

## TWO GRECO-ROMAN MEDALLIONS FOUND IN DOBRUJA FROM THE FIRST HALF OF THE 3<sup>rd</sup> CENTURY AD

Steluța Marin\*  
Gabriel Talmațchi\*\*

**Keywords:** *bronze medallion, Tarsus, Caracalla, Heraclea Pontica, Gordian III, Dobruja.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *medalion de bronz, Tarsus, Caracalla, Heraclea Pontica, Gordian III, Dobrogea.*

**Abstract:** *The authors present two pieces that are preserved in the collection of the Museum of National History and Archaeology in Constanța. These are remarkable both by their type, being medallions, and by the fact that they were found in Dobruja. The first piece is a medallion from Caracalla, issued in Tarsus, Cilicia and has a rather poor conservation state, making its identification difficult. The second piece is a medallion from Gordian III struck by Heraclea Pontica. This last item was found in Tomis, in 1992, on Muzeelor Street, on the stratigraphic sequence between the section I and II, in a Roman-Byzantine pit. The penetration of these pieces in Dobruja is related to the movements of the military units, such as Cohors I Cilicium, but also to the movement of the people caused by certain historical events.*

**Rezumat:** *Autorii prezintă două piese ce se păstrează în colecția Muzeului de Istorie Națională și Arheologie din Constanța. Acestea sunt deosebite atât prin tipul lor, fiind medalioane, cât și prin faptul că au fost descoperite în Dobrogea. Prima piesă este un medalion de la Caracalla emis în Tarsus, Cilicia, care are o stare de conservare destul de slabă, făcând dificilă identificarea ei. Cea de-a doua piesă este un medalion de la Gordian III bătut de Heraclea Pontica. Acesta a fost găsit chiar în Tomis, în anul 1992, pe strada Muzeelor, pe martorul dintre secțiunile I și II, într-o groapă romano-bizantină. Pătrunderea acestor piese în Dobrogea este legată de deplasările unităților militare, cum este de pildă, Cohors I Cilicium, dar și de circulația oamenilor provocată de anumite circumstanțe istorice.*

In the collection of the Museum of National History and Archaeology in Constanța, two special pieces are preserved, remarkable both because of their type, being medallions and because they were found in Dobruja.

The first piece is a medallion from Caracalla, issued in Tarsus, Cilicia and is in a rather poor conservation state, making its identification difficult. The second piece is a medallion from Gordian III struck by Heraclea Pontica. This last item was found in

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\* Bucharest Municipality Museum.

\*\* Museum for National History and Archaeology of Constanța.

Constanța, ancient Tomis, in 1992, on Muzeelor Street, on the stratigraphic sequence between the I and II sections, in a Roman-Byzantine pit.

Tarsus (Cilicia), Caracalla, 211-217 AD.

Av. ΑΥΤ ΚΑΙ Μ ΑΥΡ ΚΕΥ[ΗΡΟC ΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟC] ΚΕΒ. In the field, Π – [Π]. Laureate, draped and cuirassed bust to the right. Linear circle.

Rev. [ΑΝΤΩΝΙΑΝ – ΗC ΚΕΥΗ ΑΔΡ ΜΗΤΡ]; in exergue, ΤΑΡΚΟΥ. In left field, Ϟ (retrograde); in right field, Δ; below, between the hero's legs, Κ (retrograde) barely visible.

Herakles, towards to left, grasping the giant Antaios around the waist and raising him from the ground; behind him, to right, a club upright and lion's skin. Linear circle.

BMC Cilicia, p.195, no. 184 reverse, with different obverse.

1. AE ⚡ 17.60 g, 32.8 × 33.7 mm; from the old collection of MNHAC. Finding place: Dobruja passim.

Other pieces struck with the same die:

2. AE 19.02 g; 33 mm; part of the bid of the Savoca Numismatik auction house, 27<sup>th</sup> Silver Auction / 25.11.2018, lot 445. Pl. I, 2.

3. AE ⚡ 18.23 g; 33 mm; part of the bid of the Leu Numismatik auction house, Web Auction 8 / 29.06.2019, lot 778. Pl. I, 3.

