



Caracalla's journeys through the Balkans in 213 and 214

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ABSTRACT

This article traces and discusses rare evidence that survives for Caracalla's itinerary through the Balkans in 213 and 214. This period was at the end of the emperor's bellum Germanicum and his final move to Asia Minor and the East. It was during this time that the emperor first officially announced his intention to wage war against Parthia, and when he began his respective military preparations. Based on recent research, this paper proposes a chronology and an imperial itinerary.

Keywords: Caracalla, Thrace, Imperial Journey, Epigraphy, Numismatics

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Caracalla's itinerary and actions after he left Rome for his *business expedition in Germania* are poorly documented. In fact, Sir Ronald Syme's verdict remains true: "Everything from 213 to the emperor's death in 217 gets reported in a scrappy fashion." It is "barely intelligible" and, one might add that it is hostile throughout.¹ The few surviving passages from Cassius Dio's Roman History (known mainly through Xiphilinos's epitomes and the excerpts of the *Excerpta Valesiana*) remain our most detailed source for this period of Roman history. Despite their poor state of conservation and their hostility towards Caracalla, these passages are particularly

¹ Syme, R. 1968. *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968, p.34; Cf. C. Davenport, "Cassius Dio and Caracalla." *The Classical Quarterly*, 62/2 (2012), pp. 796-815 on Dio's relationship with Caracalla. Several of the arguments presented here have already been developed in M. A. Speidel, "Caracalla in Thrace and the Beginning of his Parthian War", *Emperor, Army, and Society. Studies in Roman Imperial History* by Anthony, ed. E. Eck and F. Santangelo & K. Vössing, Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, 2022, p.161-172.

valuable because they reflect the personal views of one high-ranking eye witness to some of the events connected to it, such as those that took place during the winter of 214/215 when Dio was present at the imperial court.² There is, of course, also a “plethora of testimony accruing from coins and inscriptions”.³ Yet, many uncertainties remain as evidence for Caracalla's whereabouts, actions, and military plans in the months and years after the *Victoria Germanica* were discovered.⁴ Fortunately, new epigraphic evidence makes it possible to trace Caracalla's movements in 213 and 214 with greater precision than previously possible.

The exact date of the emperor's *profection* from Rome was not clearly recorded. Some scholars believe that Caracalla left the capital in 212, while others believe that he left in 213.⁵ However, if Caracalla used the title *proconsul* in the traditional way (i.e. only when not in Rome), the epigraphic evidence indicates that he had left the capital before 30. August 212, for all Caracalla's diplomas after this date, show *propos* among the imperial titles.⁶ Moreover, inscriptions mentioning Caracalla that can be dated to the latter half of 212 also list his title as *proconsul* and thus imply the emperor's absence from Rome.⁷ This evidence strongly suggests that Caracalla left Rome before the end of August 212 and never returned. He spent the rest of his reign travelling through provincial territories until he was murdered in 217 during his Parthian War.⁸

After leaving Rome, Caracalla travelled via the Rhône valley to Upper Germany and to the confines of Raetia, where he proceeded on 11. August 213 to root out the enemies (*per*

2 Dio. 78,17,2-3. 78,18,1-4. 79,8,4-5; Cf. e.g. F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio*. Oxford: Oxford Univ Press, 1964, p.18-22; C. Davenport, "Cassius Dio and Caracalla." *The Classical Quarterly*, 62/2 (2012), p.802; D. Okón, "Caracalla and his Collaborators", *Mnemon*, 13 (2013), p.257.

3 R. Syme, R. "Journeys of Hadrian", *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, Vol. 73 (1988), p.159.

4 Cf. e.g. D. Boteva, "Following in Alexander's Footsteps: The Case of Caracalla", *Ancient Macedonia*, Vol. I, Thessaloniki: IMXA, 1999, p.181-188; L. Ruten, "Caracallas Weg durch Thrakien: eine Rekonstruktion agrund der numismatischen Zeugnisse", *Geldgeschichtliche Nachrichten*, 258 (2011), p.293-295; P. Andreeva, *Festivals in the Roman Province of Thrace (1st – 3rd c. AD)*. Sofia: National Institute of Archaeology and Museum (Bulgarian academy of sciences), 2014.

