

The *Denarius of Julia Domna* coin shows the Empress Julia Domna, who was Emperor Septimius Severus' second wife and the mother of two sons Emperor Caracalla and Emperor Geta. She was born as Domna, the daughter of a high priest Julius Bassianus in a Roman province in Syria. Julius Bassianus was the priest for the Elagabal, the Syrian deity of the sun. When she was born in 170 C.E., rumors began to flow that her horoscope said she was destined to marry a king. Rumors had lots of sway, and this is what turned Septimius Severus onto her. According to Abigail Sanchez, "with Julia Domna having been destined to marry a king, it would make sense at that time to believe that Septimius Severus was the rightful Roman emperor to succeed Emperor Commodus in 193 C.E., due to his marriage to Julia Domna in 187 C.E. In fact, it is not a far stretch to claim that Julia Domna, a woman, helped to cement Severus' place on the throne" (Sanchez). Her name was changed to Julia Domna when she married Septimius Severus who was a Roman emperor. She also earned the titles "Augusta" because she was the emperor's wife and "mother of the army camps" (Britannica). According to Abigail Sanchez she was also given the titles "*Mater Augusti*, *Mater Caesaris*, and *Mater Augustorum*, given to her by her husband, [emphasizing] her role as a mother to two emperors — Caracalla and Geta. During the reign of her son, Emperor Caracalla, she was also given the titles *Mater Senatus* and *Mater Patriae* by the Senate of Rome, presenting her not only as a mother of emperors but as a mother to the Roman Empire" (Sanchez). Evidently, Julia Domna was a very respected woman of the times. After Emperor Septimius Severus died her two sons ruled jointly for a short while before Caracalla assassinated Geta. If she wanted herself and her son to stay in power she could not show any ounce of remorse for the loss of one of her sons. Under public scrutiny as an important deciding figure in who was a valid emperor, for her own sake and safety she could only show immense joy at this change in power. Julia Domna did not lose her power when her

son became the emperor, in fact she arguably gained more of it. When Emperor Caracalla would leave the empire on campaign trips he left Julia Domna in charge of most of the civilian administration, which earned her the title “mother of the Senate and of the fatherland” (Britannica). She also handled both letters to the emperor and any petitions hoping to make their way up to him. This was actually a very powerful position, even though the most important ones would be sent straight to Emperor Caracalla, she could decide what other letters and petitions her son would get to see and make decisions on. Thus, it is influenced by many scholars that she was a valuable and respected source of advice for the emperor. When Emperor Caracalla was murdered in 217 C.E., she either starved herself to death willingly, or the new emperor Macrinus forced her to do so. Other scholars say that after her son’s death, she attempted to “become the sole ruler of the Roman Empire and started seeking out supporters before realizing her efforts would not produce the results she intended” (Sanchez).

While she was alive she represented motherhood, chastity, and modesty (Sanchez). It was also very common for her to be compared to various Roman goddesses, which was something that happened frequently with the royal families. Images of Julia Domna both when she was alive and when she had passed away are important to consider when analyzing the *Denarius of Julia Domna* coin. For instance, Emperor Septimus Severus wished to promote old Augustan values of family and stability as an emperor. Julia Domna became a symbol for Roman wives and mothers whose beliefs aligned with the emperor’s. Sanchez writes in her findings that “she was active in ceremonies alongside the Vestal Virgins in prayers to Juno Regina and in ritual banquets for Juno and Diana” (Sanchez). Juno was the Roman goddess of marriage, and since she was married to Zeus she was also called the queen of the gods. Diana was the goddess of both maidenhood, or in other words unmarried women, and childbirth. The

Vestal Virgins were a group of “highly venerated priestesses”, and her public worship implied Julia Domna’s intent to embody the values of both of the goddesses Juno and Diana (Sanchez). This set her up to be the perfect face for Emperor Septimus Severus’ empire. Her bust was minted onto the obverse sides of coinage, while the reverse sides depict an array of different deities of family, motherhood, and children. The coin shown here is one of those many kinds. It shows, of course, Julia Domna in her iconic waved hair on the obverse and the goddess Isis holding the god Horus as a child. Isis is the “Egyptian goddess of magic, healing, and fertility” (Sanchez). Because of this, the coin was most likely minted anywhere from between 196 - 211 C.E., which overlaps with when the Roman Empire expanded into what is modern day Turkey. She also was well known for funding and petitioning the restoration of old buildings like, Aedes Vestae, the Temple of Fortuna Muliebris, and an old building dedicated to married upper-class women. By doing this she further associated herself with the values of Emperor Septimus Severus’ campaign. Sanchez even asserts that “discussions with upper-class women and the utilization of her symbolic imagery to her advantage showed how her political influence extended to the noble class and the everyday people of Rome” (Sanchez).