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COINS

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### Introduction

The story of Roman Emperor Publius Septimius Geta (reigned 198–211 ce) encompasses universal themes that define our common humanity as well as our potential for inhumanity: fatherly indulgence, motherly protection, sibling rivalry, betrayal, fratricide, and inconsolable grief. Although ancient, it is reminiscent of a Shakespearian tragedy wherein a flawed, high-ranking protagonist suffers a reversal of fortune and dies at the end of the play. Coins struck contemporaneously with Geta's reign augment this story as told by ancient authors, and a variety in bronze and silver serve to illustrate it here.

Born Lucius Septimius Geta on 7 March 189, from 203 onward his praenomen changed from Lucius to Publius. Geta's names thus honor his father, Emperor Lucius Septimius Severus (r. 193–211), and his paternal grandfather, Publius Septimius Geta (born c. 110–died c. 171). Geta was the youngest of two sons born to Severus and his wife Julia Domna (r. 193–217). His older brother Caracalla (born 188) is known to us today as Emperor Caracalla (r. 196–217). Geta is thought to have been born in Rome or Mediolanum (present-day Milan) and Caracalla in Lugdunum (present-day Lyon). Yet their Punic father Severus hailed from Leptis Magna in North Africa. Their mother Julia was a Syrian high priestess of royal birth. The boys' mixed heritage attests to the mobility and cosmopolitan makeup of the vast Roman Empire during the late-second and early-third centuries ce.

The story of Geta is bound inextricably with that of his father, who burned with ambition to establish a lasting and viable imperial dynasty. It is also intertwined with the rise of Caracalla, who as Severus's eldest son was the primary heir to the throne. Unfortunately, Severus's love for his sons, his quest for personal glory, his desire for lasting familial fame, and his occult beliefs combined to create a noxious brew. This led him to disastrously misjudge his sons' capacity to co-rule the empire effectively and harmoniously.



In dynastic profile on this masterfully-engraved Roman gem c. 198–200 ce, Septimius Severus and his wife Julia Domna face right, their youthful sons Caracalla and Geta face left. As the youngest son, Geta is shown partially obscured in the shadow of his brother.

Geta as prince, or Caesar, is bare-headed. Caracalla wears the laurel crown marking his rank as Augustus, already sharing the responsibilities of emperor with his father.

Lépine and Mougeot, detail from "Empereurs, Césars, Rés," print, 25 x 21 cm (44.45 x 58.42 cm), in *Iconographie ancienne ou Recueil des portraits authentiques des empereurs, rois et hommes illustres de l'Antiquité*, by Enrico Quarino Visconti, plate 45, Figure 5. Paris: F. Didot, 1808–26. Image made from a scan of the original print.

2000 LOST IN THE HORSE MARKET  
ATOMIC ENERGY REC'D.  
DOE REC'D. 1985  
DOE REC'D. 1985

# prince of youth

COINAGE TRACES THE RISE AND FALL  
OF PUBLIUS SEPTIMIUS GETA



1. Geta, Rome, AE obv.  
203–8 ce; 28 mm, 7.73 g.  
RIC — (cf. 128b, 149); Hill 874 variant (bust draped only).  
Obv: P SEPTIMIVS GETA CAES; youth's bare-headed draped and cuirassed bust right.  
Rev: PONTIF COS around / S C in exergue; Minerva seated left, holding owl and resting left elbow on shield; transverse spear or scepter under arm. Very Fine.

Possibly unique variant. See RIC 128b for the same obv., but with rev. legend COS; see RIC 149 for the same obv. and rev. type, but with rev. legend COS II.



A marble bust of Geta from the Louvre, Paris, portrays him as a maturing young man of around 19 years old, c. 208 ce.  
Pierre Bouillon, detail from "Caracalla, Geta" engraving, copperplate, 15 x 10.5 in (38.1 x 26.7 cm), in *Musée des antiquités. Dessins et gravures par P. Bouillon ... Avec des notices explicatives ...* by Pierre Bouillon and J. B. de Saint-Victor, Paris: P. Didot, 1810–21. Image made from a scan of the original print.

