in addition to his connections to the rivals of Pertinax in 169–70, was also the nephew of Lucius through the second marriage of his influential mother, Lucius' sister Ceionia Fabia. He was thus a cousin to one Plautia Servilla, who was in all likelihood the daughter of his maternal aunt, another sister of Lucius, Ceionia Plautia.<sup>59</sup> Plautia Servilla's husband, in turn, was Q. Hedijs Lollianus Gentianus, the son of Pertinax's former patron. This Hedijs Gentianus, on a different occasion – perhaps galled at the imperial status of the son of his father's former client – rebuked Pertinax in the senate for breaking a promise, and Pertinax defused the situation without rancour (*Pert.* 7.7): *denique aggressus eum Lollianus Gentianus consularis, quod contra promissum faceret, necessitatis rationem accepit.* ('Finally, having attacked him because he had broken his promise, the consular Lollianus Gentianus accepted Pertinax's reasoning of necessity').

Importantly, Falco's ancestry gives his opposition to Pertinax a dynastic and familial context. His imperial connections through his relatives undoubtedly enhanced his suitability as a prospective alternative emperor. At his accession in 193, the connections of Lucius who had schemed against Pertinax and his patron in 169–70 witnessed his rise to the imperial power. Considering Pertinax's close connection to Pompeianus, who in 193 had signalled his approval of Pertinax's accession, those who had the most to lose from his accession were the connections of the other branch of the dynasty. These again were the very same families who had lost the most through the death of Lucius and the rise of Pompeianus in 169: the connections of Lucius and the Ceionii. Falco, whose precise role in the attempted coup of 193 is unclear, was possibly seen by Laetus as a plausible alternative to the less tractable Pertinax.<sup>60</sup> The rationale for Laetus' selection of Falco (and perhaps also the

<sup>58</sup> Pompeius Falco, *cos. ord.* 149 and *comes* of Marcus: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 656. His son, *cos. ord.* 169 and the father of Falco: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 651.

<sup>59</sup> Raepsaet-Charlier (1987) no. 618, stemma 26; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 487. Raepsaet-Charlier follows Pflaum (1961: 35–6), in suggesting that Plautia Servilla is the daughter of Peducaeus Plautius Quintillus (a nephew of Lucius through his mother Ceionia Fabia), and Fadilla, a daughter of Marcus. Birley (1988<sup>2</sup>: 238 n. 2) suggests that she was the daughter of Ceionia Plautia, Lucius' other sister, and Q. Servilius Pudens, *cos. ord.* 166. Her *nomen* 'Plautia' might just as easily come from Peducaeus or from Ceionia Plautia; in both cases it recalled the same connection to a certain Plautia (Raepsaet-Charlier (1987) no. 615, stemmata 13, 24), who was Lucius' paternal grandmother. However, 'Servilla' (as a variation of Servilia) cannot be readily accounted for in the ancestry of Peducaeus or Ceionia Fabia, thus Birley is probably correct on onomastic grounds. Both options point to connections of Lucius: through his nephew Peducaeus, or his sister Ceionia Plautia. Issues of chronology are not decisive, though if she is Lucius' grand-niece rather than his niece – and supposing the marriage of Peducaeus to Fadilla to be dated c. 177 – her marriage to Gentianus probably took place not long before 193. Gentianus: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> H 42; Peducaeus' ancestry and marriage: Jarvis (2017) 1–20.