5 *Profectio Aug(usti)*: see RIC Caracalla 225 and 226. Caracalla's portrait on these coins dates them to between 212 and the end of 213. Thus, A. Pangerl, "Porträtypen des Caracalla und des Geta auf römischen Reichsprägungen – Definition eines neuen Caesartyps des Caracalla und eines neuen Augustustyps des Geta", *Archäologisches Korrespondenzblatt*, 43 (2013), pp. 105-106 and 112. For Caracalla leaving Rome in 2023 see e.g. A. R., "Caracalla", *Die römischen Kaiser*, ed. M. Clauss, München: C.H. Beck, 1997, p.185-191; K. Królczyk, "Der Germanenfeldzug des Kaisers Caracalla im Lichte der epigraphischen Quellen", *Studia Lesco Mrowewicz ab amicis et discipulis dedicata*, ed. S. Ruciński et al. Poznań: Sebastian Ruciński, 2011, p.210. Undecided: e.g. H. Halfmann, *Itinera principum: Geschichte und Typologie der Kaiserreisen im römischen Reich*. Stuttgart: F. Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1986, p.223; A. Kolb, "Caracalla and Raetien", *Tyche*, 18 (2003), p. 21.

6 Compare RMD 455 (7. Jan. 212, without *procos*, with RMD 74 (30. Aug. 212, with *procos*). On the subject in general see W. Eck, "Hadrian mit dem Titel 'proconsul' als Bauherr in Rom. Zur Neuinterpretation von CIL VI 40518, einer stadtömischen Bauinschrift." *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, 2 (2019), p.195-205.

7 E.g.: CIL II 2 5, 492 (Dec. 212). CIL III 15203 (Dec. 212). CIL III 11093 = ILS 2382 (Dec. 212). AE 1900, 82 (Dec. 212).

8 See Dio 79,5,1-5 with Speidel, M. A. "Protectors and Assassins - Caracalla's guards on the day he died", *Corps du chef et grades du corps dans l'armée romaine*, ed. C. Wolff and Faure, P. Lyon: Ceror, 2020, p. 421.

*limitem Raetiae ad hostes extirpandos).*⁹ News of his German victory reached Rome on 6. October 213.¹⁰ Therefore, the victory occurred at the end of September. Caracalla spent the following weeks visiting and inspecting the legionary fortresses and military installations on the Danube.¹¹ According to Herodian, “Antoninus, after completing his business with the garrison on the Danube, marched south to Thrace”.¹² Cassius Dio adds that when “Antoninus came to Thrace he paid no further attention to Dacia but crossed the Hellespont, not without danger”.¹³ Caracalla finally reached his winter quarters at Bithynian Nicomedia by the beginning of December 213 at the latest, as his arrival there was recorded in Rome before the 17th of that month.¹⁴ This last date was recovered by John Scheid in 1998 and is based on his improved and convincing reconstruction of the relevant sections of the acts of the Arval Brethren in Rome.¹⁵

Dio’s remarks that Caracalla paid “no further attention to Dacia” may have been an aborted visit to Dacia. In fact, several inscriptions from Dacia Porolissensis dating to 213 (before October) have been taken to imply that an imperial visit to Dacia was planned for that year.¹⁶ These inscriptions were at the core of a debate (mainly among Romanian scholars) whether or not Caracalla visited Dacia in 213 or 214.¹⁷ However, Dio’s assertion that Caracalla crossed Thrace without paying “further attention to Dacia” and the epigraphic evidence that he arrived in Nicomedia in early December 213 strongly suggest that no major imperial journey through Dacia took place in 213. The inscriptions from Dacia Porolissensis may, perhaps, reveal the emperor’s intention to visit Dacia in 213, which, if true, he had communicated before

