

RE-EVALUATING THE CHRONOLOGY OF CARACALLA'S REIGN: WHEN WAS CARACALLA IN NICOMEDIA?

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Summary: It has become increasingly common to assert that Caracalla wintered in Nicomedia in 213/214 rather than 214/215. This is important because it has led scholars to argue that Caracalla's activities and campaigns in the Balkans are largely invented by ancient historiographers. The present article examines and rejects the evidentiary basis of the new dating and, through an analysis of Caracalla's itinerary and relevant coinage, provides strong support for the theory that Caracalla wintered in Nicomedia in 214/215. This reconstruction significantly influences the wider chronology of Caracalla's reign and restores his activities in the Balkans to the history books.

INTRODUCTION

Caracalla became sole emperor after murdering his brother Geta, probably in December 211, and, after solidifying his hold on power, he then campaigned against the Germans in 213.¹ At some point after this campaign, Caracalla journeyed to the East and never returned to the capital.

- 1 After Septimius Severus' death on 4 February 211, Caracalla entered Rome in spring, perhaps on his birthday, 4 April: Alföldy 1996: 28, 30; Hekster and Kaizer 2012: 96. Some confusion remains about when Caracalla murdered Geta and became sole ruler: Birley 1988: 189; Vagi 1999, 286-287; Campbell 2005: 16 put Geta's death in December 211 but Hill 1978: 33; Whitby 2007: 133; de Blois 2019: 46 put it in February 212. However, the latter date is based on the Life of Geta in the *Historia Augusta* which is thoroughly unreliable: Rohrbacher 2013: 158. December 211, on the other hand, is based on solid evidence: Cass. Dio 78[77].2.5; Perpetua 7.9, 16.3-4; the Chronography of 354 (under the heading *depositio martyrum*); van Beek 1936: 162. See further Vagi 1999: 287; van Minnen 2016: 212 n. 29 who argue convincingly for December 211. Hereafter, Caracalla campaigned against the Germans and it has sometimes been argued that Caracalla already left Rome in 212 for this purpose: e.g. Rowan 2012: 116;

On his way, he wintered in Nicomedia and, based on an inscription from the Arval Brethren, scholars have traditionally assumed that Caracalla left Rome in 214 and arrived in Nicomedia towards the end of the year.² However, John Scheid broke with this view and, reinterpreting the just mentioned inscription, argued that Caracalla in fact arrived in late 213.³ This has been widely accepted by the scholars who cite Scheid's work.⁴ In Scheid's reconstruction, then, Caracalla left Rome to campaign against the Germans in 212 or 213 and thereafter went directly to Nicomedia with negligible activities along the way.

However, I will argue that Scheid's arguments are problematic: they essentially rest on the assumption that the Arval Brethren did not deviate from tradition in their protocols, but these protocols do in fact exhibit noteworthy inconsistencies. Furthermore, I will show that Scheid's suggestion itself in fact rests on a supposed inconsistency by the Arval Brethren. Importantly, the other existing evidence strongly suggests that Caracalla wintered in Nicomedia in 214/215: firstly, Scheid's reconstruction demands that Caracalla travelled from Mogontiacum to Nicomedia in just over two months, which I will argue is unlikely. Secondly, Caracalla's coinage suggests that he returned to Rome to give a *largesse* after the Alemannic campaigns of 213 and therefore only set out for Nicomedia in the following year. According to my reconstruction, Caracalla was thus in Rome from spring 211 to spring 214, except for some months

Schöpe 2014: 45. Potter 2004: 141; Davenport 2017: 76 suggest late 212 or early 213. However, an inscription from the Arval Brethren from 11 August 213 shows that Caracalla was just about to cross the *limes* from Raetia at this time (Scheid 1998a: No. 99a, L. 21-23 = CIL VI 2086, 20-22). Furthermore, Caracalla's new title, *Germanicus Maximus*, became common on coins and inscriptions in 214: see e.g. RSC 239, 242 with Southern 2001: 209. This strongly suggests that Caracalla only left Rome in spring or early summer 213. A final important chronological problem of Caracalla's reign is the publication of the *Constitutio Antoniniana*: on this, see recently van Minnen 2016.

2 Inscription: Scheid 1998a: No. 99b2.

3 Scheid 1990: 296-298; 1998a: 288-289; 1998b.

4 See e.g. Letta 1994: 188; Szabó 2003: 139-140; 150; Mráv and Ottományi 2005: 203; Pont 2010: 195; Christol 2012; Hekster and Kaizer 2012: 90; Kovács 2012: 387; Rowan 2012: 132; Christol 2014: 135; Opreanu 2015: 19; Letta 2016: 262; Davenport 2017: 76; Scott 2018: 1; Laflí *et al.* 2019: 144 n. 35. Some scholars still retain the original dating, but they do not mention Scheid's arguments. See e.g. Potter 2004: 143; Peter 2005: 109; de Blois 2019: 48-49.

campaigning against the Germans. The question of when exactly Caracalla wintered in Nicomedia has wide consequences, as I will explore in the last section.

THE ARVAL BRETHERN

So far, the key evidence in the debate regarding Caracalla's stay in Nicomedia has been the protocol of the Arval Brethren, which was inscribed annually in their sanctuary and outlined rituals performed in the previous year by the Arval Brethren. There are two key inscriptions for our purposes and, due to their importance for determining when Caracalla wintered in Nicomedia, I have given them in full. The first inscription (Scheid 1998a, No. 99b1 = CIL VI 2103a)⁵ mentions two rituals, performed for unspecified reasons:

[In Capitolio ante cellam Iunonis reginae fratres aruales conuenerunt et immolauerunt per L. Armenium Peregrinum promag(istrum),]
 [quod dominus noster Imp(erator) Caes(ar) M. Aurellius] Anto[ninus Pius Felix Aug(ustus) --- Ioui o(ptimo) m(aximo) b(ouem) m(arem) Iunoni reginae b(ouem) f(eminam), Mineruae b(ouem) f(eminam),]
 [---, Fe]licit(ati) Aug(ustae) b(ouem) f(eminam), [---. Adfuerunt]
 [L. Armenius Peregrinus promag(ister), --- A]grippinus, P. Ael[ius Coeranus iun(ior), ---]
 [---. Detulit Primus Co]rnel(ianus) public(us) a comm(entariis) [fratrum arualium.]
 [--- in Capitolio ante cellam] Iun(onis) reg(inae) fratr(es) arual(es) [conuenerunt et immolauerunt per L. Armenium Peregrinum promag(istrum),]
 [quod dominus noster Imp(erator) Caes(ar) M.] Aurellius Antoninu[s pius felix Aug(ustus) Parth(icus) max(imus)]

5 For the Arval inscriptions, I have used the edition of Scheid 1998a, but for convenience I have provided the number in CIL for the most important references.