### About the Collection

The coins displayed in this exhibit have been acquired through the dedicated labor of twenty years' collecting and study. They form a subset of a larger collection of Severan coinage, which is a living work in progress and not intended to be a comprehensive catalog of every single type. The primary collecting focus is silver denarii. Additional depth is provided by the inclusion of some larger-size bronze pieces. Many of the coins shown here are among the finest known for their type. Most are scarce to rare. Several are provenanced to the cabinets of distinguished numismatists or illustrated in publications as noted in the descriptions of individual coins.

### **Destined to Rule**

Geta's elevation to the imperial throne occurred in the aftermath of the civil war that raged from 193 to 197 CE. His father Septimius Severus, as governor of Pannonicia Superior, had been proclaimed emperor by the local legions. Severus used his cunning and superior military strength to defeat various rivals, ultimately becoming the uncontested ruler of Rome. Seeking to establish a dynasty as a means to consolidate power, in 196 Severus named his 8-year-old son Geta as Caesar, next in line to the throne. Then in 198 he elevated Caracalla to the rank of Augustus, making him co-ruler; to 5-year-old Geta he bestowed the title of Caesar. Severus issued a brief series of dynastic coins to mark the occasion, each bearing family portraits intended to represent *secessus imperii*, or "eternity of Roman rule" (cat no. 5).

Both brothers were celebrated on numerous coin types presenting them as the inevitable successors to their father, as dutiful priests, and as bringers of good fortune. On coins bearing the legend *princeps etenim* or abbreviations thereof, the boys appear as "first among the young" or "priests of youth," denizens reserved for designated heirs to the throne. A coin type unique to Geta shows him evading his companions confidently from horseback (no. 2).

Dynastic associations assured dynastic continuity consecrated by the gods. The brothers' similarity of appearance encouraged their identification with the mythical *Dioscuri*, twin protectors of Rome (no. 8). On a provincial coin from Thessalica Hadrianopolis, Geta is crowned by an eagle, the sacred symbol of Jupiter (no. 2). The young prince's right to legitimate rule is thus conferred directly by the king of heaven, Earth, justice, and all of the Olympian gods.



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3. Geta, Laodicea, AR denarius, c. 202–3 CE; 19 mm, 3.72 g.  
RIC 167 (S) variant.

Obv: L SEPTIMIVS GETA CAES, boy's bare-headed draped bust right.  
Rev: SEVERI PI AVG FIL; *litterae* (wreath), laurel, jug, simpulum (ladle) and sprinkler; Very Fine.

Implements of purification represent the various priestly colleges into which Geta had been adopted as Caesar.

4. Geta, Laodicea, AR denarius, c. 202–3 CE; 19 mm, 3.06 g.  
RIC 94 (S).

Obv: L SEPTIMIVS GETA CAES, boy's bare-headed draped bust right.  
Rev: SEVERI PI AVG FIL; *litterae* (wreath), laurel, jug, simpulum (ladle) and sprinkler; Very Fine.

A dynastic issue depicting Caracalla as Augustus and Geta as Coesar.



2

### **Rarity Scales**

HILL. Total surviving coins: RIC 1100 studied 20 hours of research since 1980s. The largest contained \$1,000.

C	50,000 coins
S	10–49
S <sup>2</sup>	20–49
E	50–100
E <sup>2</sup>	5–10
P <sup>1</sup>	2–4
P <sup>2</sup>	0–1

RIC. Rarity was determined by comparing coins in major public and private European collections.

R	fewer than collections
R <sup>2</sup>	100 coins
R <sup>3</sup>	11–15
R <sup>4</sup>	5–10
R <sup>5</sup>	2–5
R <sup>6</sup>	1

2. Geta, Thess., Hadrianopolis, 198–900 CE; 22 mm, 8.28 g.  
Varbarely VF.

Obv: P DET EG G. ACK, bearded bust right, draped and uncrossed.  
Rev: ADPIA AVGVSTI, NOHONIT / ON, in exergue: Geta holding spear and vessel over a bull, to left a large eagle standing right, crowning Geta with wreath. Near Very Fine.