<sup>60</sup> Dio Cass. 74.8–9. The *HA* provides much the same account (*Pert.* 10.1–10) but omits direct collusion on the part of Laetus with the ambitions of Pompeius Falco.



role played by the seemingly hapless Triarius Maternus) can best be understood by considering Falco's family connection to Lucius, which conferred perhaps a sufficient sheen of legitimacy. This consideration also lends credence to Dio's account of Laetus' scheming; Laetus, on this reading, did more than choose a prominent consular of impeccable ancestry. Rather, he made use of Falco as a living blood relative of a deified Antonine emperor. The choice of Falco was perhaps important to counter Pertinax's own credentials as a loyal servant of Marcus' dynasty. Moreover, Pertinax was always careful to appear humble in his dealings with the senate, and Falco's prominent dynastic connections may also help explain the leniency that Pertinax, not wishing to be seen as another Commodus, extended to him after the failure of the conspiracy.<sup>61</sup>

### *The Wider Prosopography of the Conspiracies against Pertinax in 193*

The two conspiracies against Pertinax in 193 are strange affairs. The accounts of both contain odd details and corrupted texts, and prosopography offers the best way to make some sense of them. The two conspirators – ambitious men, dupes, or willing tools – are linked through Erucius Clarus, the *consul ordinarius* of 193. Maternus was his uncle, Falco his brother-in-law. It is from the connections of Falco himself that a fuller picture of the opposition to Pertinax may emerge. The two coups begin to take shape through the Pompeii Sosii and their connections, and the events of early 193 represent the final gambit of the Ceionian nobility.<sup>62</sup>

At this point we may extend Champlin's prosopography. A network of Lucius' connections is linked to the last survivors of a provincial African network. Networks such as this one, deriving from both family ties and shared provincial origins, are an obvious feature of Roman imperial (and *mutatis mutandis* republican) society, and indeed of any society with a formal or informal oligarchy. They form a foundation for socio-political interaction and relations, within the aristocracy itself and between the aristocracy and the emperor. It is usually better to consider them as loose networks, composed of acknowledged and retained links that could survive and adapt to disruption and setbacks, rather than cohesive political factions. This was required on an individual and network scale to thrive under Commodus.<sup>63</sup> In the second century, provincial networks mattered in ways that would be entirely familiar to the great houses of the republic: family connections, regional ties, alliances, patronage. In the period under discussion, a different African network had in fact conspired in the removal of Commodus.<sup>64</sup> Further examples of strong regional ties retained by powerful figures in Rome in the second century

<sup>61</sup> *Pert.* 10.5–7; Dio Cass. 74.8.

<sup>62</sup> Champlin (1979) 305.

<sup>63</sup> The flexibility and mutability of connections in a dangerous court were a feature of Roman political life, cf. Winterling (2009) 34–5, where he discusses the *amicitia* between Sejanus and four senators in 28 and 31.

<sup>64</sup> It included Laetus and some of his relatives and provincial connections, cf. Birley (1969) 252–74.

include the cadre of prominent Hispano-Roman families, ushered into proximity to the imperial power by Vespasian and Trajan,<sup>65</sup> and scions of royal families from Ancyra such as the Julii Severi.<sup>66</sup> The lines between patronage, regional ties, and political alliances were never fixed, but may on occasion be delineated. In the case of the African network analysed here, the salient factors are their connections to Lucius, to each other, to their province of origin, and their opposition to Pertinax. These elements unite to suggest a provincial network that was politically active, well-connected, and willing to intrigue for power.

To discuss this network, we may begin close to Pertinax himself. As noted above, Hediudus Gentianus, *cos. suff.* 186, the younger son of Pertinax's former patron, is recorded by the biographer as speaking against Pertinax publicly in the senate (*Pert.* 7.7). As the son of Pertinax's previous patron – it is in fact possible that his father had once owned Helvius Successus, Pertinax's father – his rebuke of the emperor was loaded with personal history. The biographer of the *HA*, purveyor of gossip and scandal, passes over this connection in silence.<sup>67</sup> Hediudus Gentianus' connection to Falco ran through his marriage to Falco's cousin Plautia Servilla. Her father was very probably Q. Servilius Pudens, *cos. ord.* 166, who came from Hippo Regius on the north coast of the Roman province of Africa. It was a town whose nobility were connected by ties of acquaintance at least to Fronto, the tutor and friend of Marcus, who came from Cirta in Africa.<sup>68</sup> For his part, young Hediudus' father – that is, Pertinax's original patron – may have known Servilius from his time as the governor of Africa c. 158.<sup>69</sup> Falco's paternal aunt, Pompeia Sosia Falconilla – his father's sister who was married to the Pontius Laelianus, who was *consul ordinarius* in 163 – is recorded on an inscription in Cirta,