9 CIL VI 2086, p. 17. For Caracalla’s itinerary in 213 and his *expedition Germania* cf. esp. Halfmann, p.223–225. J. Nollé, “Die Krankheit des Kaisers Caracalla”, *Münzenrevue*, 28 (1996), H.5, p.29–30; J. Scheid, *Commentarii fratrum arvalium qui supersunt*. Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1998, p.284; Kolb, p.21–22; Królczyki, p.210; Kovács, P., “Der Besuch von Caracalla in Pannonien”, *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 63 (2012) p.381–394; C. H. Opreanu, Opreanu, C. H. “Caracalla and Dacia. Imperial Visit, a Reality or only Rumour?”, *Journal of Ancient History and Archaeology*, 2/2 (2015), p.18–19; I. Piso & D. Deac, “Eine neue kaiserliche Statuenbasis aus Buciumi und Caracallas Reise nach Dakien”, *Limes XXIII*, ed. C. Sebastian Sommer & S. Matešić, Mainz: Nünnerich-Asmus Verlag, 2018, p.756–762.

10 CIL VI 2086, l. 23–24. Cf. Scheid, *Commentarii fratrum arvalium qui supersunt*, p.284. For Caracalla’s visit to the temple of Apollo Grannus in Raetian Phoebianae, see Dio 77, 15, 6. IvEph 802. Cf. Kolb. Regarding Caracalla’s illness, see Dio 78, 15, 2–7; HA Carac. 5, 3. Cf. J. Nollé, “Caracallas Kur in Pergamon–Krankheit und Heilung eines römischen Kaisers im Spiegel seiner Münzen”, *Antike Welt*, 34/4 (2003), p.409–10. Cf. also O. Hekster & T. Kaizer, “An accidental tourist? Caracalla’s fatal trip to the temple of the Moon at Carrhae/Harran.” *Ancient Society*, 42 (2012), p.89–107.

11 For evidence of this part of Caracalla’s journey, see Kovács.

12 Hdn. 4,8,1.

13 Dio 78,16,7. M. Christol, “Caracalla en 214: de Nicomédie à Nicomédie”, *Les voyages des empereurs dans l’Orient romain. Epoque Antonine et Sévérienne*, eds. A. Hostein, S. Lalanne. 2012. Arles: Errance, 2012, p.156–160.

14 AE 1998, 113.

15 Scheid, *Commentarii fratrum arvalium qui supersunt*, p.285–86 and 288–89; J. Scheid, “Le protocole arvale de l’année 213 et l’arrivée de Caracalla à Nicomédie”, *Epigrafia romana in area adriatica*, ed. G. Paci, Macerata: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 1998, p.439–451.

16 Dio 78,16,7. See also H. A. Carac. 5,4. For the inscriptions, see Piso and Deac. Their date was based on the absence of Caracalla’s epithet *Germanicus maximus*.

17 See, most recently, Piso and Deac (arguing for 213, yet without taking account of Christol). See also Opreanu (arguing for 214). Both with earlier respective bibliographies.

his final victory in the *expedition Germanica*. However, by themselves, the inscriptions do not provide evidence of an imperial journey. In fact, as we will see, there was a good reason to date Caracalla's presence there to 214.¹⁸

Dio reports that after travelling through Thrace, the emperor crossed the Hellespont, "not without danger".¹⁹ This appears to be an allusion to a near shipwreck recorded by Historia Augusta that put the emperor and his escort (his *protectores*) in great danger during their journey across the Hellespont.²⁰ Possible allusions to this event in the acts of the Arval Brethren and on a series of *denarii* seem to confirm the date of the episode late in 213 and, if true, further strengthen the arguments for the sequence of events proposed here.²¹

Dio further reported that after crossing the Hellespont, Caracalla intended to proceed to Ilion to perform celebrations in honour of Achilles.²² However, based on Scheid's new reading, Michel Christol doubted that this could be true, as the short time it took the imperial party to travel to Nicomedia, in his view, strongly suggests that they took the shortest route from the Raetian frontier via Sirmium (cf. AE 1971, 455 = SEG 1960, 505 = IvEph 802) and Thrace. According to Christol, therefore, there would have been no time for detours or prolonged stops.²³ However, if Caracalla and his entourage chose to travel on horseback at speeds of around or just over 30 km per day, as they did on other known occasions, they would indeed have had sufficient time for a detour to Ilion in the autumn of 213.²⁴ Dio's account is therefore probably accurate.