[Brit(annicus) max(imus) Germ(anicus) max(imus), p(ontifex) m(axi-
 mus), trib(unicia) pot(estate) sexta/septima decima],⁶ imp(erator)
 (tertium), co(n)s(ul) (quartum), proco(n)s(ul), [---]
 [--- s]aluus seruatus sit, I[oui o(ptimo) m(aximo) b(ouem) m(arem),
 Iunoni reginae b(ouem) f(eminam), Mineruae b(ouem) f(eminam),]
 [---, Genio Antonini Aug(usti) ta]u[r] (um), Iun(oni) Iuliae Aug(ustae)
 b(ouem) f(emi[nam], ---.]
 [Adfuerunt L. Armenius Peregrinus promag(ister), C. Sulpici]us Pollio,
 P. Aelius Co[eranus iun(ior), ---]
 [---. Detulit Primus Cornelia]nus public(us) a comm(entariis) [fratrum
 arualium.]

Since Caracalla had been consul four times and imperator three, the inscription dates from either 213 or 214. The second inscription (Scheid 1998a, No. 99b2 = CIL VI 2103b) tells us that, during the consulship of Messalla and Sabinus (ordinary consuls for 214), the Arval Brethren sacrificed in gratitude for Caracalla arriving safely to his winter quarters in Nicomedia. Hereafter, we are told that Caius Sulpicius Pollio (the *promagister*) in place of the *magister* (the leader of the Arval Brethren), Marcus Iulius Gessius Bassianus, sacrificed to various gods, as well as to the *Salus* of the emperor, whereafter the inscription breaks off:

[Mes]salla et Sabino co(n)s(ulibus)
 [--- in Capitolio ante cellam Iu]n(onis) reg(inae) [f]ratres aruales
 conuenerunt ad
 [uota soluenda, quod dom]inus n(oster) imp(erator) Caes(ar) M. Aure-
 lius Antoninus pius
 [felix Aug(ustus) Parth(icus) max(imus) Brit(annicus) max(imus)
 Germ(anicus) ma]x(imus), p(ontifex) m(aximus), t(ribunicia)
 p(otestate) (septima decima), imp(erator) (tertium), co(n)s(ul)
 (quartum), p(ater) p(atriciae), proco(n)s(ul), salu[us
 atque incolumis pro securitate prouin]ciar(um) felicissime ad
 [h]iberna Nicomediae ing[res-]

6 This is from the edition of Scheid 1998a and is meant to indicate that the inscription dates to either 213 (*sexta decima*) or 214 (*septima decima*).

[sus sit, et immolauit C. Sulpicius Polli]o promag(ister) uice M. Iuli Gessi Bassiani mag(istri)
 [Ioui o(ptimo) m(aximo) b(ouem) m(arem) a(uratum), Iunoni reg(inae) b(ouem) f(eminam) a(uratam), Mineruae b(ouem)] f(eminam) a(uratam), Saluti Imp(eratoris) Antonini b(ouem) f(eminam) a(uratam), Fort(unae) duci b(ouem)
 [f(eminam) a(uratam), --- Lari u]iali (?) t(aurum) a(uratum), Genio Antonini Aug(usti) t(aurum) a(uratum), Iun(oni) Iuliae
 [Aug(ustae) b(ouem) f(eminam) a(uratam). Adfuerunt] C. Sulpicius Pollio, P. Aelius Coeranus iun(ior), M. [---]
 [---.] (vacat).

Scheid, upon personal inspection of the fragments, has asserted that they fit together, and that CIL VI 2103a therefore should be joined to CIL VI 2103b to form one long inscription.⁷ In other words, the latter follows the former chronologically.

In the Severan Age, only ordinary consuls, rather than suffect ones, were used for dating by the Arval Brethren.⁸ Therefore, the mention of the ordinary consuls of 214 in the second inscription, and the fact that Caracalla had received the tribunician power seventeen times at this point, has traditionally led scholars to place Caracalla's arrival in Nicomedia in 214.⁹ However, there are some difficulties: the annual protocol of the Arval Brethren started with a mention of the new consuls by name in order to provide the year, which was generally followed by an important ritual wishing the emperor health and success on 3 January. Subsequent consular dating normally took the form *isdem consulibus* (under the same consuls) rather than a repetition of the consuls' names.¹⁰ However, in our inscription, the Arval Brethren mention the consuls by name and then move directly to Caracalla's safe arrival in Nicomedia rather than the rituals on 3 January. Wilhelm Henzen, in his foundational edition of the Arval *acta* from 1874, explained this by suggesting that the

7 See especially Scheid 2015.

8 I will discuss this below.

9 See e.g. Halfmann 1986: 224; Kienast 1996: 162.

10 On the Arval Brethren and their praxis, see especially Scheid 1990.

Arval Brethren had simply used the consuls' names again instead of writing *isdem consulibus*, and that the mention of the consuls by name therefore should not be seen as the start of a new annual protocol.¹¹ This facilitated the traditional view that Caracalla arrived in Nicomedia in 214.

However, Scheid rejected this solution since it contrasted with the Arval Brethren's normal procedure and instead asserted that Caracalla arrived in late 213.¹² He argued that the Arval ceremony thanking the gods for Caracalla's safe arrival in Nicomedia had to postdate 31 December 213, since the new consuls mentioned were inserted on 1 January, but predate the large ceremony on 3 January 214 since this ceremony is not mentioned directly after the consuls as normally. 2 January was a *dies ater* on which no religious ceremonies could take place and Scheid therefore concluded that 1 January was the only option. However, Dio asserts that Caracalla celebrated the Saturnalia (which started on 17 December) in Nicomedia.¹³ Scheid therefore suggests that Caracalla arrived just before the Saturnalia and that it hereafter took around two weeks for the news to reach Rome where the Arval Brethren then celebrated Caracalla's safe arrival on 1 January. In Scheid's reconstruction, then, Caracalla was victorious against the Germans in late September and then journeyed immediately to Nicomedia with negligible military activities in the Balkans, arriving at his winter quarters in mid-December.

The scholars who mention Scheid's arguments often treat them as wholly conclusive.¹⁴ However, there seems to be some confusion regarding Scheid's work. The joining of two well-known inscriptions is sometimes presented as new and decisive evidence, supposedly unknown before Scheid: for example, Coriolan Opreanu recently wrote that "the most relevant epigraphic document to our discussion is the new fragment from *Acta Fratrum Arvalium* which attests the presence of Caracalla in his winter headquarters at Nicomedia as early as 17 December 213",¹⁵

11 Henzen 1874: CIC.

12 Scheid 1990: 296-298; 1998a: 288-289; 1998b.

13 Cass. Dio 79[78].8.4.

14 See footnote 4.

15 Opreanu 2015, 19. See likewise Szabó 2003: 140 who asserts that "eine neulich bekannt gewordene Quelle" shows that Caracalla arrived in Nicomedia in 213 and Kovács 2012: 387 who writes that the "Edition der *neuesten* Fragmente der *Fratres Arvales*" (my emphasis) is decisive for this question.

and he then refers to Scheid. Furthermore, Scheid himself and his supporters often place great emphasis on the joining of the fragments as key to determining when Caracalla was in Nicomedia.¹⁶ However, this joining of fragments does not, in fact, decisively influence the question of when Caracalla arrived in Nicomedia. Rather, Scheid's argumentation fundamentally rests on his assertion that *Messalla et Sabino consulibus* could not have been a synonym for *isdem consulibus*, as suggested by Henzen, and that the mention of these consuls must have signified the beginning of a new year.¹⁷ This argument is evidently not tied to the joining of the two fragments. If Henzen's suggestion is followed, on the other hand, the second inscription (99b2) simply presents us with a ceremony from some point in 214, regardless of whether it is preceded by the other fragment (99b1), as suggested by Scheid.¹⁸ Thus, Scheid's arguments do not rest on 'new' evidence but essentially on the assumption that the Arval Brethren could not have varied their inscriptional praxis and that their annual records therefore were painstakingly consistent.