Very rare. This coin is perhaps the second best example.



Castor and Pollux are known in Roman mythology as the sons of divine Divus Iulius. They were twin half-brothers and sons of their mother Leda, who was seduced by Jupiter after he took the form of a swan.

According to ancient tradition (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book 12, lines 186–200), the brothers were born from a single egg. The brothers are often depicted as twin brothers, one wearing a laurel wreath and the other wearing a myrtle wreath (see page 207, Denarius, London, 1795, Metropolitan Museum of Art).

### **Select Severan Coin Types Promoting Geta as Dynastic Co-Heir Alongside His Brother Caracalla, 198–209 CE**



3 4 5



6 7 8



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6. Geta, Rome, AR denarius, 203–6 CE; 19 mm, 5.76 g.  
RIC 38b, Hill 524 (R<sup>1</sup>).

Obv: GETA CAES PONT COS; youth's bare-headed draped bust right.  
Rev: VOTA PVBLICA,  
Geta, veiled, standing left, holding a cornucopia; two figures (Severus, Caracalla, and Geta) galloping right (i.e. Geta and two *augures*); tender turns his head back and throws out right hand in gesture of encouragement. Very Fine.

Ex Elvira E. Cahn-Bretschneid Collection.

7. Geta, Rome, AR denarius, 203–206 CE; 20 mm, 6.06 g.  
RIC 6, Hill 550 (R<sup>2</sup>).

Obv: P SEPT GETA CAES PONT.  
Boy's bare-headed bust draped right.  
Rev: CASTOR; Castor standing half-left, beside horse standing left, holding scepter. Very Fine.

This reverse type links Geta with Castor of the *Dioscuri*, who was the mortal half-brother of the immortal Pollux.

### Brotherly Discord

Coinage issued during the reign of Septimius Severus often promotes harmony between Caracalla and Geta, their family, and the military. A prime example is a unique coin of Julia Domna from Tavium, Galatia, which celebrates the return of the empire to peace and stability after the civil war of 193–7 CE. It shows Severus, Caracalla, and Geta below the legend ΕΙC ΕΩ NA TOYC KYPIOC, which names them as "eternal rulers" (no. 12).

The idea of familial and military concord was important to advancing the public perception of dynastic stability and confidence in the perpetuation of Severan rule. Numerous coin types thus depict the two heirs facing each other and clasping hands in agreement. Sometimes the brothers are shown performing sacrificial rites together or with military imagery.

During a period of peace from 203 to 207, the boys developed an intense sibling rivalry fueled by their luxurious lifestyle in the imperial palace. The brothers also became increasingly indecent, carousing with chariooteers and engaging in all sorts of petty crimes and abuses. Pleas from their mother Julia fell on deaf ears. In 208 Severus compelled them to accompany him on a military expedition to the remote island of Britannia, far removed from the debaucheries of Rome. In doing this, Severus hoped that the responsibilities of administration and command, along with the rigors of military discipline and the deprivations of camp life, would force the brothers to cooperate. An as of Geta issued contemporaneously with these events shows Concordia, the personification of harmony, standing among six legionary standards; it may have been issued to soldiers to evoke feelings of personal loyalty (no. 15).

### Select Severan Coin Types Celebrating Harmonious Relations Between Geta, His Family, and the Military, 197–211 CE



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**12.** Caracalla, Rome, AE sestertius. 197–8 CE; AE26, 12.11 g. SNG von Aulock —. Obv: IOΥΛΙΑ Δ OMΝΑ CEBACTH; draped bust right. Rev: EΙC ΕΩΝΑ TOYC KYPIOC / TAOYIA; Septimius Severus, radiate, standing center, clasping his right hand with Caracalla's at right, Geta facing left, holding patera and scroll. Very Fine. Possibly unique. This coin is the only one known for Domna with this rev. type. A very rare type; 5–20 known.