Nevertheless, Michel Christol was certainly right to point out in 2012 that all the imperial visits and activities in the Balkans and Asia Minor recorded by Dio, Herodian and the Historia Augusta for the period before Caracalla left Nicomedia on his way south to Syrian Antioch could not have taken place in the short two months between the emperor's *victoria Germanica* at the End of September in 213 and his arrival in Nicomedia in the first days of December of

18 See Christol, p.160-61 and below, at n. 33.

19 Dio 78,16,7. See Christol, p.156-60.

20 HA Carac. 5,8: *Per Thracias cum praef. praet. iter fecit: inde cum in Asiam traiceret, naufragii periculum adit anterna fracta... Pace. C. Letta*, "naufragio" di Caracalla in Cassio Dione, nell'Historia Augusta e nei commentari degli Arvali", *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 103 (1994), p.188-190; Escort: Speidel, Protectors and Assassins - Caracalla's guards on the day he died, p.421-431.

21 CIL VI 2103, pars b = Scheid, *Commentarii fratrum arvalium qui supersunt*, p.283, nr. 99: [...] *quod dominus noster (...) s]alvus servatus sit*. RIC 319B (TR P XVII). These coins were Caracalla's only coins to show Neptune. Unfortunately, the reference to the shipwreck episode must remain hypothetical in both cases.

22 Herodian's account (4,8,3-5) seems slightly confused, as he seems to date the emperor's visit to Ilion to 214, claiming that Caracalla imitated Achilles "once again" on that occasion. Perhaps the emperor visited Ilion twice, once in 213 and twice in 214.

23 Christol, p.160.

24 For Caracalla and his entourage riding on horseback, see Dio 79,5,1-5 with Speidel, *Protectors and Assassins - Caracalla's guardians on the day he died*, p.421. (Compare Septimius Severus: Dio 74,15,3 and 75,1,3. Speidel, *Protectors and Assassins - Caracalla's guards on the day he died*, p.430). For speed and time calculations, see *The Standford Geospatial Network Model of the Roman World* (<http://orbis.stanford.edu>). Christol, p.160 is surely correct that a detour to Porolissum and other parts of Dacia in 213 (see below) overstretch the time available.

the same year.²⁵ Christol therefore convincingly argued that the surviving evidence best fits an itinerary in which Caracalla passed the winter twice in Nicomedia, first in 213/214 and again in 214/215.²⁶ According to Christol, Caracalla returned to Thrace in 214, after his first winter in the Bithynian capital, and returned to Asia Minor and Bithynia in the second half of that year.²⁷

New documentary evidence has come to light that supports the reconstruction of Caracalla's journey.²⁸ Two recently published discharge documents implied the emperor's presence in Thrace on 28. February 214.²⁹ These documents confirm the recruitment of Thracian soldiers (*Trax / dilectarius ex provincia Thracia*) into at least two different expeditionary units from Upper Germany on that day (*miles factus in leg. VIII Augusta / leg. XXII P(rimigenia) p(ia) f(ideli) a vivo Antonino Magno*).³⁰ Both the wording *miles factus ... a vivo Antonino Magno* of these official texts and the procedure they record imply the emperor's presence in Thrace during the *dilectus*.³¹ A distinct group of inscriptions on Thracian and Illyrian legionary soldiers in Upper and Lower Germany refer to the same recruiting operation under Caracalla in 214.³²

Caracalla probably decided and arranged his stay at Nicomedia in the winter of 213/214 (rather than e.g. on the Lower Danube) months before his arrival in early December 213. When he returned to Thrace in February 214, he evidently had business to do. A passage from *Historia Augusta* appears to refer to this context: he "then made ready for a march to the Orient but interrupted his journey and stopped in Dacia" (*dein ad orientem profectionem parans omisso itinere, in Dacia resedit*).³³ 214, therefore, most likely was the year in which Caracalla visited Dacia.³⁴ An inscription from Oescus suggests that during Caracalla's visit to the region, the Roman army had to deal with hostilities from the Dacian tribe of the *Carpi*.³⁵ The same remark from *Historia Augusta* also

25 Christol, p.155-167.

26 Accepted by H. Halfmann in his review of A. Hostein & S. Lanne (Ed.), *Les voyages des empereurs dans l'Orient, romain. Époques antonine et sévérienne*. Arles: Errance, 2012, in HZ 299, 2014, p.447-448.