The *acta* of the Arval Brethren were indeed often seen as highly monotonous.¹⁹ However, Mary Beard in a lucid article showed that the *acta*

16 See especially Scheid 2015. Supporters: Letta 1994: 188; Christol 2012: 155; 2014: 135; Laflı *et al.* 2019: 144 n. 35.

17 As Scheid 1990: 297 himself points out: "S'il [Henzen] a raison, la question est tranchée, et nous pouvons admettre que les deux cérémonies concernées sont postérieures aux *uota* annuels du 3 janvier."

18 Scheid 1990: 296-298; 1998a: 288-289 are relatively superficial and constitute brief rejections of Henzen's suggestion on the previously mentioned basis that *isdem consulibus* was generally used in the *acta* rather than repeating the names of the consuls. Scheid 1998b is more elaborate and adds new arguments (441-444) which attempt to move the ceremony celebrating Caracalla's arrival in Nicomedia into the Arval protocol of 213, as set out below. Lastly, Scheid 2015 informs us that the joining of the two fragments, which before was only hypothetical, has now been confirmed by personal inspection of the fragments. In this piece, Scheid (2015: 268-269) also argues that the mention of Alpinus as *magister* during a ceremony on 6 October 213 supports his conclusions about the date of Caracalla's stay in Nicomedia. However, this mention of Alpinus belongs to fragment 99a (which is clearly from 213), not to the fragments in question, namely 99b1 and 99b2, and cannot be used to date these. No *magister* is mentioned in 99b1, while Bassianus (*magister* for 214) occupies this role in 99b2.

19 Syme 1980: 1 says that the Arval *acta* are characterised by "repetition and tedium".

also exhibit inconsistencies and change. According to her, “the records of the Arval brethren show striking diversity and variation. The inscribed details of individual ceremonies differed considerably from year to year”.²⁰ Thus, Beard highlighted variation not necessarily in the rituals themselves but in the manner in which they were inscribed. This in itself warns against blindly trusting that the Arval Brethren were always painstakingly consistent. Furthermore, some of the variations are particularly interesting for our purposes: except for the use of *isdem consulibus*, the Arval Brethren generally repeat the names of individuals, such as the *magister*, the *promagister* and the groups of people present at the rites, even when this repetition occurs within a few lines and a form of *idem* would have sufficed. For example, in a largely intact inscription from 38 AD spanning 109 lines, there are 14 instances of *Taurus Statilius Corvinus promagister*, all placed prominently at the beginning of the sentence.²¹ However, a few years earlier (33-36 AD, according to Scheid’s dating), the expression *idem pro magistro* is used.²² Here we have the kind of onomastic inconsistency which Henzen suggested and Scheid rejected: generally, the Arval Brethren consistently repeat the name of the *promagister*, but for some reason they deviated from this practice in an inscription from the reign of Tiberius.

This deviation is not unique: for example, in the records of 58, the Arval Brethren present for the ceremony known as the *indictio* are mentioned twice by name, which is the common procedure generally adhered to, but for the same ritual in 59 they are first mentioned by name and hereafter referred to by the phrase: *in conlegio adfuerunt isdem qui supra scripti sunt* (present in the fraternity were the same people who are mentioned above).²³ There are several other examples where the Arval Brethren likewise refer back to a group of individuals without repeating their names.²⁴ Overall, then, the Arval Brethren almost always repeat the

20 Beard 1985: 127. Scheid 1990: 60-66 notes another form of diversity as he highlights that the length of the Arval records increases drastically in the course of the first century AD.

21 Scheid 1998a: No. 12c.

22 Scheid 1998a: No. 7a, Col. 2, L. 5.

23 Scheid 1998a: No. 27, L. 56.

24 See e.g. Scheid 1998a: No. 100a, L. 16, No. 102, L. 16-17.

names of individuals involved in their ceremonies, but sometimes they deviate from this otherwise consistent praxis. Once it is observed that the Arval Brethren were in fact not painstakingly consistent, it is not impossible that they also occasionally deviated from their normal praxis of writing *isdem consulibus* after mentioning the consuls' names at the start of the annual protocol and simply repeated the names instead.

This suggestion receives support from the fact that the mode of consular dating by the Arval Brethren actually changed significantly during the Severan Age: already in the early part of Tiberius' reign, it is evident that suffect consuls are used by the Arval Brethren to date their various rites.²⁵ This continues in a strikingly consistent manner all the way until Commodus to the point where the Arval inscriptions are an important source for our knowledge of the holders of suffect consulships. We only have inscriptions for two years during the period 193-213, but it is clear that hereafter the suffect consuls have disappeared from the consular dating in the Arval records.²⁶ Essentially, then, at some point during either the reign of Septimius Severus or Caracalla, the Arval Brethren instituted a significant change in the way they used the consuls as dating devices in their records, as only the ordinary consuls and not the suffect consuls were now used. If the Arval Brethren could institute such a striking rejection of a tradition that can be traced back to the revival of the priestly college in the early Principate, we cannot completely reject the possibility that other aspects of the traditional procedure surrounding consular dating, such as the use of *isdem consulibus* rather than repeating

25 Scheid 1998a: No. 4, Col. 2, L. 16-17. None of the previous inscriptions entails events that could have been dated by suffect consuls.

26 The only exception is the mention of Elagabalus and Adventus on 14 July 218 (Scheid 1998a: No. 100b, L. 29-30) which, of course, is tied to an anomalous situation: Elagabalus had just become emperor the month before, and the Arval Brethren therefore held the rite that included wishes for the emperor's well-being. This rite normally took place on 3 January and was preceded by a mention of the consuls by name. Deviating from praxis and mentioning the suffect consuls (Elagabalus and his colleague) by name may also have been a way to honour the new emperor, who indeed showed a noteworthy interest in the Arval Brethren as he joined the priestly college: Scheid 1998a: No. 100b, L. 25-29. There is one other possible use of suffect consuls, which Scheid 1998a: 279 tentatively places in 196 but he notes that "les sources ne sont pas claires".

the names of the consuls, could likewise have changed or at least become less consistent in this period.