<sup>65</sup> For an overview, *CAH*<sup>2</sup> 11, 454–5, 459–60; cf. Strobel (2010) 65–71. The Aelii and Ulpia from Italica, the Annii Veri from Ucubi, and the Pedanii from Barcino are noteworthy examples, but the ascent of powerful Hispano-Roman families under Vespasian, Trajan, and Hadrian was reflected also in the greater number of *equites* coming from Spain in this period. Patronage derived from common Spanish provincial origins is attested also in the third century, cf. *CIL* 6.1410.

<sup>66</sup> Such as C. Julius Severus, *cos. suff.* c. 138: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> J 573; Alföldy (1977) 137–8; cf. *IGRR* 3.173 on his family connections. He boasts of his descent from the kings Attalus, Deiotarus, and Amyntas, and records his consular relations and connections: he claims to be related to the powerful A. Julius Quadratus, *cos. II ord.* 105, a Pergamene, who had governed Lycia-Pamphilia, Syria, and Asia, and to C. Claudius Severus, who in this context must be the consul of c. 112, grandfather of Marcus' son-in-law.

<sup>67</sup> The biographer or his source presumably knew of the connection, since the *nomen* Lollianus is used for father (*Pert.* 1.5) and son (*Pert.* 7.7).

<sup>68</sup> Q. Servilius Pudens: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> S 595. In the second century there was only one other senatorial family from Hippo Regius, the Baburii Iuvenes. A letter of Fronto to Arrius Antoninus (*ad Am.* 2.8) mediates with him on behalf of one Baburiana in a financial matter. Considering Arrius Antoninus' African origin and connections, and the attested status of the Baburii as *patrones* of Hippo Regius (Corbier (1982) 720), the inference should be that the lady is a member of this family. The Servilii and Baburii of Hippo Regius presumably knew each other, being the most prominent families of the city. Both families were present in Rome under Severus: a certain Baburiana was a member of the chorus in the *ludi saeculares* of 204 (Pighi (1965) 169, V<sup>a</sup> 89.7), as was Plautia Servilla, or perhaps her daughter-in-law (Pighi (1965) 158, IV 15, 249 no. 26).

<sup>69</sup> *PIR*<sup>2</sup> H 40. On his time in Africa cf. *Apul. Apol.* 24, 94; Hunink (1997) vol. 2. 82, 232–3; Thomasson (1996) 62–3, no. 76.

underlining the connections.<sup>70</sup> Servilius' eponymous son, perhaps from a previous marriage, was honoured as the patron of nearby Calama, halfway along the route from Hippo Regius to Cirta.<sup>71</sup> Intriguingly, Calama was also same town which claimed as a patron Vibia Aurelia Sabina, the daughter of Marcus.<sup>72</sup> She had been married to Antistius Burrus, whose family in turn came from Thibilis, 30 kilometres to the south-west of Calama. Commodus had executed this brother-in-law for his alleged imperial ambitions.<sup>73</sup> According to the *HA* it was Pertinax who had brought Burrus' alleged ambitions to Commodus' attention (*Pert.* 3.7).

The connections of Lucius to this provincial network were thus through his two sisters and their husbands and children. They ranged from Diana Veteranorum in the south through Ceionia Fabia's second husband Pompeius Sossus, *cos. ord.* 169, and their children (Falco the consul and conspirator of 193, and his sister the wife of Erucius Clarus, Falco's fellow consul of 193 who was implicated in both attempted coups in 193) to Hippo Regius via Calama in the north through Ceionia Plautia's husband, Servilius Pudens, *cos. ord.* 166, their daughter Plautia Servilla (married to a son of Pertinax's former patron), and Servilius' son. The senatorial opposition to Pertinax, recounted in a scattered fashion in the literary sources, comes in every case from the connections and relatives of Lucius, and many of these were tied to families with connections in Africa.

