



Anazarbos: trophies and Roman victory between Macrinus and Elagabalus [1]

Anazarbos, a city in Cilicia, organises games celebrating the victory of Elagabalus for the first time in the Empire, after having been adorned with Roman trophies under Macrinus.

Date: 219 CE to 220 CE

Mint: Anazarbos

Name of Ruler: Elagabalus

Obverse (Image and Inscription):

1. ?????? C??C?? (Julia Maesa Augusta)

2. ?????? C??C?? (Julia Maesa Augusta)

Reverse (Image and Inscription):

1. A????????? ???? ?????????????? ???? ?C ??????????C
??????????

(The city of the) Anazarbeans. (Year) 238 (= 219/20 CE). The first Antoniniana Epinikia of the world

2. ?????????? ??????Y ??????????C ??????????C ??????????C ????C??????C

(Of the city) Anazarbos, honourable metropolis, adorned with Roman trophies

Commentary:

[Anazarbos](#) [2] was a city in the southern Anatolian region of Cilicia. Local dynasts mostly dominated the Hellenistic community that in the 1st century CE started to be designated also as *Caesarea Augusta* (Pliny, *Natural History* V.93). Under Roman rule, the reorganisation of Asia Minor had an impact on the relevance of a settlement granted international Olympic games by Hadrian (Ziegler, *Sta?dtisches Prestige*, B1–3 cf. A2, A12, A20–1). The development of the region became even more spectacular between the end of the 2nd and beginning of the 3rd centuries. These two coins shed light on this process and the corresponding adoption of motifs of Roman power by local entities in the eastern Mediterranean.

With military confrontations in the eastern front growing, southern Anatolia became a crucial point of support and supply for the imperial army (see Mitchell, “The Balkans, Anatolia,” p. 142; Ziegler, *Sta?dtisches Prestige*, p. 17–8; Elton “Military Supply”). After Lucius Verus’ Parthian campaigns, the region witnessed another spectacular increase in Roman presence during the civil wars that led to the accession of Septimius Severus and his family to the throne. Anazarbos lay on the road between Cilicia and Melitene – seat of the Legio XII Fulminata – not far from Syria. From here, the Severan army launched a new war against Parthia which culminated with the capture of Ctesiphon and the proclamation of the *Victoria Parthica* in 198 CE (P.Dura 54.14–6). In this same year, coins of Anazarbos commemorate the condition of the city as *neokoros* (Ziegler, *Kaiser, Heer*, p. 262–4, no. 280–93). This coveted title was granted by the emperors to those cities hosting an official centre of the imperial cult. It soon became a mark of regional status in the fierce contest for pre-eminence and titulature between centres in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire (see Heller, *Les bêtises*; Guerber, *Les cités grecques*). In Cilicia, Tarsus was the main hub and rival to Anazarbos, after the former had already been given the first *neokoria* by Hadrian (Burrell, *Neokoroi*, p. 212). The Severan period therefore witnessed a heated race for imperial distinctions between the two cities which were rewarded on account of their loyalty and support for particularly prodigal emperors. Indeed, Anazarbean coins minted in 202 CE displayed the *neokoria* for the second time (Ziegler, *Kaiser, Heer*, p. 266, no. 300; see Burrell, *Neokoroi*, p. 222–226), and the title of ??????????/*métropolis* (“mother-city”) was achieved by 204/5 CE (Ziegler, *Kaiser, Heer*, p. 267–8, no. 301–7). A surviving inscription honouring Caracalla confirms that this accumulation of titles was not just restricted to local coinage (*I.Anazarbos* 4). This is the context in which the interpretation of the two specimens analysed by this entry should be inserted.



Both coins bear the same portrait of Julia Maesa Augusta on the obverse. She was the older sister of Julia Domna – Septimius Severus’s wife – and aunt of Caracalla. With his daughter Julia Soemias, the Syrian royalty sought to continue the Severan dynasty by supporting her young grandson, and priest of the homonymous god, Elagabalus and ousting Macrinus from the imperial throne in 218 (see Kettenhoffen, *Die syrischen Augustae*). Macrinus had been designated emperor by the army after Caracalla’s murder near Carrhae in 217, but his brief tenure in power was not extremely successful. Cassius Dio is very critical of Macrinus’s Parthian campaign and the fact that the Senate granted him triumphal sacrifices and an acclamation (*Roman History* LXXIX.27; see Scott, “The Legitimization”). Anazarbos does not appear to have been very much concerned about such criticism, because in this year local coins and inscriptions started to commemorate that the city was honourable (???????/endoxos) and adorned with Roman trophies (????????? ?????????? ??????????/Rômaikois tropaiois kekosmêmenê; see Ziegler, *Kaiser, Heer*, p. 114-115 and *I.Anazarbos* 11). Our second coin shows that this distinction was not dismissed after Macrinus’s fall (cf. *I.Anazarbos* 12). Indeed, this is the only legend mentioning Roman trophies attested in the provincial coinage and most likely meant that Anazarbos received and looked after spoils taken by the imperial army. Macrinus’s favour, on the other hand, could also mark the city as a staunch supporter of an ousted emperor whom the new regime of Elagabalus considered an enemy of the Severan dynasty. The Anazarbean institutions needed to swiftly make another display of loyalty for the new emperor and this is what our first coin records.