Indeed, the use of *isdem consulibus* seems to have become significantly less common after Commodus: in one single inscription from the time of Nero, covering around ten months and running to 72 lines, *isdem consulibus* is used 9 times, but in all of the 20 inscriptions after Commodus (mostly dating from the Severan period and several of them lengthy) the expression is only used 3 times.²⁷ This is even more striking since one would expect a profusion of *isdem consulibus* to replace the names of the suffect consuls which disappeared from the Arval records in this period. With such few instances of *isdem consulibus* during a period in which the use of this expression should increase, and considering the fragmentary state of the evidence, we strictly speaking cannot know whether it remained common praxis during the Severans to use *isdem consulibus* rather than repeating the consuls' names. Importantly, the previous consistency of this praxis cannot be marshalled in support, since another traditional aspect of consular dating in the Arval records, the suffect consuls, demonstrably disappeared under the Severans. Furthermore, the strength of such a praxis often revolves around its frequency, and the scant instances of *isdem consulibus* during the Severans, even if its use was the norm in this period, therefore increases the likelihood that deviations could have taken place.

In sum, the Arval Brethren demonstrably deviated from the well-established pattern of repeating the names of the *promagister* and of the individuals attending the rites and sometimes used a form of *idem* instead; they instituted a significant change in the manner of consular dating at some point in the 190s or 200s, as suffect consuls were no longer used; and the use of *isdem consulibus* decreased drastically in the Severan Age to the point where it is difficult to discern whether its use was normal praxis or not. Against this background, it is possible that *Messalla et Sabino consulibus* was used instead of *isdem consulibus*, as suggested by Henzen. The rejection of this possibility is the foundation for Scheid's arguments and his redating of Caracalla's stay in Nicomedia, and we therefore cannot accept Scheid's conclusions as readily and unquestioningly as some scholars have done so far.

27 Scheid 1998a: No. 27. Scheid 1998a: No. 99a, L. 23-24, No. 102, L. 15, No. 103b, L. 3.

Indeed, once the details are inspected, Scheid's suggestion appears rather improbable and in fact itself relies on an inconsistency from the Arval Brethren: the leader of this religious group, the *magister*, was elected for one year and inserted on 17 December. All ceremonies carried out under a certain *magister* were inscribed in the spring following the end of his term in the sanctuary of the Arval Brethren. Furthermore, each annual protocol was finished by the inscription of so-called *piacula*, which were expiatory rites conducted in the spring in connection with the inscription of the protocol of the preceding year, and the fragment of the Arval protocol which contains the mention of Caracalla entering Nicomedia finishes with such *piacula*.²⁸ Consequently, if 99b1 dates from 213, as Scheid argues, it entails that both this fragment and 99b2 are inscribed in the Arval record of 213. As Scheid himself notes, this constitutes a problem for his explanation.²⁹ If the ceremony took place on 1 January 214 as suggested by Scheid, it should be included in the protocol of 214 since the Arval year started on 17 December and the new *magister* for 214, Gessius Bassianus, had been inserted on this date.³⁰ Scheid attempts to solve this problem by arguing that, since Caracalla had arrived in Nicomedia before the new *magister* took office on 17 December, the Arval ceremony celebrating this event was included in the protocol for 213.³¹

However, this explanation seems rather strained. Gessius Bassianus was clearly *magister* when the ceremony celebrating Caracalla's arrival in Nicomedia took place, and Scheid presents no other instances where a ceremony occurred in one year but was moved to the protocol of the previous year because the event that occasioned the ceremony happened in the latter period.³² Furthermore, such a praxis would open a Pandora's

28 Scheid 1998b: 442-443. On the praxis of the Arval Brethren more broadly, see Scheid 1990.

29 Scheid 1998b: 444 asks: "Comment expliquer cette anomalie?"

30 Bassianus as *magister*: Scheid 1998a: No. 99b2, L. 16.

31 Scheid 1998b: 444-446; 2015: 269-270.

32 Scheid 1998b: 446 points to the *piacula*, which were conducted under one *magister* but inscribed in the records of his predecessor, as a parallel supporting his argument. However, the *piacula* were expiatory rites connected specifically with the inscription of the protocol of the previous year. In other words, it was natural to let the *piacula* accompany the inscription of the previous year's record, since this highlighted that

box of protocol disputes: although the *cursus publicus* was remarkably fast, news from the edges of the Empire could take many weeks to arrive, especially in winter. For example, it took 63 days for Pertinax's accession to be announced in Alexandria and it took around 36 days for the death of Gaius Caesar in Lycia to reach Italy.³³ Consequently, for several weeks and potentially months after a new *magister* had taken over, material would have to be added to the former *magister*'s protocol as rites were performed due to events that had happened before 17 December. Furthermore, an exact date did not necessarily accompany all news, which would have caused disputes within the college regarding which *magister* should be allowed to include the resulting ceremony in his protocol. It makes more sense to assume that ceremonies were included in the protocol of the *magister* under whom they were carried out and, as mentioned, Scheid presents no evidence to the contrary. One could object that the Arval deviated from praxis occasionally and included the ceremony celebrating Caracalla's arrival in Nicomedia in the protocol of 213, despite conducting this ceremony on 1 January 214. However, Scheid's whole argument rests on the assumption that deviations from praxis are not an option.

Lastly, it is also worth noting the unlikely coincidence that Scheid's suggestion entails: Caracalla would have to arrive before the Saturnalia on 17 December and the news of his arrival would then have to be celebrated on exactly 1 January by the Arval Brethren. If the ceremony had taken place one day before, the consuls could not have been mentioned, and it could not have taken place after 1 January since, as mentioned, 2 January was a *dies ater* and 3 January was reserved for the big annual ceremony for the emperor's health. Thus, Scheid's suggestion entails the unlikely coincidence that the ceremony was conducted on exactly 1 January 214 and not one day before or after.

the inscription had been performed correctly. Essentially, then, the *piacula* accompanied the previous year's record due to a ritual connection to this. Furthermore, ending the record of one year with *piacula* was an established praxis. This, of course, is very different from an untraditional, *ad hoc* inclusion of a ceremony in the previous year's record due to a temporal connection, as suggested by Scheid.

33 Ramsay 1925: 69-70, 72. See also Elliot 1955.

Importantly, Henzen's suggestion avoids moving any ceremonies to protocols where they do not chronologically belong. If *Messalla et Sabino consulibus* is simply a synonym for *isdem consulibus*, Caracalla's arrival in Nicomedia and the resulting ceremony are placed sometime in 214. This repetition of the consuls' names would be a less surprising deviation than moving a ceremony into the protocol of the previous year. Furthermore, the presence of *piacula* are easily explained if we follow Henzen, since it simply means that Caracalla arrived late in 214 and that no more ceremonies were celebrated by the Arval Brethren that year. Lastly, Scheid's suggestion that the fragment mentioning Caracalla's entry into Nicomedia and the other fragment of the Arval *acta*, which included two ceremonies regarding Caracalla's health, should be joined also fits well with Henzen's solution. These two ceremonies would then be placed earlier in 214, but after 3 January, and could for example be the result of Caracalla campaigning in the Balkans, just like Caracalla's campaign against the Germans had occasioned two ceremonies in 213.³⁴

OTHER EVIDENCE

It should by now be clear that Scheid does not present new evidence or incontestably persuasive arguments that decisively solve the question of when Caracalla wintered in Nicomedia, as some scholars have asserted. Both Scheid's and Henzen's solution involve a deviation from established Arval praxis and, although Henzen's solution appears simpler and less strained, it is therefore imperative to examine other evidence for the timing of Caracalla's stay in Nicomedia. Importantly, this evidence suggests that Caracalla arrived in Nicomedia in late 214.