**13.** Caracalla (as Augustus) and Geta (as Caesar), Moesia Inferior, Nicopolis ad Istrum, 198–209 CE. AE28, 13.04 g. Varbanov 3169. Obv: AΥ K M AYP ANTONINOC KA CEP / KAI ΓΕΤΑC; laureate bust of Caracalla right, facing bare-headed bust of Geta left. Rev: PONTIF TR P II COS II / S C; Caracalla and Geta standing left and right, face to face, sacrificing out of pattern over lighted tripod; behind, bull prostrate facing left; in center, flute player. Very Fine. Ex Fritz Reising Collection. Ex Philip C. Peck Collection.



9

**9.** Septimius Severus, Moesia Inferior, Nicopolis ad Istrum. c. 209 CE; AE28, 11.16 g. Varbanov 2794. Obv: AΥΤ Λ ΣΕΠΤΙ ΣΕΥΗΡΟΣ Π, laureate head right. Rev: ΥΠ ΦΛ ΟΥ ΛΠΙΑΝ ΝΙΚΟΠΟΛΙ / ΠΡΟΣ! in exergue; Caracalla and Geta standing left and right, face to face, and clasping hands. Extremely Fine.

**10.** Caracalla, Thracia, Sardica. c. 211 CE; AE26, 17.35 g. Varbanov 2230 variant (bust type). Obv: AΥT K M AY CEV ANTΩNEINOC; laureate head right. Rev: ΟΥΛΠΙΑΣ ΣΕΡΔΙ / ΚΗC; Caracalla and Geta standing left and right, face to face, each holding panzerion and reversed spear, with foot on captive; between, trophy. Very Fine.

**11.** Caracalla, Rome, AE sestertius. 210–1 CE; AE26, 12.11 g. RIC 508a (R<sup>2</sup>); Hill 1220. Obv: M AVREL ANTONINVS PIVS AVG BRIT; laureate head right. Rev: CONCORDIAE ANGG / S C; Caracalla and Geta standing left and right, face to face, one crowned by Apollo (C), the other by Hercules. Fine. Ex Estate of Thomas Bentley — d. d.



Severus, Caracalla, and Geta presided over sacrifices held before and after military expeditions, at which a bull was led to the altar in a solemn procession followed by a long column of soldiers. Ackermann and Krommelmann, detail from "The Lance," print, 9 x 11.5 in (23.54 x 29.21 cm). In Iconographic Encyclopedia of Science, Literature, and Art, vol. II ..., by J. G. Heck, plate 29, Figure 23. New York: Rudolph Gurgle, 1825. Image courtesy of Internet Archive.

### Honoring Geta on Provincial Portraiture

The coins of Geta form a remarkable series of portraiture showing a clear progression from smooth-cheeked, innocent boy (no. 23) to ungainly adolescent (no. 25) to fully-bearded, careworn man (no. 26). The numismatic output of the mostly Greek-speaking East is particularly interesting and varied. Eastern portraits from the Severan era (193–235 CE) generally adhere to the Hellenistic style, which sought to capture the true-to-life individualism of their subjects. Differences of quality and style between the coinage of numerous provincial cities depended largely upon the training and skill of local die engravers. These portraits are best described as "veristic" rather than "realistic." This is because it is impossible for us to check how closely the appearance of any given portrait would have matched the true appearance of the actual living person.

Geta never ruled independently. overshadowed by his father Severus and brother Caracalla, he wielded a limited amount of autonomous power. This combined with his short reign as Augustus (209–11) make him a figure of relatively minor influence in the grand span of Roman history. Yet the prolific number of coins bearing Geta's image attests to the importance of his role in an overarching program of propagandistic imagery. Provincial cities were obligated to venerate the imperial cult on their coinage, and the portraits presented Roman rulers as divinely-sanctioned personages worthy of devotion. Portraits are also a form of didactic art that enabled the local citizenry to become "acquainted" with the members of the ruling dynasty.



**23.** Geta (Caesar), Phrygia, Amorium. 198–209 CE; AE26, 8.74 g.

SNG Copenhagen 127.