27 Christol, p.162-63. Unfortunately, Christol's reconstruction has not been considered in all recent scholarship. It was missed e.g. by A. Imrie, "Caracalla and 'Alexander's Phalanx': Caught at a Crossroads of Evidence", *Greece & Rome*, 68 (2021), p.222-328; Piso & Deac; I. Syvärne, *Caracalla. A Military Biography*. Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2017; Opreanu, p.16-23.

28 AE 2006, 1866 = AE 2018, 1978. AE 2018, 1977.

29 For what follows see esp. P. Weiss, "Eine honesta mission im Sonderformat: Neuartige Bronzurkunden für Veteranen der Legionen in Germania superior under Gordian III", *Chiron*, 45 (2015), p.23-75, to which this contribution owes much.

30 Weiss, p.48-9.

31 M. A. Speidel, *Heer und Herrschaft im Römischen Reich der Hohen Kaiserzeit*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2009, p.213-34, 329-30, and 323-33. Weiss, p.49-51.

32 G. Alföldy, *Römische Heeresgeschichte, Beiträge 1962-1985*. Amsterdam: Brill, 1987, p.368-370. See also Weiss, p.50-52 with further evidence.

33 HA. Carac. 5, 4

34 Christol, p.160-61; P. Forni, *Caracalla: Père de la citoyenneté universelle?*. Paris: Ellipses, 2021, p.199.

35 HA Carac. 10,6; CIL III 14416 = ILS 7178 = ILBulg 18. Cf. B. Gerov, "Die Invasion der Carpen im Jahre 214", *Beiträge zur Geschichte der römischen Provinzen Moesien und Thrakien: gesammelte Aufsätze*, Band 1, Amsterdam: Hakert, 1980, p.251-258, and now esp. A. B. Biernacki, and N. Sharankov, "A Hitherto Unknown Aspect of the Military Activity of the Legio I Italica considering a Recently Discovered Pedestal with a Greek Inscription from Novae." *Archaeologia Bulgarica*, 22/3 (2018), p. 16. With an improved reading of the inscription.

contains an explicit reference to the preparation of a *profecion ad orientem*. Given that the term *profecion* was used here in its technical sense (which it most likely was), it means that Caracalla was preparing to officially launch his Parthian War, the *bellum Armeniacum Parthumque* (HA Carac. 6,1) or the *expedition feracissima orientalis*, as was the war's official name (CIL VIII 2564 = 18052 = ILS 470) in Thrace early in 214.³⁶ Moreover, imperial and provincial coinage suggests that a military event of major symbolic significance occurred in Ulpia Serdica in 214, which appears to have marked the official beginning of the Parthian campaign.³⁷

Herodian's comment that Caracalla "suddenly became Alexander" when he arrived in Thrace no doubt reflects his Parthian ambitions and dates the relevant imperial pronouncements to earlier months of the year.³⁸ Cassius Dio probably refers to the same event when remarking that the emperor informed the Senate by letter that Alexander had come to life again in the person of the Augustus.³⁹ Among other things, Caracalla now allegedly wore Macedonian clothes and weapons, levied and drilled a Macedonian phalanx, and even acquired several elephants.⁴⁰ According to Cassius Dio, the elephants were to imply that Caracalla "might seem to be imitating Alexander, or rather, perhaps, Dionysus".⁴¹ Dio thus suggests that by imitating Alexander, Caracalla revealed his intention to subdue the Parthian Empire. The reference to Dionysus even suggested conquests as far as India.