Travelling to Nicomedia

34 For possible reasons for these ceremonies, see Letta 1994; Scheid 1998b: 440-441. Ceremonies in connection with the German campaigns: Scheid 1998a: No. 99a, L. 20-29.

Firstly, there is a very practical element of importance here, namely the time it would have taken to journey to Nicomedia: given the Arval inscription celebrating Caracalla's victory over the Germans on 6 October 213, he probably won the final battle close to ancient Mogontiacum in late September.³⁵ Furthermore, we know from an inscription that Caracalla stopped at Sirmium on his way to Nicomedia and both Dio and Herodian assert that Caracalla also went to Pergamum before Nicomedia.³⁶ According to Orbis, it takes on average 112 days to travel from Mogontiacum to Nicomedia over Sirmium and Pergamum, which is based on an average travel speed of thirty kilometres per day, the normally accepted marching speed of Roman soldiers.³⁷ It seems highly probable that Caracalla was travelling with at least some infantry contingents and that some of his extensive retinue travelled on foot.³⁸ Herodian, in fact, asserts that Caracalla himself mostly travelled on foot.³⁹ Thus, if Caracalla departed in early October and travelled almost four months (112 days), he would have arrived in Nicomedia by late January 214. This is clearly incompatible with Scheid's reconstruction.

However, thirty kilometers per day might be optimistic for an emperor with an extensive retinue and grand receptions in the towns that welcomed him.⁴⁰ Helmut Halfmann, for example, has calculated the emperor's average speed to be between twenty and thirty kilometers per day.⁴¹ Furthermore, the timing of Caracalla's potential journey in late autumn and early winter would probably have further lowered this average

35 The location is given as near the river Main in *Aur. Vict. Caes.* 21.2 which flows eastward from Mogontiacum into Germanic territory. The battle must therefore have taken place close to Mogontiacum. According to <https://orbis.stanford.edu/>, there are 1156 kilometres between Rome and Mogontiacum and the *cursus publicus* travelled about 80 kilometres a day, so it would have taken around two weeks for news of Caracalla's victory to reach Rome. On the speed of the *cursus publicus*, see Riepl 1913: 123-240; Ramsay 1925; Elliot 1955; Duncan-Jones 1990: 7-29; Kolb 2000: 308-332.

36 *Cass.* 78[77].16.8; *Hdn.* 4.8.3; *IvEph* 802.

37 <http://orbis.stanford.edu/>.

38 The thirty kilometres per day are taken from the fourth-century *De re militari* by Vegetius (1.9) but is generally accepted. See e.g. Benario 1986 or Orbis' assumed average marching speed.

39 *Hdn.* 4.7.6.

40 As asserted by e.g. Opreanu 2015: 19 n. 57.

41 Halfmann 1986: 86, 190.

due to poor weather conditions. Indeed, Ammianus tells us that the advisors of Valentinian I vehemently opposed his suggestion of marching from Trier to Illyria in winter to assist forces which were being overrun, although this journey was less than half as long as Caracalla's: "They urged that the roads, hardened with frost, where neither any growth of grass would be found for fodder nor anything else fit for the use of the army, could not be penetrated".⁴² The average speed used above, which still results in a journey time far too long for Scheid's chronology, is thus probably too high.

Furthermore, the journey-time of four months presupposes four months of constant, effective travelling of thirty kilometers per day with no stops or detours. This is clearly unrealistic: Dio, Herodian and the *Historia Augusta* all mention some sort of military activity centred on Dacia, and Caracalla also found time to reform the military organisation of Pannonia.⁴³ Likewise, Caracalla created a new army unit mirroring Alexander's Macedonian phalanx, and Herodian vaguely mentions administrative arrangements (ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι διοικήσας)⁴⁴ carried out by Caracalla before arriving in Pergamum.⁴⁵ Furthermore, both Dio and Herodian assert that Caracalla conducted extensive games and honoured Achilles upon his arrival in Asia and that he stopped to visit Achilles' tomb near the site of ancient Troy.⁴⁶ Dio also laments the lavish lodgings that had to be built wherever Caracalla travelled, which does not suggest that this emperor travelled speedily.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Caracalla visited the sanctuary of Apollo Grannus, probably the temple near modern Faimingen, and the sanctuary of Asclepius in Pergamum, seemingly because he was

42 Amm. Marc. 30.3.3. See likewise Amm. Marc. 30.5.14.

43 Cass. Dio 78[77].16.7; *Hist. Aug. M. Ant.* 5.4; Hdn. 4.8.1. See also Cass. Dio 79[78].27.5 who mentions hostages taken by Caracalla from the Dacians as part of an alliance. Military reorganisation: although he accepts Scheid's conclusions, Kovács 2012 gives a useful overview of the evidence for Caracalla's activities in Pannonia.

44 Hdn. 4.8.3.

45 Macedonian phalanx: Hdn. 4.8.2-3.

46 Cass. Dio 78[77].16.7-8; Hdn. 4.8.3-5.

47 Cass. Dio 78[77].16.6-7.

gravely sick.⁴⁸ Given military engagements and recruitment, games, administrative duties, potentially serious illness and visits to different temples, it is clear that Caracalla would likely have spent even more than four months travelling from Mogontiacum to Nicomedia. If he had started in early October, Caracalla would not have arrived in Nicomedia until well into February at the earliest. Importantly, this is not even close to accommodating Scheid's reconstruction, which demands that Caracalla arrived in Nicomedia before 17 December.⁴⁹

It is here worth asking why Caracalla would have braved the ferocious conditions of travelling in winter to reach Nicomedia. Dio asserts that Caracalla in fact stayed in Nicomedia all the way until his birthday in April, which does not suggest that he was in a hurry to reach the East.⁵⁰ Scheid's theory also fits poorly with the chronology of Caracalla's movements after Nicomedia: he first went to Antioch, visiting cities in Asia Minor on the way, and then to Egypt, which was followed by the Parthian campaign of 216 and his death in spring 217.⁵¹ If Caracalla left Nicomedia in 214 already, he would have had to spend a whole year in Antioch with little or no activity since nothing indicates that he stayed in Egypt for long.⁵² If Caracalla came to Antioch in 215, on the other hand, he could go to Egypt in late 215 and then launch his campaign against Parthia in 216.⁵³

48 Cass. Dio 78[77].15.3-6; *Epit. de Caes.* 21.3; Hdn. 4.8.3; *Hist. Aug. M. Ant.* 5.3; IvEph 802. Faimingen; so Kovács 2012: 390. Potter 2004: 141 suggests that the visit to the sanctuary of Apollo Grannus took place before the campaign against the Germans, but Cass. Dio 78[77].15.2 indicates otherwise by writing that it was the charms of his German enemies that caused Caracalla's illness during the campaign. Rowan 2012: 112-115 suggests that Caracalla's illness may have been exaggerated by ancient writers.

