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FROM THE CIL ARCHIVES: A NEW STATUE BASE OF JULIA DOMNA FROM MUSTIS (TUNISIA)


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The photographic archive of CIL contains numerous photos of inscriptions from North Africa. They were taken by Hans-Georg Kolbe during an epigraphic survey in Algeria and Tunisia in the spring of 1966 and some of them refer to texts which are still unpublished. A couple of these pictures reproduce inscriptions found in Mustis (today known by the modern name of Henchir el Mest), a Roman city in northern Tunisia, about 120 kilometers south-west of Tunis and 13 km south-west of Dougga, not far from the modern town of Al Karib.

The pictures taken by Kolbe concern two statue bases reused in the walls of the byzantine citadel. The first of them belongs to Septimius Severus and was published some years ago in an article by Attilio Mastino written in collaboration with Azedine Beschaouch:

\[
\text{Divo L. Septimio Severo Pio Pertinaci patri Imperatoris Caes(aris) M. Aureli Severi Antonini Pii Felicis}
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\[
\text{Augusti Parthici, Arabici Maximi, Britannici Maximi, pontificis max(im)i, patris patriae, ordo Mustitanus pacentor deo d(ecreto) d(ecurionum) p(ecunia) p(ublica).}
\]

The second one is located a few centimeters below, in direct contact with that; however, as far as I know, this one remains still unpublished.

This base is completely identical to the one of Septimius Severus. It’s a rectangular block of local marble with the inscription surrounded by a simple frame, which is partially damaged on the right side and in the lower right corner. Moreover, the right side of the inscription shows signs of erosion and wear almost everywhere; consequently many letters at the end of the lines are lost or difficult to read. The layout of the text, however, is very accurate and the letters are regular.

I would suggest the following reading:

\[
\text{Iuliae Domnae Aug(ustae), matri Imperatoris Caes(aris) M. Aureli Se[v]e[ri] Antonini Pii F[eli]-}
\]

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\[
\text{cis Aug(usti) et castroru[m et se]- natus et patriae, [co]n[jugi]}
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A New Statue Base of Julia Domna from Mustis (Tunisia)

Divi Severi Pii, patris domini nostri Imperatoris Antonini Pius, Part(hici) Max(imi), Brit(annici) Max(imi), pont(ifcis) max(imi), p(atris) p(atriae), ordo Musti[sanus]

Fortunae Reduci et [Fecundi]-
ditati d(ecreto) d(ecurionum) [p(ecunia) p(ublica)].
Critical notes: 1. 7. The supplement Aug(usti) is preferable to Pii: the name of Caracalla as Imp. Antoninus Augustus is widely attested, while Imp. Antoninus Pius without other names so far has not been documented. 1. 8. At the end of the line the supplement pont(ificus) is based upon the evidence from the titles from the inscription for Septimius Severus. 1. 10. As far as I can see, Fecunditas as a goddess is not yet documented in any inscription; however, she frequently occurs on coins as a personification of Julia Domna herself. 1. 11. The supplement is based upon the evidence from the contemporary inscription for Septimius Severus.

The base was put up at public expense by the town council of Mustis in honour of Julia Domna, called Fortuna Redux and Fecunditas, mother of M. Aurelius Severus Antoninus Pius Felix Augustus (Caracalla), of the encampments, of the senate, of the country and wife of the deified Septimius Severus, father of Caracalla, who is subsequently called Parthicus Maximus, Britannicus Maximus, pontifex maximus and father of the country.

It is also interesting that before Julia Domna and Septimius Severus all the emperors of the second century, with the only exception of Didius Iulianus, were honoured in Mustis: statue bases and dedications to gods pro salute were put up to Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, Commodus and Pertinax. Moreover, a statue in honour of Lucilla was erected too.

This is the second attestation of Julia Domna found in Mustis: the first one is a dedication by the duumvir P. Perellius Saturninus to the Dii Mauri Castori for the safety of the members of the imperial family. In North Africa the wide diffusion of the dedications to the Severian family is well known. Towards Julia Domna, in particular, Attilio Mastino has counted 150 inscriptions which report the name of the Empress. Moreover, from the environs of Mustis there are several attestations of inscriptions placed for Julia Domna only: on a stone slab found in the forum of Uchi Maius a text which is quite similar to this one of Mustis is documented and from Thugga are two other bases with more simple texts.