4. AE 15.50 g; 31 mm; part of the bid of the Savoca Numismatik auction house, 3rd Blue Auction / 25.11.2017, lot 616. Pl. I, 4.

Heraclea Pontica (Bithynia), Gordian III, 238-244 AD.

Av. Μ ΑΝΤ ΓΟΡΔΙΑΝΟC ΑΥΓ. Laureate and cuirassed bust to the right. Pearled circle.

Rv. ΗΡΑΚΛΕΩ – ΤΑΝ; in exergue, ΠΟΝΤΩ. Zeus seated on high-backed throne to the left, holding scepter in the left hand and a patera in the right hand; at his feet, in the left field, the three Graces. Pearled circle.

Waddington 1908, p. 376, no. 205, pl. LXI, 16 (avers); SNG von Aulock 1967, 6938 (revers).

5. AE ⚡ 20.45 g; 33.33 × 34.83 mm; inv. MNHAC 84061. Finding place: Constanța (ancient Tomis), 1992, Muzeelor Street, stratigraphic sequence between S I and S II, square 2-3, at the depth of – 2.85 m; the coin was found in the roman-byzantine pit. Pl. I, 5.

Heraclea Pontica (Bithynia), pseudo-autonomous coins issued from the time of Gordian III.

Av. ΤΟΝ ΚΤΙΛΤΑΝ. Head of bearded Herakles to the right, with a club in the left field and around his neck, the lion's skin with its head depicted frontally. Pearled circle.

Rv. ΗΠΑΚΛΕΩ – ΤΑΝ; in exergue, ΠΟΝΤΩ. Zeus seated on high-backed throne to the left, holding scepter in the left hand and a patera in the right hand; at his feet, in the left field, the three Graces. Pearled circle.

SNG von Aulock 1967, 6938.

6. AE 24.16 g; 35 mm, with reference to Waddington 1908, p. 357, no. 72 variant. Pl. I, 6.

Av. The same die with Heracles' bust, as above.

Rv. ΗΠΑΚΛΕΩΤΑΝ ΜΑΤΡΟC Α–ΠΟΙΚΩΝ ΠΟΛ; in exergue, ΙΩΝ.

Zeus seated left, holding patera in right hand, scepter in left; in left field, at his feet, two feminine figures (personification of colonies of Heraclea Pontica?). Pearled circle.

Waddington 1908, p. 357, no. 72, pl. LVII, 12, with the same dies.

7. AE 22.77 g; 33 mm; part of the bid of the Classical Numismatic Group auction house, Triton II, 1 December 1998, lot 626. Pl. I, 7.

The first piece is a medallion from Caracalla issued in Tarsus, Cilicia, which is in a rather poor conservation state, indicating its long circulation. In the paper dedicated to monetary issues from Tarsus, there is mentioned only one variant of this coin, with another obverse, indicating that there were several series during the reign of this emperor<sup>1</sup>. On the obverse, next to the head, are depicted the letters Π - Π, the initials of the title given to Caracalla, πατήρ πατρίδος. It appears on almost all the coins issued here, but also in other cities in Cilicia, starting with Hadrian<sup>2</sup>. On the reverse, we can see the legend of the city with the titles Ἀνωτιανῆς, Σε(ο)σηριανῆς, Ἀδριανῆς μητροπόλεως Ταρσους, used since Hadrian's time, continuing with Septimius Severus and the last one from Caracalla (Ἀνωτιανῆς)<sup>3</sup>.

As for the meaning of the letters in the field, this is not very clearly known, but it seems to be related to the status of the city or to other tasks performed by it. The letters C (retrograde, in the upper left field) and K (retrograde, between the hero's legs) may come from ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΟΝ ΚΟΙΝΟΒΟΥΛΙΟΝ, a provincial structure responsible for coordinating temples' activity and conducting κοινόν festivals<sup>4</sup>. Also, they may mean that the city is the office of the dignitary named Ἐπαρχικός, a kind of prefect of the praetorium or governor, as well as of the one named Κιλικαρχίας, an official who also deals with the administrative organization of the region.