Obv: Π ΓΕΤΙ ΦΕΤΑΚ ΚΑΙCAP; boy's bare-headed and draped bust right. Rev: AMOPIANON ΕΠΙ Γ ΝΟΥ / ΑΡΧ in exergae; Zeus seated left, holding thunderbolt and scepter. Very Fine.

Ex Henry Clay Lindgren Collection; illustrated in Lindgren & Knothe, no. A880A.

**25.** Geta (Caesar), Mysia, Hadrianothera. 198–209 CE; AE25, 8.74 g. SNG Copenhagen —.

Obv: Λ ΣΕΠΤΙ ΦΕΤΑΚ ΚΑΙ; youth's bare-headed, draped bust right. Rev: ΟΕΒΑΚΤ ΗΡΑΚΛΕ; Herakles standing right, grasping Lernaean Hydra and wielding club about to strike it. ΕΤ | HC in field. Very Fine. *Possibly unique.* This coin is perhaps the second known example.

*Possibly unique.* This type for Geta from Hadrianothera is unlisted.



**24.**

**25.** Geta (Caesar), Pontus, Hadrianothera. 198–209 CE; AE25, 8.74 g. SNG Copenhagen —.

Obv: Λ ΣΕΠΤΙ ΦΕΤΑΚ ΚΑΙ; youth's bare-headed, draped bust right. Rev: ΟΕΒΑΚΤ ΗΡΑΚΛΕ; Herakles standing right, grasping Lernaean Hydra and wielding club about to strike it. ΕΤ | HC in field. Very Fine.

*Possibly unique.* This type for Geta from Hadrianothera is unlisted.

### Select Provincial Coin Types Depicting Geta as Caesar and Augustus, 198–211 CE



**26.**



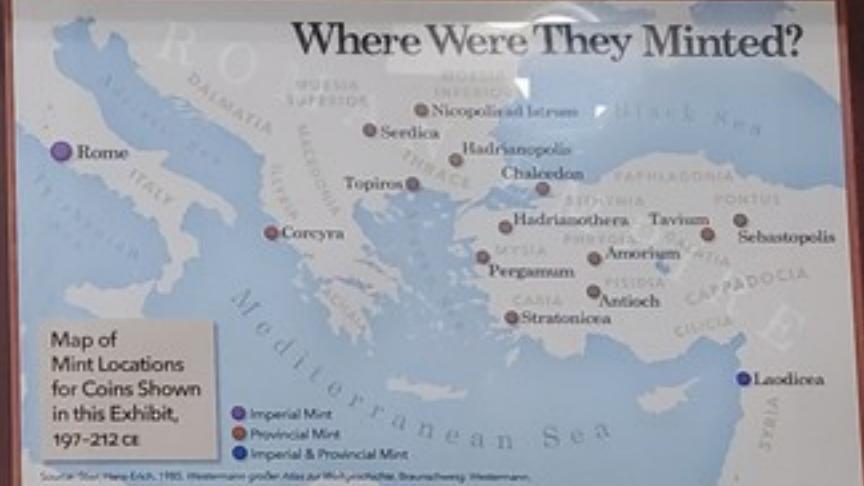
**27.**



**28.**



### Where Were They Minted?



Map of Mint Locations for Coins Shown in this Exhibit, 197–212 CE

**Dozens of provincial mints** were active during the Severan era. The map above marks the locations of a select few. At Laodicea, imperial denarii were struck for Geta and his family from 198 to 202 CE (see coin nos. 3, 4, and 30). These were produced alongside a local denomination called the tetradrachm.

### The End of Geta's Reign

The differences between Geta and Caracalla as rival emperors seemed insurmountable. Each fortified his separate apartment in the imperial palace to guard against the threat of assassination by the other. A treaty was drawn for the division of territory: Caracalla would govern Italy and the West; Geta would govern Egypt and the East. This arrangement would have certainly destroyed the empire, tearing it asunder and degenerating into civil war.