The reverse of this coin contains an agonistic urn and a legend recording the corresponding games as “the first Antoniniana Epinikia of the world.” The epithet ????????????/ANTÔNEINIANA naturally refers to Elagabalus, who was officially named Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus. As for the claim to be the “first in the world” (????? ??C ??????????C/PRÔTA TÊS OIKOUMENÊS), the coin is precisely dated with the local era to 219 CE (238 – 19 BCE), which makes it plausible. Such imperial epithets needed to be confirmed by the emperor himself, so Anazarbos might have proposed the change through an embassy while Elagabalus was still near Syria. Civic institutions customarily sent diplomatic missions upon the accession of a new ruler as attested, for example, in Aphrodisias, and they took such opportunities to display their loyalty (see Ando, *Imperial Ideology*, p. 175-190). Anazarbos did not only propose to adopt the imperial titulature in its previously Olympic festival, but also incorporated an additional epithet, ??????????, which was even more unequivocal about the city’s allegiance to the new Severan success. The title is only scarcely attested in our sources and derives from the adjective ??????????/epinikios to signify that the games celebrated victory (?????/nikê). A survey of these limited attestations shows that it was mostly displayed by communities committed to Roman rule and benefitting from its triumphs. For example, the commonalty (or *koinon*) of Cilicia organised epinician games for Septimius Severus’s Parthian victory exactly on the Issus plain where his enemy Pescennius Niger had previously been defeated. It is impossible to know whether these festivals entailed any special ceremony, but they clearly served to celebrate Roman victories (see Blanco-Pérez, “EPINIKIA”). For this reason, the combination of the messages conveyed by these two contemporary inscriptions is complementary and shows the strategies deployed by local communities in order to attract imperial attention and favours. With Elagabalus’s authorisation, Anazarbos and its festivities were again aligned with a Severan rule that could punish previous Macrinus’s supporters. Moreover, the trophies were Roman and did not belong to a particular emperor, so they continued to be displayed in coins and inscriptions both under Elagabalus and Severus Alexander, when the city called itself *Alexandrine, Septimia Severiane* and *Antoniniane* (*I.Anazarbos* 6). Such local responses, nonetheless, should not solely be understood as one-way efforts from subjected communities. Southern Anatolia also played a crucial role in the maintenance of imperial campaigns during the early 3rd century, with its supplies, alliance and loyalty. Consequently, the emperors were rewarding mutually beneficial attitudes which, even if unequal, must be understood in terms of reciprocity rather than mere imposition.

Keywords in the original language:

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- [????????????????](#) [4]
- [????????](#) [5]
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Thematic keywords:

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- [Elagabalus](#) [14]
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- [loyalty](#) [23]
- [reciprocity](#) [24]
- [agonistic festivals](#) [25]
- [local festivities](#) [26]

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Other sources connected with this document: Inscription

[Aphrodisias, Divine Kinship and the Accession of Septimius Severus and Caracalla \[39\]](#)

Septimius Severus and Caracalla confirm the privileged polity and laws of Aphrodisias, a city that celebrated their dynastic victories and was closely related to the empire of Rome.

- [Read more about Aphrodisias, Divine Kinship and the Accession of Septimius Severus and Caracalla \[39\]](#)

Inscription



[Antoninus Pius and the Meleagria Games of Balbura](#) [40]

The emperor Antoninus Pius confirms the foundation of games that followed the precedent set by the neighbouring city of Oenoanda / Oinoanda

- [Read more about Antoninus Pius and the Meleagria Games of Balbura](#) [40]

Inscription

[Roman Soldiers and a Local Temple in Dura Europos](#) [41]

Alexander, a man of Semitic origin, has to restore the doors of a temple taken away by the Romans when they retreated from Dura Europos

- [Read more about Roman Soldiers and a Local Temple in Dura Europos](#) [41]

Inscription

[Hadrian, Roman soldiers, and Asia](#) [42]

Hadrian issues an edict to prevent the abuse by soldiers crossing Asia during one of his imperial visits

- [Read more about Hadrian, Roman soldiers, and Asia](#) [42]

Inscription

[Perge, metropolis by the emperor-god Tacitus](#) [43]

The city of Perge in southern Anatolia celebrates its new title of *metropolis* after the exceptional grant of the emperor Tacitus, worshipped as a god.

- [Read more about Perge, metropolis by the emperor-god Tacitus](#) [43]

Inscription

[An invitation to gladiators' games in Beroia \(Macedonia\) under Severus Alexander](#) [44]

A couple of benefactors in Macedonia produce an invitation for gladiatorial spectacles that include vows for Severus Alexander and other constituent elements of Roman power.

- [Read more about An invitation to gladiators' games in Beroia \(Macedonia\) under Severus Alexander](#) [44]

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