The letter Δ was interpreted as coming from Δημιουργία, which represented an office, a department that would have existed in Tarsus, but also in other cities in Cilicia<sup>5</sup>. The title of δημιουργός was taken by Caracalla on coins, as is evident from other

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<sup>1</sup> BMC Cilicia, p.195, no. 184 reverse. On the obverse is depicted the emperor's laureate head to the left, with a star behind.

<sup>2</sup> BMC Cilicia, p. lxxxix.

<sup>3</sup> BMC Cilicia, p. lxxxviii.

<sup>4</sup> BMC Cilicia, p. xcii. We do not exclude the possibility that they also come from an expression that reclaims belonging to Cilicia's eparchia, but the city is always called the metropolis of the three eparchies: Cilicia, Isauria and Lycaonia.

<sup>5</sup> BMC Cilicia, p. xciii.

inscriptions on the monetary issues of the city, bearing its name<sup>6</sup>. Together with him, Commodus and Severus Alexander bore as well the title of *δημιουργός* in Tarsus, indicating that they performed this function here. For example, during Elagabal's reign, such an office (*Δημιουργία*) operated in Anazarbus, and the emperor adopted this title on the coins of the respective city.

Regarding its state of preservation, it can be observed that the piece is very worn, with the legends almost erased, while the image on the reverse is difficult to identify. Therefore, we have illustrated here other coins from online auction bids, in order to highlight more clearly the features of the issue (pl. I, 2-4). They have the same obverse and reverse dies, with a state of preservation that also suggests a long circulation. For this reason, for our piece, we try to find out under what circumstances it arrived in the Dobruja region.

In Romania, there have been signaled coin findings struck by the cities of Cilicia<sup>7</sup>. If we consider the findings from the territory of Romania, from the ones known so far, they refer only to issues from the autonomous period: Alexander the Great type tetradrachm from Tarsus, issued in the last quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, from the Bătășani hoard, Vâlcea County<sup>8</sup>. Another tetradrachm from here was an isolated find in Mureș County<sup>9</sup>, while a bronze piece from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, which was very worn, was assigned with reservation to the same city and it comes from the excavations carried out in Micăsasa, Sibiu County<sup>10</sup>.

In Dobruja, Tarsus issues start to appear from the time of Vespasian (69-79), being in direct connection with the presence in the region of the *Cohors I Cilicum* military unit. In Babadag, Tulcea County, a pseudo-autonomous coin was discovered, bearing Tyche's head on the obverse and Sandan's monument on the reverse, dating to the period before 117 AD, from Trajan or his predecessors<sup>11</sup>. Three other pieces from Cilicia from a later period were recorded as being discovered at Tomis: one from the time of Maximinus (Maximus Caesar, 236-238) struck at Anazarbus and two other coins from Trajan Decius (249-251) and Valerian (253-260) issued by Tarsus<sup>12</sup>.

A significant lot of eight coins from Cilicia is preserved in the Maria and Dr. George Severeanu collection, having as probable origin Dobruja, as *passim*<sup>13</sup>. Although the origin of the pieces is not clearly mentioned, two collector's notes were kept, in which he mentions that two of them were purchased from a merchant named Macarian and from an antiquities shop, Union. The trader's name also appears on the notes kept for other coins struck in the cities of Dobruja: Istros, Callatis, Tomis. For this reason, but also because on the rest of the Romanian territory, there were found coins from Cilicia dated much earlier, during the Hellenistic period, we consider that those from the Dr. George Severeanu collection were found in the Dobruja region, being later

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<sup>6</sup> BMC Cilicia, p. xcvi.

<sup>7</sup> Gramaticu 2002, p. 99.

<sup>8</sup> Poenaru Bordea, Stoica 1973, p. 25-26.

<sup>9</sup> Chirilă 1980, p. 17-19.

<sup>10</sup> Mitrofan, Ardevan 1997, p. 130, no. 166.

<sup>11</sup> Iliescu 1958, p. 450, nr. 7. The monetary type is recorded in BMC Cilicia, p. 183, no. 128.

<sup>12</sup> Popeea 1982, p. 31-32, no. 7-9.