Locally produced imagery on coins and other objects from Thrace and elsewhere appear to have been inspired by the emperor's new style and appear to express local attitudes and expectations. Thus, a unique bronze plaque from Philippopolis showing Hercules with the lion's skin on the left and Caracalla with a miniature elephant's skin around his shoulders on the right expresses the equality of Hercules and Caracalla as Alexander-Dionysus.⁴² As suggested by Milena Raycheva, the local creation of this image may have been the *Alexandreia Pythia* games that the Thracian *koinon* held in Philippopolis in honour of Caracalla.⁴³ At any rate, local coinage from Philippopolis commemorating the games prominently depicts Hercules with a lion's skin.⁴⁴ For chronological reasons, the most likely date of the games was 214 during the emperor's stay in the province.

36 On this aspect and what follows now see now Speidel, *Caracalla in Thrace and the Beginning of his Parthian War*, p.161-172.

37 Speidel, *Caracalla in Thrace and the Beginning of his Parthian War*, p.168-69.

38 Hdn. 4,8,1.

39 Dio 78,7,2.

40 Dio 78,7,1-2. 78,18,1; Hdn. 4,8,1-2.

41 Dio 78,7,4. See also IGRR 4,468 (Pergamon): Νέος Διόνυσος.

42 See the excellent discussion by M. Raycheva, "On Caracalla, Elephants and the Alexandreia Games in Philippopolis", *Studia Classica Serdicensia V, Monuments and Texts in Antiquity and Beyond*, ed. M. Slavova and N. Sharankov. Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, 2016, p.276-289.

43 Hdn. 4,8. Cf. SEG 55, 757 and 55, 766. Cf. also SEG 55, 758; Raycheva, p.282-83. For a recent discussion, see Andreeva, who suggests a date in 215.

44 Varbanov 1436. 1465. Moushmov 5365. Other coins minted in Philippopolis also feature Caracalla and Hercules: Varbanov 1503. 1512. Moushmov 5369. 5428. Etc. For Caracalla with lions, see Dio 79,1,5. 79,4,5. 79,7,2-3; HA Carac. 5,5 and 9.

Large-scale recruitment and troop deployments were among the emperor's activities early in 214. The expeditionary forces for the Parthian War from the German and Pannonian armies crossed Thrace in 214 on their way to their winter quarters.⁴⁵ Young Thracians were recruited by the emperor into units of the Roman expeditionary forces in early 214, as mentioned above. The surviving administrative records on the papyrus of *cohort XX Palmyrenorum* from Dura Europos also record extraordinary drafts from Palmyra and the Near East into that unit in 214.⁴⁶ No doubt, therefore, other recruiting efforts were also going on elsewhere. However, in two cases in 214, such drafts may have been of a more symbolic nature. Caracalla is said to have set up a traditional Macedonian phalanx of allegedly 16,000 hoplites dressed and equipped in the ancient style. Although the reported size may have been inspired by Greek literature on military theory and was perhaps not met in reality, there is no reason to doubt the short-lived existence of Caracalla's Macedonian phalanx, as was recently reported.⁴⁷ Cassius Dio stated that he saw the emperor drill this unit at Nicomedia in the winter of 214/15.⁴⁸ Finally, Herodian also reports how Caracalla set up a traditional Spartan unit (*lochos*).⁴⁹ This probably also happened in 214. The gravestones of some of its (?) soldiers have been found at Sparta.⁵⁰

In 214, Caracalla arrested Armenia's king.⁵¹ According to Cassius Dio, the king was quarrelling with his sons. Caracalla, pretending to help resolve the situation, summoned the king in a friendly letter, but then arrested and imprisoned him. However, rather than submitting to the emperor, the Armenians took up arms against Rome.⁵² The exact date of

45 Alfoldy, p.368-370; AE 2006, 1866 = AE 2018, 1978. AE 2018, 1977. IK = 58, 122 = AE = 1976, 642. IK = 58, 123 = AE = 1976, 641. CIL III 7396. AE 1976, 640. AE 1947, 188 = IK 39, 173. IK 20, 55. Cf. M. P. Speidel, *Roman Army Pay Scales I*. Amsterdam, 1984, p.12-14; M. P. Speidel, *Roman Army Studies II*. Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1992, p.181; M. H. Sayar, *Perinthos – Herakleia (Marmara Ereğlisi) und Umgebung. Geschichte, Testimonien, griechische und lateinische Inschriften*. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der, 1998, p.261-264. Alternatively, (some) the inscription(s) might have been found in 218 (cf. Dio 80,4,5).