#### 4. Conclusion: The Motivations of the Senatorial Opposition to Pertinax

The confluence of names and connections around the attested conspirators against Pertinax is difficult to ignore. Thus far the argument has been that opposition to the new man Pompeianus in 169–70 took the form of hostility to the promotion of his protégé Pertinax, resulting in the latter's dismissal. The timing in 169–70 was shortly after Pompeianus' marriage to Lucilla in late 169, after the death of Lucius early in that year. The vagaries of war and the growing importance of Pompeianus on that occasion restored Pertinax's fortunes. I have suggested that in 193 the documented senatorial opposition to Pertinax comes from this same group. Connected to them, too, by 193 was the son of Pertinax's former patron, Hediudus Gentianus, now himself married into the Ceionian line through Plautia Servilla, Lucius' niece. An important geographic locus of the opposition to Pertinax was a network of Ceionian connections with ties to Africa.

<sup>70</sup> *PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 681, cf. *ILAlg.* 2.652.

<sup>71</sup> *PIR*<sup>2</sup> S 596, cf. *CIL* 8.17492.

<sup>72</sup> *ILAlg.* 1.241 = *CIL* 8.5328 in Thibilis; Raepsaet-Charlier (1987) no. 800, stemma 26. The inscription does not mention Antistius Burrus, dead 20 years when it was erected, but rather emphasises Vibia's status as the daughter of Marcus Aurelius and her ties to her ersatz Antonine connections, Severus and his sons. Thibilis is here her *patria*. Hemelrijk (2004) 215 n. 30, notes that this may have been honorary, but it was clear under the Severans that retiring to the provinces could offer some protection from the dangerous burden of imperial status.

<sup>73</sup> *Comm.* 6.11–7.1; *Pert.* 3.7.

It is further important to emphasise that the senatorial opposition to Pertinax was not only sustained over two conspiracies: it was also immediate and fast-moving. Pertinax ruled for 87 days, and within this period two of the conspiracies against him came directly from the connections of Lucius. In addition to any personal animosity, they were no doubt opposed to Pertinax on socio-political grounds. This latter consideration may have been shared by many within the larger body of the senatorial and equestrian aristocracy. It should be noted that Erucius Clarus, Pompeius Falco, Hedijs Gentianus, and Maternus – all of the named senators tangled up in plots against Pertinax – came from families long ennobled with the consulship. From the perspective of the highest consular aristocracy, always the redoubt of traditional senatorial values, Pertinax's accession was perhaps especially confronting. It was not as though viable alternatives did not exist. Connections of previous dynasties, deriving from august consular families, were passed over. Lucius' own nephew spoke against Pertinax in the senate and hinted at the illegitimate manner by which Pertinax had come to power. To judge from the two connected conspiracies in 193, the connections of Lucius – though they had despised Commodus – were ambitious and willing to intrigue immediately against the new emperor. The continuing importance of the dynastic principle is clear, regardless of the success or failure of the conspiracies themselves.

The Severans in future decades did not discriminate between threats from previous dynasties. After a period of socio-political and existential crisis for the senatorial aristocracy, dynastic considerations – real or manufactured, genuine or gimcrack – remained an important political factor. For the Severans, any previous imperial ties might be dangerous, but most especially where members of the family had evinced political ambition. Under Septimius Severus, the troublesome and troublesomely well-connected Erucius Clarus was executed later in 193.<sup>74</sup> Falco, for his part, had the good sense to stay out of politics after the failed conspiracy in 193. He does not reappear. The suppression of Peducaeus – son-in-law of Marcus, nephew of Lucius, half-brother of Falco through their mother, active and august senator – came in 205. He cursed Severus as he died, echoing Ursus Servianus' final hex on Hadrian generations earlier.<sup>75</sup> Caracalla had the son of Pompeianus and Lucilla, Marcus' grandson, killed in 212. He had been *consul ordinarius* in 209 and possessed the grand nomenclature of Aurelius Commodus Pompeianus. The deed was apparently arranged in such a way that bandits could be blamed (*M. Ant.* 3.8). Pertinax's own son, perhaps once Caesar, was killed by Caracalla in 212, following the murder of Geta.<sup>76</sup> The imperial connections of women could also be seen as a threat: Caracalla ordered the death of Cornificia,