<sup>13</sup> Gramaticu 2002, p. 95-97.

purchased and gradually gathered by the collector. The earliest of these is a coin from Tarsus, dated to the period between 164 BC and the beginning of the imperial period<sup>14</sup>. It is followed by several pieces from a later stage: from Anazarbus, Iulia Cornelia Paula (219-220) and Valerian (253-260), from Tarsus, Maximus Caesar (236-238) and Pupienus (238), Gordian III (238-244) and Otacilla Severa (244-249), from Seleucia ad Calykadnum, Philip the Arab (244-249).

The presence of the Cilician coins in Dobruja is not accidental, as it is related to the actions of the *Cohors I Cilicum* military unit. Its activity is marked by the bricks with the stamp of the cohort discovered in Sacidava and Dinogetia<sup>15</sup>, but also by the inscriptions dedicated at Tomis, as well as in other cities on the northwestern coast of the Black Sea.

If we pay attention to all the isolated findings of Cilician coins from Dobruja, we will notice that they are distributed in this way. The first coin, the one dated at the beginning of the imperial period, may have arrived during the reign of Vespasian, when the *Cohors I Cilicum* is attested in the military diplomas of the years 69-79 as part of the troops stationed in the province of Moesia<sup>16</sup>. Later, it appears that it stationed at Naissus, in Moesia Superior, as indicated by three military diplomas<sup>17</sup>. After a probable participation in the Dacian-Roman wars, for which there is no firm evidence<sup>18</sup>, it seems that it had participated in the Roman-Parthian wars, according to a military diploma from the year 115.

The coin dated to the period before Hadrian, which was found in Babadag, Tulcea County, could probably have reached our area starting with this emperor. A military diploma from the year 134 reveals the presence of the cohort in Moesia Inferior, it being followed by other such documents, and also by inscriptions discovered in Sacidava, regarding its activity between the years 134-157<sup>19</sup>.

But most of the Cilician coins are grouped between the years 236-249, from Maximus Caesar to Philip the Arab, with small exceptions: our medallion from Caracalla found in Tomis and the piece from Iulia Cornelia Paula, issued by Anazarbus, from the Dr. George Severeanu collection. The state of deterioration of the earlier ones, dating from the time of the Severian emperors, is very advanced, a fact which made us to consider that they also arrived in the Moesia region at the same time with the later issues. Their presence is explained by the fact that the military unit from Cilicia was stationed at Tomis during the time of Philip the Arab, on which occasion it took the name of *Philippiana*<sup>20</sup>. This event is mentioned in a Tomitan inscription, in which a soldier of *Cohors I Cilicum*, Cornelius Valentinus, the son of Cornelius Valentinus, dedicates a limestone altar to a deity whose name has not been preserved, perhaps for the health of the emperor<sup>21</sup>. The title of

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<sup>14</sup> Gramaticu 2002, p. 97, no. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Aricescu 1977, p. 57-59, no. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Țentea, Matei-Popescu 2004, p. 279; Bennett 2011, p. 261.

<sup>17</sup> Bennett 2011, p. 261-262.

<sup>18</sup> Matei-Popescu, Țentea 2006, p. 132, the authors show that there is no evidence of its participation in the Dacian-Roman wars, but the authors do not exclude this hypothesis.

<sup>19</sup> Bennett 2011, p. 262.

<sup>20</sup> ISM II, 452 (2).

<sup>21</sup> Tudor 1956, p. 582, no. 51.

*Philippiana* would have been received by the cohort following its participation in the battles of Philip the Arab against the tribes of Goths, Taifals, Peucini, who had attacked the west coast of the Black Sea and north of the Danube in 248.

A few later pieces, one from Trajan Decius (249-251) and two from Valerian (253-260) issued by Tarsus and Anazarbus were also discovered in Constanța<sup>22</sup>. They arrived on the Pontic coast in other circumstances, but also related to the activity of the military unit and its movements within the Moesia Province. In Trajan Decius's time, *Cohors I Cilicum* is stationed in Olbia, where is signaled an inscription mentioning his name next to the title *Deciana*<sup>23</sup>. Considering the issues from Valerian, such as the degree of degradation of the piece in the Dr. Severeanu collection, punched with the numbers representing the year 253/254, this being erased and partially broken, we can suppose that the pieces arrived late in the Pontic area (after 263), in the time of Gallienus (253-268), remaining for a longer period in circulation. During this period, raids of the northern populations, of the Goths, which affect not only the Dobruja region, but also the southern Pontic area, begin with a greater frequency and power<sup>24</sup>.