46 P. Dura 100 and 101 = RMR 1 and 2. J. G. Gilliam, *Roman Army Papers*. Amsterdam: Gieben, 1986, p.290; R. Marichal, "Introduction", *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores*, Vol. IX. Olten: Graf, 1977, pp. 8-11.

47 Thus, Wheeler, 2004, p. 313. Imrie, 2021, pp. 231-32.

48 Dio 78,7,1-2. 78,18,1; Hdn. 4,8,2-3. 4,9,4; A. Imrie, "Caracalla and 'Alexander's Phalanx': Caught at a Crossroads of Evidence", *Greece & Rome*, 68 (2021), p.229-328 argues that no new phalanx was set up but that Dio's reference was to men being enrolled into existing legions, which had developed towards "phalangite formations". Yet, the *discerns phalangariorum* of *regio II Parthica*, as known from his gravestone in Syrian Apamea (EDCS 00685), probably had nothing to do with Caracalla's Macedonian phalanx.

49 Hdns. 4,8,2-3. 4,9,4.

50 Gravestones: SEG 45, 287; C. R. Whittaker, *Herodian*, Vol. I. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969, p. 414, n. 4 suggested that an inscription from Cappadocian Caesarea Mazaka refers to Caracalla's Spartan *lochos*: H. Grégoire, stating, "Rapport sur un voyage d'exploration dans le Pont et en Cappadoce." *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique*, 33 (1909), p.63-66, no. 44 = R. Merkelbach & J. Stauber, *Steinepigramme aus dem griechischen Osten*, Vol. 3: Der "Ferne Osten" und das Landesinnere bis zum Taurus. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001, p.38-9, no. 13/6/1. However, see L. Robert, *Les gladiateurs dans l'Orient grec*. Paris: E. Champion, 1940, p.126-128, esp. One hundred and twenty eight n.1 no. 74.

51 On the subject, see, e.g. L. E. Pattersen, "Caracalla's Armenia", *Syllecta Classica*, 24(2013), pp. 173-199.

52 Dio 78,12,2. Cf. Dio. 78,21,1

his arrest remains unknown, but it must have occurred before winter when Dio witnessed the construction of two numerous engines “both for the Armenian and the Parthian war”.⁵³

At some point in the second half of 214, Caracalla left Thrace, apparently having decided to undertake steps to improve his health.⁵⁴ The emperor embarked (probably from the port of Perinthus) to Elaia, the harbour of Pergamon, where he visited the famous healing temple of Asclepius. Numismatic evidence suggests that in his first address to the local inhabitants, he presented himself as a victorious general, probably speaking about the upcoming Parthian War.⁵⁵ Before 23. September, after completing the healing procedures in the temple, Caracalla continued his journey and travelled via several other cities in western Asia Minor (apparently favouring those with famous *asclepeia*) to his winter quarters in Nicomedia. In the following year, he would return to Pergamon for a second visit on his way to Antioch.⁵⁶ Again, the expected upcoming victory over the Parthians was celebrated.⁵⁷

If the above considerations are correct, they provide a basis for a better understanding of Caracalla's politics and actions during his journey through the Balkans in 213 and 214 and provide new light on some of the events that took place in those months, among which were the early stages of his *expedition feracissima orientalis*.

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53 Dio 78,18,1.

54 For what follows cf. Dio 78,15,2-5; Nollé, *Die Krankheit des Kaisers Caracalla*, p.26-33; Nollé, *Caracallas Kur in Pergamon – Krankheit und Heilung eines römischen Kaisers im Spiegel seiner Münzen*, p.409-419.

55 Nollé, *Die Krankheit des Kaisers Caracalla*, p.411-12 with fig. 7.3, on page 413.

56 Nollé, *Die Krankheit des Kaisers Caracalla*, p.414 places Caracalla's second visit to Pergamon in the same year 214, but that seems rather unlikely.

57 Nollé, *Die Krankheit des Kaisers Caracalla*, p.415 with fig. 9.2 and 3, and 416 with fig. 10.

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