Concerning the last two lines of the inscription, it is important to emphasize that the assimilation of Julia Domna with a divinity is a very rare phenomenon in African epigraphy. The only cases known to me are two inscriptions from Leptis Magna and Zama Regia, in which the Empress appears as the goddess Juno. Nevertheless, the representation of Julia Domna as a goddess is very common in iconographical and numismatic sources. The latter are particularly interesting because in her coinage the legends Fortunaes...
Reduci and Fecunditas are well documented. With regard to Fortuna Redux, the correct interpretation in this inscription is that of Julia Domna as tutelary deity, as well as Septimius Severus, who on the other base is called Deus Pacator, that is guarantor of the prosperity of the state. An interesting comparison could be a Greek inscription from Nicopolis, in the province of Moesia Inferior, where Julia Domna was honoured by the town council and the citizens with the title of Τύχη τῆς Οἰκουμένης, whose sense should be found in a tutelary goddess (Fortuna/Tyche precisely) in which the Empress can be identified. On the other hand, the term Fecunditas, which is typical on coins of women from the Antonine and Severian dynasties, has evidently the purpose of underlining the role of the Empress as mother and guarantor of the succession of the dynasty. In the inscription this concept is already present in the word mater, which, through the expression matri castrorum et senatus et patriae, acquires also the role of protector of the state. Ultimately, it appears that both names mean something quite similar. The purpose of the citizens of Mustis was evidently to honour Julia Domna as a sort of semi-devine entity bearer of wellness and prosperity, and, at the same time, to express loyalty to the Imperial house and in particular to the ruling emperor, namely Caracalla, to whom a third statue should have been dedicated.

In fact it is necessary to notice that three statues in honour of the deified Severus, Caracalla and Julia Domna were erected by the town council in the Algerian city of Uzelis. Without doubt these monuments were put up at the same time. Thanks to Caracalla’s tribunicia potestas, which is identical on all the three inscriptions, they must be dated between 10 December 211 and 9 December 212, just after the death of Septimius Severus. Moreover, three statue bases are still visible upon the triumphal arch dedicated to Caracalla in Cuicul between 214 and 215, whose inscription mentions his parents too. Finally, other three

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20 Cfr. I. Kajanto, Interpreting Fortuna Redux, in D. Kremer (ed.), Homenagem a Joseph M. Piel por ocasião do seu 85.º aniversário, Tübingen 1988, 46: “(...) the interpretation of Fortuna Redux as the bringer back to Rome of the Emperor is overly restricted. There are certainly numerous cases in which this is literally true. But even when referring to the Emperor and the Imperial house, Redux often suggests general protection more than home-bringing.”


24 CIL VIII 6341 = ILAlg II 3, 8797: Imperatoris Caes(ari) divi Septimini Severi Pob Arabic i Adiabenici Parthici Maximini, Britannici (!) Maximini filio, divi M. Antonini Pii Germanici, Sarmatici nepoti, divi Antonini Pii Nepoti, divi Hadriani abnepoti, divi Traiani Parthici adnepoti, M. Aurelio Severo Antonino Pio Felici Aug(usto) / Parthico Maximo, Britannico (!) Maximino, i pontifici maximo, tribuniciae potestatis / XV, imperatoris II, co(n)s(uli) III, p(atri) p(atriae), r(e) publica Uzelitanorum. ILAlg II 3, 8798: D(i)vo Pio L. Septimio Severo / Ar(abi)lico Adiabenico Parthico Maximo, Britannico Maximino, patri Imperatoris Caes(ari) M. Aureli Severi Antonini / Pii Felici Augusti, Britannico (!) Maximini, pontificis maximi, tribuniciae / potestatis XV, imperatoris II, co(n)s(uli) III, r(e) publica Uzelitanorum. ILAlg II 3, 8799: Iulii (Augustae) Piae Feliciae, matri [Imperatoris Caes(ari)] M. Aureli Severi Antonini / Pii Felici Augusti, Britannico (!) Maximini, pontifici maximi, tribuniciae / potestatis XV, imperatoris II, co(n)s(uli) III, p(atri) p(atriae), divi Septimini Severi Pii Arabic i Adiabenici / Parthico Maximini, Britannico Pii Feliici Augusti (!) Maximini filii, divi M. Antonini Pri Germanici, Sarmatici nepoti, divi Antonini Pii Nepoti, divi Hadriani abnepoti, divi Traiani Parthici adnepoti (!) et Senatus et castrorum et patriae, r(e)(s) publica Uzelitanorum.

25 D. Kienast, Römische Kaisertabelle, Darmstadt 1990, 163.

26 CIL VIII 8321 cfr. p. 968 = CIL VIII 20137 = ILAlg II 3, 7818: Imperatoris Caes(arii) M. Aurelio Severo Antonino Pio Felici Aug(usto) / Parthico Maximo, Britannico Maximo, Britannico Pii Feliici Augusti, / pontifici maximi, tribuniciae / potestatis XVIII, co(n)s(uli) III, imperatoris II, p(atri) p(atriae), p(ubl(i)c(a)) r(e) publica Uzelitanorum.
statues were probably erected upon the arch of the deified Septimius Severus built in the meanwhile in Assuras, as recorded by the dedicatory inscription\textsuperscript{27}.

Therefore it seems that at the time of the death of Septimius Severus and the succession of Caracalla many African cities felt the need to confirm their loyalty to the Imperial house. For this reason the statue bases from Mustis should be dated, as those from Uzelis, between the years 211 and 212. This is not in contradiction with the dating of the arches in C\textit{u}icul and Assuras, whose construction should have necessarily required more time.

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