



Aureus depicting the head of Caracalla and Victoria, the goddess of victory (213 CE)

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[1]

Denomination:

Aureus

Date: 213 CE

Material:

Gold

Mint:

Rome

Name of Ruler:

Caracalla

Obverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: Laureate and cuirassed bust of Caracalla looking right

Inscription: ANTONINVS PIVS FEL AVG

Reverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: Victory advancing right, holding trophy in left hand over left shoulder and wreath in extended right hand

Inscription: VICTORIA GERMANICA

Weight (g): 7.46g

Commentary:

(RIC IVa, Caracalla, no. 237, p. 245)

This aureus, minted in 213 CE, depicts on the obverse the head of Caracalla, wearing a laurel crown and cuirass (breastplate and backplate), and on the reverse Victoria, who is depicted running forward carrying a wreath in one hand and a trophy in the other. Victoria, the personified goddess of victory, was the Roman equivalent of the Greek goddess Nikè. The inscription on the obverse refers to the emperor as Antoninus Pius, Felix, and Augustus. The inscription on the reverse refers to Victoria Germanica, advertising imperial victory in Germany. In 213 CE, Caracalla waged a campaign in Germany against a group of Germanic tribes in the area of the Agri Decumates (Germania superior and Raetia) (see Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LXXVIII.13 and Herodian, *Roman History* IV.7; for a summary of the debate as to whether the tribes Caracalla fought can accurately be described as “Alammani” at this point in history, see Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome*, p. 43-44; Southern, *The Roman Empire*, p. 70). For Drinkwater, the German tribes posed little threat to Rome, and were used as an opportunity for the emperor to gain military prowess. However, the senate conferred upon Caracalla the title of Germanicus Maximus all the same. Caracalla’s victory in Germania in 213 CE was commemorated with the striking of two coin types, including the present example (see also RIC IV/1, Caracalla, no. 316, p. 260; Manders, *Coining Images of Power*, p. 242).

Between 69 and 235 CE legends on imperial coins celebrated real or imagined military victories (see Noreña,



Imperial Ideals, p. 162), and the legends emphasising these specific victories were often accompanied by images of trophies, arms, captives, and/or Victoria (see Manders, *Coining Images of Power*, p. 85). In the case of the present issue, we see the legend Victoria Germanica accompanied by a combination of these symbols – the goddess carrying a trophy. The trophy (or *tropaeum*) was originally a tree hung with the armour of the defeated enemy, but Roman trophies evolved to be impressive monuments in the city of Rome itself, as a lasting symbol of an emperor's military success. Trophies of course were a popular propaganda image on Roman coinage, where particularly when paired with Victoria, they were “symbols of conquest and empire” (Noreña, *Imperial Ideals*, p. 155).

The wreath, which Victoria holds in her right hand on this issue, was an item used as a prize in athletic competitions, and so therefore emphasized the concept of victory in a general sense. That Victoria is presented on this issue as carrying this symbol of success, which we also see crowning the emperor on the obverse of the coin serves to forward the message of Roman triumph over her enemies and directly link this to the emperor, who stood at the head of the Roman army as its commander. Moreover, that the emperor wears an identical wreath to that carried by Victory also further connects him with the deity, and makes clear that his military success was awarded and sanctioned by the gods. The iconography we see on this coin, of Victoria holding a trophy was a very widespread type, which was first minted by Vespasian to celebrate his victory in the Jewish War. Subsequently, it was minted by every emperor, including all the members of the Severan dynasty, including Caracalla. The message forwarded by this denomination, an aureus, was directed to the imperial elites, including senators and equestrians, but also to the urban aristocracies of both the west and the east. Essentially, this issue conveyed the message that the emperor had overseen a victory over a particular threat to Rome, whatever the reality of this threat was, and regardless of how complete the Roman victory actually was (see the discussions in the secondary literature cited in the opening paragraph on the case of Caracalla's Germanic campaign in this regard). By combining visual symbols of Rome's goddess of victory, war, and the triumphal crowned emperor, this coin made a strong statement about Rome's military power.

Keywords in the original language:

- [Pius](#) [2]
- [Felix Augustus](#) [3]
- [Victoria Germanica](#) [4]

Thematic keywords:

- [Caracalla](#) [5]
- [Roman army](#) [6]
- [victory](#) [7]
- [Victoria \(goddess of victory\)](#) [8]
- [wreath](#) [9]
- [trophy](#) [10]
- [Germania](#) [11]
- [Germans](#) [12]
- [Roman power](#) [13]

Bibliographical references:

[The Alamanni and Rome 213-496: \(Caracalla to Clovis\)](#) [14]

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[Coining Images of Power: Patterns in the Representation of Roman Emperors on Imperial Coinage, A.D. 193-284](#) [15]



Manders, Erikabook*Coining Images of Power: Patterns in the Representation of Roman Emperors on Imperial Coinage, A.D. 193-284*Leiden - New YorkBrill2012

[Imperial Ideals in the Roman West: Representation, Circulation, Power](#) [16]

Noreña, Carlos F.book*Imperial Ideals in the Roman West: Representation, Circulation, Power*CambridgeCambridge University Press2011

[The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine](#) [17]

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- [2] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/pius>
- [3] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/felix-augustus>
- [4] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/victoria-germanica>
- [5] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/caracalla>
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