The second piece in our catalog is a medallion struck in Heraclea Pontica (Bithynia), by Gordian III (238-244), discovered in the city of Tomis (pl. I, 5). Despite the fact that the reverse is damaged, missing much of its center, it reflects the dies links between the issues bearing the emperor's head and the pseudo-autonomous ones struck in his time, with the bearded head of Herakles and the TON KTICTAN legend. The reverse of our piece, on which is depicted Zeus sitting on a throne, together with the three Graces and the legend ΗΡΑΚΛΕΩΤΑΝ ΠΟΝΤΩ, was struck with the same die as the pseudo-autonomous coin, revealing that they were struck in the same time. In order to highlight this connection, we illustrated here a pseudo-autonomous piece from Heraclea Pontica, from the von Aulock collection (pl. I, 6)<sup>25</sup>.

In the city of Bithynia, in the time of Gordian III, several pseudo-autonomous, but also imperial, of higher nominal, bronze medallions were issued, indicating the flowering of the city during this period. Thus, the obverse die of the piece illustrated by us, with the head of Herakles, is common with that of another pseudo-autonomous coin, which also has an unconventional representation: Zeus sitting on a throne, next to two female personages, who were identified as personifications of the colonies founded by Heraclea, and the legend ΗΡΑΚΛΕΩΤΑΝ ΜΑΤΡΟΣ ΑΠΟΙΚΩΝ ΠΟΛΙΩΝ (pl. I, 7)<sup>26</sup>. A coin of this type, with the same dies, also appears in the bid of an auction house<sup>27</sup>. As a result, it is confirmed once again that the Gordian III head issues (with the reverse legend ΗΡΑΚΛΕΩΤΑΝ ΠΟΝΤΩ) were struck at the same time with the Herakles pseudo-autonomous coins with the similar legend, as well as those with ΗΡΑΚΛΕΩΤΑΝ ΜΑΤΡΟΣ ΑΠΟΙΚΩΝ ΠΟΛΙΩΝ<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Popea 1982, p. 31-32; Gramaticu 2002, p. 95, no. 2.

<sup>23</sup> AE 2004, p. 450, no. 1289.

<sup>24</sup> DID II, p. 257-259.

<sup>25</sup> SNG von Aulock 1967, 6938.

<sup>26</sup> Waddington 1908, p. 357, nr. 72, pl. LVII, 12.

<sup>27</sup> Gorny & Mosch Giessener Münzhandlung, Auction 130 / 08.03.2004, lot 1842: AE 23,55 g; with reference to Waddington 1908, no. 72.

<sup>28</sup> Waddington 1908, p. 356-357, no. 70, 72, 76, pl. LVII, 11, 12, 16.

At the same time, it is important that the medallion described by us was located in the city itself, in Tomis, although in a late context, in a Roman-Byzantine pit, which indicates, as does its poor state of preservation, a long circulation. In Dobruja, in Adamclisi, Constanța County, the finding of a bronze piece from Geta was also signaled<sup>29</sup>. It seems that the coins of Heraclea Pontica are not necessarily related to the movement of military units, but rather to the movement of people from south to north and backwards. They came to our area rather like the coins of Niceea, which are much more numerous in monetary discoveries, through trade and the movement of people<sup>30</sup>. We do not exclude the fact that this absence of the Heraclea pieces from the discoveries is directly influenced by the absence of systematic publication of the coins resulting from the archaeological excavations, as well as of those from the museum collections.

In the Tomitan city, there is recorded a fragmentary inscription, which mentions a citizen of Heraclea Pontica, who would have lived here sometime in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD<sup>31</sup>. Another document found near the city, in Cumpăna, Constanța County, enumerates the names of some members of a cult, including citizens of Bithynia, from Tium, Heraclea and Nicomedia<sup>32</sup>. It is dated in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, based on the mention of the city of Abonoteichos (which becomes, from Marcus Aurelius, Ionopolis). Also during this period, there is another inscription discovered in Sibioara, Constanța County<sup>33</sup>. It was dedicated by the citizens of Heraclea Pontica to T. Flavius Longinus Q. Marcius Turbo, who was also consul, imperial legate propraetor of the province Moesia Inferior, around the year 155 AD. Consequently, the sources are not very numerous, so for this late period, after Gordian III, we have no clue.