49 Christol 2012: 158-160 likewise notes that Caracalla's route and activities as reported by the sources are a problem for Scheid's reconstruction. However, he still accepts Scheid's conclusions as incontestable. See further in footnote 86.

50 Cass. Dio 78[77].19.3, 79[78].6.5.

51 For the evidence of Caracalla's movements after leaving Nicomedia, see Halfmann 1986: 224-225.

52 Unless we accept Christol 2012. The journey to Antioch likely did not take more than a month or two since Johnston 1983 has shown that the places visited by Caracalla on this journey were far less numerous than suggested by Levick 1969.

53 Another factor related to Caracalla's journey is the so-called *Itinerarium Antonini*: it is a complex source containing various imperial routes for travelling. Some scholars

Coinage

Overall, then, the traveling time from Mogontiacum to Nicomedia militates strongly against the suggestion that Caracalla wintered in Nicomedia in 213/214. Let us now turn our attention to the evidence for Caracalla's movements in 214. The literary sources are not particularly helpful. However, it is worth noting that Dio's narrative, as preserved in Xiphilinus and the *Excerpta Constantiniana*, includes episodes set in Rome after the account of the Alemannic campaigns: we are told that Caracalla burned Vestal Virgins; Caracalla killed adulterers without trial; and Caracalla forced Cornificia to commit suicide. Dio thus quite clearly followed his narrative of the Alemannic campaigns with a description of Caracalla's activities in the capital. When commencing his narrative of a new emperor, Dio often starts with a thematic presentation of the ruler, and then normally returns to a chronological, year-by-year narrative. Consequently, the narrative return to Rome could appear to furnish strong support for the theory that Caracalla returned to the capital.⁵⁴ However, caution must be taken due to the highly epitomised nature of Dio's narrative. Furthermore, Dio's account of the Alemannic campaigns underlines that the gods refused to help Caracalla due to his evil deeds, and the following episodes of Caracalla's abominable behaviour in Rome could thus constitute flashbacks intended to drive home this point.⁵⁵

date it to the reign of Caracalla and view an *itinerarium* therein (going from Rome through Milan to Egypt) as the route which Caracalla planned to take: van Berchem 1937: 166-181; 1973: 123-126; Reed 1978: 230-231. This was treated as decisive by Millar 1964 155: n. 6 for proving that Caracalla returned to Rome after his German campaigns. However, Caracalla could of course have deviated from the initially planned route. Furthermore, Arnaud 1992 has questioned the Severan date of the *Itinerarium Antonini*.

54 Dio's imperial narrative structure: Questa 1957: 37; Millar 1962: 124. See also Pelling 1997.

55 The other key historiographical source for Caracalla's reign is Herodian who does not mention a return to Rome after the Alemannic wars. However, the often thematic, rather than chronological, structure of Herodian's narrative, according to which he frequently focuses first on the emperor in Rome and then on his campaigns, means that this absence cannot be used as evidence for Caracalla moving directly from Germany to the Balkans. Indeed, Herodian often demonstrably leaves out imperial stays in the capital if these do not fit his thematic focus: for example,

On the other hand, Caracalla's coinage is more illuminating. Let us first consider the coins for the key year, 214: as in previous years, there are numerous depictions of various deities, but there is a special martial focus given the five different coin types depicting Mars and the three different types depicting Roma with Victory.⁵⁶ Furthermore, there is a coin type showing Caracalla in military attire on a platform haranguing his soldiers, and one type depicting him galloping on a horse with a javelin and a prostrate foe.⁵⁷ These two coin types, as well as the ones depicting Mars and Roma with Victory, clearly celebrate Caracalla's martial prowess, but they do not tell us much about Caracalla's movements in 214: they could indicate an emperor fighting at the front throughout 214, but they may just as well have been struck in celebration of his return to Rome from the Alemannic campaigns. Indeed, a kneeling German is included on two of the coin types depicting Roma.⁵⁸ The coins celebrating Caracalla's martial prowess may even conceivably be a reference to his campaigns in the Balkans in 214.⁵⁹

Aside from these coins with military connotations, and those depicting various deities, there are four other Caracallan coin motifs in the *RIC* that can be securely dated to 214: an elephant; Caracalla togate with a baton and branch; Caracalla sacrificing at Vesta's temple; and Caracalla

both Severus' stay in Rome in 196 after his victory over Niger and Alexander Severus' visit in 233 are absent from Herodian's narrative (for the evidence for these visits, see Halfmann 1986: 217, 232). On Herodian's narrative structure more generally, see especially Hidber 2006: 131-152; 2007 but also Widmer 1967: 61-64; Whittaker 1969: xli-xliii. Regarding the evidence for Caracalla's movements in 214, one may also note *Cod. Iust.* 7.16.2, a Caracallan *constitutio* given "at Rome (*Romae*)" in February 214. Whittaker 1969: 412 viewed it as evidence for Caracalla's presence in Rome in 214. However, such dates in the Codex are often unreliable and *Romae* does not necessitate the emperor's physical presence. E.g., the Caracallan *constitutio* *Cod. Iust.* 5.50.1 dates to July 215 and is also given "at Rome", but it is highly unlikely that Caracalla was in the capital personally at this point.

56 *RIC* IV 243, 524, 528-533.

57 *RIC* IV 525-526.

58 *RIC* IV 530, 533. See also *RIC* IV 237, 316 showing Victory and the legend: *VICTORIA GERMANICA*, presumably from 214 as well.

59 This is not impossible as shown by the fact that coins appeared already in 213 celebrating Caracalla's campaigns in Germany: *RIC* IV 496, 501, 504.

on a platform in the company of *Liberalitas*.⁶⁰ The former two are of little interest for our purposes: the elephant could refer to games given in Rome, which would indicate Caracalla's presence in the capital, but may also simply be a symbol of imperial power.⁶¹ Likewise, the togate Caracalla could imply civic responsibilities in Rome after his victories in Germany (alluded to by the branch of Victory) but this is too vague to function as useful evidence.

The Vesta coins from 214, showing Caracalla sacrificing in military attire in the company of a group of Vestal Virgins at the temple of Vesta in Rome, may be more significant.⁶² It was common to depict Vesta's temple on anniversaries of Augustus' death, the bicentenary of which occurred in 214, and Julia Domna had been depicted on the obverse of coins showing the temple of Vesta to commemorate its restoration under Septimius Severus.⁶³ Caracalla's coins with the Vesta temple may thus be occasioned by these factors.⁶⁴ However, it is noteworthy that Caracalla's coins are the only ones showing the emperor himself sacrificing at the temple of Vesta, whereas the emperor is absent from all other imperial coins with an image of this temple.⁶⁵ It is thus possible that Caracalla's Vesta coins commemorate an actual sacrifice in Rome after his Alemannic campaign, and Caracalla is indeed shown in military attire.⁶⁶ This suggestion may be supported by the fact that the only other Caracallan coin type showing this emperor sacrificing at a temple (that of Asclepius) did in fact commemorate an actual visit and sacrifice performed by Caracalla.⁶⁷

60 RIC IV 246-247, 249-250, 250A, 527.

61 See e.g. RIC III 862 with Manders 2012: 250.

62 RIC IV 249-250.

63 RIC I 61, II 492, 515, 704, IV 585-586, 594 with Grant 1950: 34, 80-81, 91, 135.

64 The Vesta motif could also be connected to Caracalla's execution of Vestal Virgins for being unchaste: Cass. Dio 78[77].16.1; Hdn. 4.6.4. Caracalla's Vesta coins connected to the bicentenary of Augustus' death: Grant 1950: 123. This bicentenary should not tempt us to suggest that the *Liberalitas* coin of Caracalla from this year is connected to this anniversary: such distributions were normally occasioned by more immediately important affairs such as imperial weddings, births or military victories.

