Why did Macrinus plot against Caracalla?
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Although both Cassius Dio and Herodian narrate the assassination of Caracalla in the same general manner, their accounts differ in significant ways.[1] Common practice dictates comparing the two accounts in order to piece together what actually happened. Difficulties arise, however, when such an approach is attempted. Dio and Herodian explain roughly how the assassination occurred, but they then cannot explain why it occurred. The purpose of this paper will be to assess why Dio and Herodian ascribe to Macrinus the motivations for plotting against Caracalla that they do.

Both Dio and Herodian see Macrinus' reign as defined by one negative characteristic. Dio focuses on the cowardice of Macrinus, which is a natural outgrowth of his Moorish ancestry (e.g. 78.27.1). Herodian, on the other hand, cites Macrinus' luxuriousness as the most conspicuous aspect of the emperor's character (e.g. 5.2.4). Although both authors present these shortcomings most noticeably as the cause of Macrinus' downfall, they also appear to have viewed them as spurring Macrinus to plot against Caracalla. By reading these characteristics back onto the story of the assassination of Caracalla, Dio and Herodian are able to fill in the missing details of their respective histories.

This paper will examine how Dio and Herodian each characterize Macrinus in order to more fully understand the motives that they ascribe to him for plotting against Caracalla. This investigation will show how each writer fills in portions of his narrative when he cannot discover verifiable information. These versions of the story should not be judged against one another, since neither story is historically accurate. It is therefore less helpful to try to understand which account is "correct" than to understand how each writer constructed a narrative when little reliable information was available.

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[1] The *vita Caracalli* of the *Historia Augusta* also records the story, but it is brief and does not offer any detail absent from the accounts of Dio and Herodian.