

Caracalla in Egypt (A.D. 215-216)

Marcus Aurelius Severus Antoninus (188–217) was a young Roman emperor. He lived only 29 years and ruled the Roman empire from 211 to 217. He was the elder son of Lucius Septimius Severus and Julia Domna. The young ruler had been brought up in a milieu interested in philosophy. 'Caracalla' is a nickname, which in ancient sources appears as 'Karakallos' (Caracallus). This word was a name of a coat which the emperor often used. Modern scholarship named the emperor Caracalla to avoid confusion with other Marci Aurelii of Roman history. After a short joint rule with his brother Publius Septimius Geta, Caracalla had him murdered, probably at the end of 211. In 212 the emperor granted Roman citizenship to all inhabitants of the empire. His dream was the conquest of the East and creation of a universal empire. Caracalla was an admirer of Alexander the Great. Like his idol, Caracalla did not avoid the inconveniences of military life, and enjoyed popularity among the soldiers. His hot temper and violent manners led him to acts of cruel tyranny. The present study concerns a mysterious episode of Caracalla's war in the East which was a part of his imitation of Alexander the Great. In December 215 the emperor came to Alexandria, a metropolis of Egypt founded by the great Alexander. However, instead of a festive sojourn in Egypt Caracalla sentenced to death the administrators of the province, exterminated the Alexandrian entrepreneurs and in April 216 massacred the inhabitants of Alexandria.