65 See e.g. RIC I 61, II 492, 515, 704, IV 585-586.

66 In that case, RIC IV 271-272 from 215, which likewise show Caracalla sacrificing at Vesta's temple, would then commemorate the sacrifice of 214.

67 I will discuss this further below.

However, the most significant coin for our purposes is the one including *Liberalitas*: Caracalla is seated on a curule chair with the divinity *Liberalitas* on his right, while a citizen is ascending a flight of stairs to receive his hand-out from this divinity.⁶⁸ Underneath is written “LIB AVG VIII”. The coin also includes a mention that Caracalla had received the tribunician power seventeen times, which places the coin between 10 December 213 and 10 December 214. From Hadrian onwards, it became common to commemorate grand imperial largesses on coins and the coin in question continues this tradition by commemorating the ninth largesse by Caracalla.⁶⁹ All imperial gifts of money or food could obviously not be commemorated on coins and the number after “LIB AVG” therefore only includes the large-scale distributions on important occasions, such as imperial weddings or the return of an emperor safely from war.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the largesses commemorated on coins are consistently performed in Rome rather than in the provinces and the donatives to the soldiers were not included on coins in the manner just described.⁷¹

It is worth underlining how uncommon it was for emperors to distribute a largesse commemorated on coins while absent from Rome: from 117 when Hadrian took the throne until 235 when Alexander Severus died, only two largesses were commemorated on surviving coins by an emperor while absent from Rome.⁷² The first was given out on the occasion of Hadrian’s accession, at which point the new emperor was in the

68 RIC IV 527. See also RIC IV 302-303. They are lacking the tribunician year but likewise have LIB AVG VIII on the reverse and GERM(ANICUS) on the obverse. Consequently, they constitute further evidence for Caracalla distributing his ninth largesse after the Alemannic wars.

69 It had happened occasionally under some previous emperors: see e.g. RIC I 101, II 56, 381. These, however, put *CONGIARIUM*, rather than *LIBERALITAS*, on their coins. On this tradition of commemorating largesses on coins, see especially Royo Martínez 2018 but also Noreña 2001: 160-164; 2011: 88-92.

70 See e.g. RIC III 15 which commemorates Marcus Aurelius’ largesse upon his accession or RIC IV 182 which commemorates the largesse due to Septimius Severus’ safe return from his Parthian campaigns in 202.

71 As pointed out by Royo Martínez 2018: 64-66.

72 Another possible example comes from the reign of Elagabalus: we have coins from 219 commemorating a second largesse by Elagabalus and he may therefore have minted *Liberalitas* coins commemorating his first largesse in 218 while he was absent from Rome. If so, this can, like Hadrian’s first *Liberalitas* coins, be explained by the

East, while the second was distributed in 175 on the occasion of Commodus assuming the *toga virilis*, while Marcus Aurelius was fighting his seven-year long war against the Marcomanni.⁷³ Thus, the only two exceptions from the general pattern were caused by Hadrian's need to bolster his authority upon his questionable accession and Marcus Aurelius' extraordinarily long Marcomannic Wars. Except for a couple of exceptional cases, then, the emperor was always present in Rome while giving out a largesse commemorated on *Liberalitas* coins. The very limited evidence available suggests that Caracalla followed this established pattern: one largesse was given in 211 with Geta upon their accession and return to Rome from Britain, and another distribution took place in 212 or 213, probably after the claimed assassination attempt on Caracalla's life by Geta.⁷⁴ Again, this underlines that large-scale distributions commemorated on coins were performed in Rome due to important events. It is not difficult to understand why: in order to reap the popularity resulting from a largesse, it was important for the emperor to be present in Rome and to be seen as personally giving to the people. In other words, it was central for the people to see the emperor in his role as the great *euergetes*.⁷⁵

Against this background, the Caracallan coin-type from 214 with LIB AVG VIII is significant: it undermines Scheid's chronology since his reconstruction would entail Caracalla giving out a large-scale distribution

fact that Elagabalus was far from Rome in the East when he took the throne in 218 and he may therefore have attempted to increase his legitimacy and popularity through a largesse and accompanying *Liberalitas* coins. He may also have given out a largesse in 218 but not produced a coin commemorating it, whereafter he commemorated his second largesse on coins in 219.

73 Cass. Dio 72[71].32.1; RIC II.3 162-164, III 318. It was common to issue *Liberalitas* coins upon accession: see e.g. RIC III 15, IV 18, 87.

74 Caracalla performed five largesses with Septimius Severus, and his first largesse as sole emperor is therefore counted as the sixth. Sixth largesse: RIC IV 87. Eighth largesse: RIC IV 219. Curiously, no coins commemorate Caracalla's seventh largesse: Caracalla had traditionally included all largesses of Septimius Severus except the first one and he may have co-opted this first largesse after Geta's death, which would explain why he put LIBERALITAS AVG VIII on coins after his sixth largesse.

75 On this conception of the emperor, see Veyne 1976.

without an occasion while he was in the provinces. This would completely break with tradition, a tradition that Caracalla himself had observed earlier in his reign. On the other hand, it would make perfect sense for Caracalla to showcase his *liberalitas* through a large distribution upon his return from the Germanic campaign in late 213 and commemorate it on his coins of 214. Indeed, the safe return of the emperor from campaign was a common occasion for largesses commemorated on coins.⁷⁶ Ultimately, it is not impossible that Caracalla broke with tradition and gave out a major largesse in Rome, commemorated on his coins from 214, while he was in the provinces.⁷⁷ However, this is unlikely and the *Liberalitas* coin from 214 instead makes it probable that Caracalla returned to Rome after the Alemannic campaign and distributed a largesse in the capital at some point during his seventeenth tribunician year, that is from 10 December 213 to 10 December 214.⁷⁸

Finally, it is worthwhile briefly considering Caracalla's coins from 215. As set out above, due to illness, Caracalla visited the temple of Asclepius in Pergamum on his way to Nicomedia, and this visit seems to have been commemorated on Caracalla's coins.⁷⁹ Asclepius first appears on Caracalla's coins in 214, as one coin-type shows the god standing in a temple.⁸⁰ However, in 215, ten different Caracallan coin types with Asclepius sud-

76 See e.g. Cass. Dio 72[71].32.1; RIC III 318, 1205, IV 81, 533-534 with Halfmann 1986: 217.

77 As pointed out by Millar 1964: 155 n. 6.

78 The coin-type thus also militates against Halfmann's brief suggestion (1986: 226) that Caracalla wintered in Sirmium in 213/214 and did not go back to Rome after the Germanic campaign. He indicates that Caracalla may not have had sufficient time to return to Rome given his travels in the Balkans and Asia Minor, but these could have taken place from spring 214 until the close of that year. However, it is an inscription (AE 1973, 437), dedicated in 213 for the health of Caracalla (*pro salute*) by two *praepositi annonae* in Gorsium, that Halfmann views as decisive evidence for Caracalla's presence in Pannonia already in this year. Yet, a dedication to the emperor does not necessitate his presence, as pointed out by Johnston 1983: 58 in relation to Caracalla's route through Asia Minor.

