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THE EMPRESS JULIA DOMNA AT EPIDAUROS LIMERA


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The statue base we publish here lies in thick underbrush on the lower southwestern slopes of the acropolis of Epidauros Limera.¹ Its exact position is indicated by an X on Wace and Hasluck’s plan of the site, which we reproduce.²


² Wace and Hasluck, op.cit. 180. The presence of a prominent Imperial monument in this location suggests to us that the large gap here in the fortification wall might mark the position of the main gate into the city on its lower southwestern side. Such a gate would provide the most convenient approach to Epidauros Limera for the road that comes down the stream bed to the southwest of the acropolis. For the position of this road, marked by surviving rock-cut wheel ruts, see the plan in Waterhouse and Hope Simpson 1961, p. 137.
It lies *ca.* 6 m. southeast of the prominent ruins of an apsidal building and *ca.* 21 m. northwest of the inscribed monument published by M.H. Jameson, *Hesperia* 22 (1953) 170-171, no. 18.\(^3\) The base, which is of blue-gray limestone, is embedded in the ground, its top projecting only *ca.* 0.20-0.25 m. above the modern surface. Except for the inscribed face and part of the top, most of the rest of the block is hidden in thick undergrowth. It sits level, however, and may be *in situ*, for the back of the base appears to have been set against a retaining wall whose large, squared limestone blocks probably indicate ancient construction. (Tafel X d).

The front of the block is slightly concave, perhaps because it once formed part of an exedra or a curved monument. It was certainly attached originally to two other, probably similar blocks on either side, for still preserved in its top surface are two clamp cuttings *ca.* 0.035 m. deep and *ca.* 0.075-0.08 m. in length, which are set roughly parallel to the front of the base at a distance of *ca.* 0.11 m. from it on the left and *ca.* 0.135 m. on the right. The small section of the right lateral face that is now exposed has been roughly dressed and preserves no trace of anathyrosis or any features other than the clamp cutting at its top. The left side of the base is now almost completely hidden. Although excavation would be required to expose the full dimensions and the nature of the top surface of the base, it seems large enough to have supported a statue of roughly life-size.

The text is inscribed on a smooth, projecting band 0.10 m. in height, at the top of the block, which is preserved, with only a few chips missing, for the full original width of the base, 0.70 m. Below it, set back from the inscribed band, is a convex moulding, *ca.* 0.08 m. in height, whose surface is much more roughly dressed than that of the inscribed band. In its present low position, the inscription is difficult to read, but after close examination of the stone on April 14 and 15, 1994, supplemented by study of squeezes and photographs, we print the following text with some confidence. Height of letters, *ca.* 0.013-0.015 m.; lunate epsilon and sigmas. (Tafel X e).

\[\text{ἔ}ιο\lambdaι\text{αν} \text{Δόμινον} \text{Σεβασ[τή]ν} [\text{Αὐτόκρ}ά]τορος} \text{Καίσ}–\text{αρος} \text{Δουκίοι} \text{Σεπτίμι[o]υ} \text{Σεουήρου} \text{Περτίνακος} \text{Σε–βαστού γυναίκα vacat}\]

Line 1: The lower part of the lunate letter in the 15th letter-space, after the sigma, is preserved but a break has removed the center of the letter.

Line 2: Of the dotted iota, only the free-standing top of a vertical stroke survives. At the bottom of the 27th letter-space there is a segment of a circular letter; enough is preserved to exclude the lunate letters epsilon and sigma and to limit the possible readings to O or Θ. Of the dotted upsilon only the bottom half of a centered vertical is visible.

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\(^3\) Since Jameson’s visit, a large piece of the moulding above the inscription has been broken off and is lying on the ground in front of the monument. The inscription, however, is still perfectly legible and seems not to have suffered. For this text, which never appeared in *SEG*, see J. and L. Robert, *BE* (1954) 123. It will be reprinted in *SEG* XLI.
Although the text of this statue base is straightforward and does not supply any new information about the Empress Julia Domna or her husband, Septimius Severus, the inscription is important testimony to the existence of her portrait statue at Epidauros Limera. To judge from the size of the base and from the clamp cuttings on its top, she was probably joined by at least two life-size statues, one to her right and another to her left, which most likely represented her husband and at least one other member of the Imperial family. A base for a Severan statue-group consisting of three portraits has been found elsewhere in the Peloponnnesos in the Asklepieion at Epidauros, IG IV² 1.610: Caracalla, Septimius Severus, and Julia Domna. It is also possible that the base at Epidauros Limera formed part of a larger, multiple monument which supported statues of several members of the Imperial family. A good parallel, though on a much larger scale, lies close to hand in Sparta, if we can accept the persuasive reconstruction by A.J.S.Spawforth of SEG XXXIV 309. Ours is the third statue base of Julia Domna from Lakonia known to us. Other Peloponnnesian sites which erected statues of her include Megara, IG VII 80; Hermione, IG IV 704, 706; and Olympia, IV O 387.

Lacking in the inscription from Epidauros Limera are any of Julia Domna’s customary titles such as μητήρ κόστρων / τῶν στρατοπέδων, which she acquired on April 14, 195 A.D., or μητήρ Αὐτοκράτορος Καίσαρος Μάρκου Αὐρηλίου Ἀντωνινοῦ Σεβαστοῦ, etc. Her husband, the Emperor Septimius Severus, also appears here without any of his victorious titulature such as Ἀραβικὸς, Ἀδιάβηνικὸς (after 195 A.D.), Παρθικὸς μέγιστος (after January 28, 198 A.D.), Βρεττανικὸς μέγιστος (210 A.D.), etc. Even though there was room on the base from Epidauros Limera to inscribe at least some of these titles, we must resist the temptation to draw chronological inferences from their absence. The presence of such titles on an inscription or coin can, of course, provide valuable evidence.
for a *terminus post quem*. But the fallacy of attempting to establish a *terminus ante quem* from their absence is graphically illustrated by the inscribed base from the Asklepieion at Epidaurus mentioned above, which has exactly the same items as our inscription, albeit in a slightly different order: Ἰουλίαν Δόμιναν Σεβ. γυναικα Αὐτοκράτορος Λ. Σεπτίμιον Σεουήρου Περτύνακος Σεβ., *I.G.* IV² 1.610. To infer, however, from the absence of μητέρα κόστρων for the Empress and Ἄραβηνικοῦ for the Emperor that the inscription must be dated before 195 A.D. would be to err dramatically, for on the same base, the inscription below the statue of Septimius Severus reads: Αὐτοκράτορα Καίσαρα Λ. Σεπτίμιον Σεουήρον Περτύνακα Ἄραβηνικόν Ἄδιαβηνικόν Σεβ. Moreover, the presence of a third statue of Caracalla as Σεβαστός on the same base places the monument after 198 A.D. We must be content, therefore - until the accompanying blocks are found - with a general date of 193-211 A.D. for Julia Domna’s new portrait from Epidaurus Limera.

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7 An instructive example of drawing mistaken inferences from the absence of Imperial titulature for Septimius Severus is provided by the heavily restored text of a small fragment from Athens by A.N.Oikonomides, *BASP* 21 (1984) 179-180, no. 1; *SEG* XXXIV 184.

8 We are thus precluded from speculation that our base may reflect “local goodwill for the Imperial family...fuelled by an act or acts, otherwise unknown, of Imperial benefaction,” Spawforth, *BSA* 81 (1986) 327.

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a)–b) Statue Base from Epidauros Limera