In the year 238 AD, the province of Dobruja was under the effects of the invasion of the Carpi and Goths populations, which aggravated previous problems, including its general state<sup>34</sup>, the intervention of the central imperial authority being urgent and necessary. This was manifested by extensive measures after 238 AD, such as the restoration of the roads and many other administrative-military structures in this western Pontic space during emperor Gordian III<sup>35</sup>. During the same emperor, the monetary mint of the capital Tomis knows the largest number of issues produced in its entire history during the Roman period<sup>36</sup>. Also, a significant number of epigraphic monuments dedicated mainly to the imperial family are discovered during the archaeological researches or by accidental discoveries<sup>37</sup>.

But the poor state of preservation of the Gordian III medallion, with the reverse mostly affected, as well as the fact that it was discovered in a Roman-Byzantine pit, causes us to consider that the coin could have arrived to Tomis much later, even after the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. This view is not surprising, given that the Goths and other barbarian

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<sup>29</sup> Vertan 2002, p. 304, no. 103, with reference to SNG von Aulock 1957, no. 393, year 204-208/9.

<sup>30</sup> Vertan 2002, fig. 5-6.

<sup>31</sup> ISM II, no. 235 (71).

<sup>32</sup> ISM II, no. 129 (14).

<sup>33</sup> ISM II, no. 57 (23).

<sup>34</sup> DID II, p. 230-231.

<sup>35</sup> Bărbulescu, Rădulescu 1991, p. 126-132, no. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Iacob 2003, p. 317-322.

<sup>37</sup> Bărbulescu, Buzoianu 2012, p. 48.

populations in the north, coming from beyond the borders of the Lower Moesia, carried out raids more and more often in the province. In the year 248, a great coalition of Goths, Carpi, Taifals, Bastarnae and Hasdingi led by Gothic kings, Argaithus and Guntherichus, crossed the Danube and devastated the towns and villages of Moesia, reaching Markianopolis<sup>38</sup>. Philip the Arab managed to stop the invasion of the barbarians, but for a short time. New troops led by king Kniva attacked again between 249 and 250, the cities from Moesia and Thracia, succeeding after the defeats of Novae and Nicopolis ad Istrum, to conquer Philippopolis and plunder it. Despite the conclusion of a peace that benefited them and the payment of subsidies, the raids of the Goths continued in the following period. In the year 266, a new invasion of the Goths, who came from the north by the sea and by the mouths of the Danube, reached Bithynia and sacked it, the city of Heraclea Pontica being especially affected<sup>39</sup>. After this, the Goths continued their route to Lydia and Cappadocia. Pushed back by the King of Palmyra, Odenathus, they will return to Heraclea, from where they will embark on the ships, to return to their lands. The climax of this situation is reached in the year 267, when a larger incursion takes place along the western Pontic shore, in which several barbarian troops are involved<sup>40</sup>. They would have penetrated the mouths of the Danube upstream, causing unprecedented damage to settlements in the province, especially in the northern part of Dobruja. Under these conditions, would have taken place the destruction of the fortress Istros, mentioned in sources (*excidium Histriae*)<sup>41</sup>, whose walls will be repaired in the next period.

In these circumstances, it is not excluded that the coins of the southern cities, later issues from Gordian III or Philip the Arab, from Trajan Decius or Valerian, worn or even damaged, reached the West-Pontic region, entrained by the incursions and movements of the barbarian populations.

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<sup>38</sup> IstRom 2010, p. 307-311.

<sup>39</sup> DID II, p. 257-258.

<sup>40</sup> Only the Heruli population would have had 500 ships.

<sup>41</sup> FHD II, p. 103 (*Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, II, *Maximus et Balbinus*, 16, 3).

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Pl. I. Bronze medallions issued in Tarsus, Caracalla (1-4) and Heraclea Pontica, Gordian III (5-7).