79 Cass. Dio 78[77].15.6, 78[77].16.8; Hdn. 4.8.3.

80 RIC IV 238.

denly appear, and Asclepius coins in fact constitute about 19% of Caracalla's silver coinage in 215.⁸¹ Furthermore, while Asclepius had only appeared on *aurei* in 214, he appears on all the different denominations in 215. Most importantly, however, a coin type from 215 shows Caracalla sacrificing at Asclepius' temple, and this coin-type does not appear before or after this year, which suggests that it commemorated Caracalla's visit to the temple of Asclepius in Pergamum.⁸² This, along with the sudden prominence of Asclepius on Caracallan coinage in 215, fits very well with the theory that Caracalla only travelled to Nicomedia in 214, since his visit to Asclepius' temple late in this year would naturally have been reflected on coins in 215.⁸³ On the other hand, it would be strange for all these coins with Asclepius on to emerge in 215 if Caracalla had already visited Pergamum in 213, as entailed in Scheid's reconstruction. Caracalla's Asclepius coins from 215, combined with the *Liberalitas* coin from 214, thus provide strong support for the theory that Caracalla returned to Rome in 213 and wintered in Nicomedia in 214/215.

CHRONOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The main aim of this article was to clarify whether Caracalla wintered in Nicomedia in 213/214 or in 214/215. Scheid argued for the former date on the assumption that the Arval *acta* were painstakingly consistent and could not have repeated the consuls' names instead of using *isdem consulibus*. The scholars who reference his work treat it as incontestably decisive, which has major consequences for our reconstruction and evaluation of Caracalla's reign. However, Scheid's argumentative basis is prob-

81 RIC IV 251-253, 270, 538-539, 549-550, 553-554 with Rowan 2012: 129-130.

82 RIC IV 270.

83 *Contra* Rowan 2012: 132 who points to the one Asclepius coin from 214 (RIC IV 238) and argues that this suggests 213 as Caracalla's arrival time in Asia Minor. However, only in 215 do Asclepius types become common and include the emperor himself sacrificing at Asclepius' temple. Rowan 2012: 132 also points to an inscription from Pergamum from 214 where Caracalla is called *domino indulgentissimo* as evidence for a visit in 213. This evidence is obviously vague but supports a visit in 214 better than one in 213.

lematic as the Arval *acta* exhibit noteworthy deviations from praxis. Furthermore, his own argument rests on an unlikely deviation from tradition by the Arval Brethren since he supposes that the ceremony celebrating Caracalla's safe arrival in Nicomedia was moved to a protocol where it does not chronologically belong. Consequently, Scheid's arguments cannot be seen as incontestable, and other evidence must be reviewed. On a practical level, it is unlikely that Caracalla could have arrived in Nicomedia before 17 December as entailed in Scheid's reconstruction. Furthermore, the *Liberalitas* coin-type from 214 probably places Caracalla in Rome in this year, and the Asclepius coins of 215 likewise suggest that Caracalla wintered in Nicomedia in 214/215 rather than 213/214. When considering all the evidence, it thus seems likely that Caracalla returned to Rome in late 213 and wintered in Nicomedia in 214/215.

This has significant consequences: in Scheid's reconstruction, Caracalla remained only a short time in Rome at the beginning of his reign before he spent the rest of his life in the provinces. However, in my reconstruction, Caracalla arrived in Rome in spring 211, probably became sole ruler in late 211 and then stayed in the capital all the way to spring 214, except for some months campaigning against the Germans.⁸⁴ This, in turn, is important for our wider understanding of Caracalla's reign: for example, Scheid's reconstruction could be used to support the common presentation of Caracalla as an anti-senatorial, militaristic emperor who, quite literally, attempted to distance himself from the senators and purposefully avoided Rome, instead preferring the company of his soldiers on campaign.⁸⁵ However, my suggested chronology of Caracalla's reign from 211 to 214 presents a rather different picture, where Caracalla in fact spent a prolonged time in the capital.

Yet, by far the most important result of my reconstruction is its consequences for Caracalla's activities in the Balkans: as a necessary corollary to the backdating of Caracalla's stay in Nicomedia, some scholars now argue that Caracalla's campaigns and other activities in the Balkans

84 See also footnote 1. On the chronology of Caracalla's reign in general, Millar 1964: 150-160 remains helpful. See also Campbell 2005: 15-20.

85 Common presentation of Caracalla: see e.g. Bryant 1999. On Caracalla's relationship with the senators more broadly, see e.g. Davenport 2012; Scott 2015.

are largely invented by ancient historiographers.⁸⁶ This is only natural as Scheid's reconstruction would leave no room for anything other than a speedy, direct march to Nicomedia in 213. However, in my reconstruction, Caracalla likely used a large part of 214 marching through the Balkans, which allows plentiful time to engage in various activities there. For example, in my reconstruction, there is no reason to reject the theory that Caracalla visited Pannonia and engaged in military reorganisation there.⁸⁷ Likewise, it invites us to accept the sources' assertion that Caracalla conducted some sort of military activities against the Dacians, although their scope is more difficult to ascertain.⁸⁸ These examples highlight that we can only attain a thorough understanding of the history of the Balkans under Caracalla if we know when and for how long the emperor visited this region. The question of when Caracalla wintered in Nicomedia thus has wide consequences. It has the power to remove or restore whole wars from the pages of history and significantly influence our understanding of Caracalla's reign.

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86 See especially Szabó 2003; Kovács 2012; Opreanu 2015 but also Letta 1994: 189; Mráv and Ottományi 2005: 203; Letta 2016: 189. Christol 2012 has a different solution where he attempts to reconcile Scheid with the historiographical sources: he views Scheid's arguments as incontestable and accepts that Caracalla arrived in Nicomedia in 213, but suggests that Caracalla then campaigned in Dacia and visited the places in Asia mentioned by Dio and Herodian in 214, before again wintering in Nicomedia in 214/215. Lafli *et al.* 2019: 144 n. 35 accept Christol's suggestion. It is ingenious but unnecessary if Scheid's arguments are not accepted.

87 See footnote 43.

88 Cass. Dio 78[77].16.7, 79[78].27.5; *Hist. Aug. M. Ant.* 5.4; Hdn. 4.8.1.

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