<sup>74</sup> *PIR*<sup>2</sup> E 97.

<sup>75</sup> *PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 474, cf. Dio Cass. 77.7.4.

<sup>76</sup> *M. Ant.* 4.8, for no other reason than he was consul, but cf. 10.6, where a pun on Geta's name at Caracalla's expense is given as the reason. The joke is repeated in slightly more detail at *Geta* 6.6, and an additional reason is given: that Caracalla feared the younger Pertinax had imperial ambitions. The removal of the younger Pertinax and Pompeianus were not part of a random purge, but rather calculated to remove persons associated with previous emperors, cf. Davenport (2012) 811–12.

daughter of Marcus and the widow of the murdered African consular Petronius Mamertinus (Dio Cass. 78.16.6). An exception to the trend might be Lollianus Plautius Avitus, likely the grandson of Ceionia Plautia through Plautia Servilla and Hedijs Gentianus, and thus the great-nephew of Lucius. He was *consul ordinarius* in 209 alongside Lucilla and Pompeianus' ill-fated son. His survival is probably due to in part to the closeness of his father to Severus and Caracalla; Hedijs Gentianus is recorded as a *comes* of these emperors.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, some connections of prominent families continued to reach the consulship under the Severans and were not suppressed: Claudius Severus and Annia Galeria's son, thus Marcus' grandson, Severus Proculus, in 200; Marcus' cousin once removed, Annius Libo, in 204; Acilius Faustinus, both of whose names suggest august lineage, in 210.<sup>78</sup> A common thread which unites the latter three is the lack of evidence that they (or their families) engaged in dynastic politics during the reign of Commodus or subsequently.

The senatorial opposition to Pertinax in 169–70 and in 193 sprang, in the end, mainly from the connections of Lucius. According to the sources in 193 it is also derived from the growing enmity between Pertinax and Laetus, and Laetus' consequent willingness to seek alternatives to Pertinax. The distance that developed between Pertinax and Laetus might be considered a consequence of Pertinax fulfilling with some success his role as a conciliatory emperor, becoming increasingly acceptable to broad sections of the aristocracy. Perhaps Laetus had intended to have influence on imperial affairs through Pertinax, and to enjoy the consequent opportunities for personal enrichment. But Pertinax's exemplary and traditional conduct to the senate clearly indicated his priorities as a member of the senatorial aristocracy. He was an emperor in the mould of Marcus in his relations to the senate. Even as the sources record the growing animosity of the praetorians and freedmen to Pertinax, he seems to have cultivated the larger part of the senate successfully. This ability to conciliate the senate would render in turn less dangerous and more isolated the agitations of the connections of Lucius: since not all of the senatorial and equestrian aristocracy were involved in dynastic schemes, the mere reality of Pertinax's mild attitude and the welcome transition from Commodus' rule were perhaps sufficient for many members of the aristocracy to accept Pertinax – or at least not actively conspire to remove him – despite his humble origins. Nevertheless, his dismissal in 169–70 and the aborted coups against him in 193 find their origin in familial and dynastic rivalries, driven by the anxieties of the imperial aristocracy and brought to the surface in a period of change and crisis.

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<sup>77</sup> *PIR*<sup>2</sup> H 36.

<sup>78</sup> Claudius Severus Proculus: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 200; Annius Libo: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> A 648; Acilius Faustinus: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> A 57.

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