On 28 December 211 ce, the brothers agreed to meet with their mother Julia Domna in her apartment to discuss reconciliation on peaceful terms. Here Caracalla treacherously directed some hidden executioners to rush upon Geta, who sought protection at his mother's breast. Julia, covered in blood and wounding her hand, tried in vain to deflect a hail of sword-blows as the 22-year-old Geta died in her arms. Caracalla forbade her to mourn him.

Caracalla consolidated his power by ordering the mass-slaughter of Geta's supporters. He nonetheless recognized that his younger brother had been held in general favor by most soldiers and citizens. Caracalla thus moved to oppose the populace, granting to Geta the honor of an emperor's funeral and the status of a god. Yet he also ordered Geta's name and image to be expunged from all public monuments and inscriptions. For practical reasons this *damnatio memoriae*, or "condemnation of the memory," does not seem to have included the widespread melting of Geta's coinage. Instances of private defacement do exist but are rare (nos. 30). Magistrates of a few cities in Asia Minor, perhaps in a show of loyalty to their new sovereign, systematically recalled large bronze civic coins bearing images of Geta facing another family member (nos. 31–33). After Geta's portrait had been erased, the coins were resculpted with a counterstamp and placed back into circulation.

### Evidence of Damnatio Memoriae on Numismatic Portraiture of Geta, 211–2 CE



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30. Geta. Ladiocca. AR denarius.  
c. 203 ce; 18 mm; 3.34 g.  
RIC 205b (R.)

Obv: P·SEPTIMVS GETA CLAES;  
older boy's bare-headed, draped bust  
left. Rev: MINERV SANCT·; Matera  
standing half-left, leaning on shield  
and holding spear. Very Fine.

Several chisel blows to Geta's portrait  
have removed a large portion of his face;  
this probably an unofficial damnatio.

31. Caracalla and Geta; Mystra,  
Pergeanum, 198–211 ce; AE17, 22.70 g.  
SNG Copenhagen 601. Obv: [mostly  
illegible]; laureate bust of Caracalla,  
facing bust of Geta erased. Geta  
name erased in legend; countermark  
Rev: ΕΠΙ ΣΤΡΑΤΙΩΝΟΥ ΤΕΡΠΙΑΝ  
ΔΡΟΥ / ΠΕΡΓΑΜΗΝΗΝ Ε ΝΟΚΟΡΟ  
N in exergue. Tyche standing left,  
crowned by Nike. Very Fine.  
Ex Marcellus Collection.

32. Caracalla and Geta; Cariis  
Stratonikeia, c. 205–9 ce; AE38, 25.27 g.  
SNG von Aulock 2034 (this mint).  
Obv: AV KAI M AYP ANTINENO;  
laureate bust of Caracalla facing bust  
of Geta erased; countermarked with  
head of Caracalla. Rev: ΕΠΙ ΑΡΧ  
ΙΕΡΟΚΑΙΝΕΥ Β ΣΤΡΑΤΟΝΙΚΕΩΝ;  
Nike standing, facing left,  
holding wreath and palm. Very Fine.  
Ex Hans von Aulock Collection.

33. Caracalla and Geta; Cariis  
Stratonikeia, c. 205–9 ce; AE38, 18.17 g.  
SNG von Aulock 2082.  
Obv: AV KAI M AYP ANTINENO;  
laureate bust of Caracalla facing bust  
of Geta erased. Geta's name erased in  
legend; countermarked ΘΕΟΥ.  
Rev: ΚΕΡΙΜ ΣΥΝΗΡΟΥ ΦΥΣΕΙ ΚΑΙ  
Μ ΑΥΡ [...] ΚΥΡ ΟΕΡ in exergue. Zeus  
Patrumene riding right, holding long  
lance and scepter. Very Fine.



**Caracalla commits fratricide** by his own hand in this eighteenth-century French engraving. More likely is that he commanded a group of loyal executioners to accomplish the bloody deed for him.  
*Source:* n.d. [n.d.]. Caracalla Killing Geta in the Arms of His Mother Julia, oil and ink with grisaille and white highlights. 30 x 40 cm. 200 x 200 mm. From: *Museum Leiden*, inv. 14705 (reproduced with permission).

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