

**DAVID R. SEAR**

# Certificate of Authenticity

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*This coin has been personally inspected and authenticated by*

Issued to: Jens G. Feierabend

On: April 9, 2022

*David R. Sear*

State: Roman Empire

Ruler: Julia Domna (wife of Septimius Severus, mother of Caracalla)

Denomination: orichalcum sestertius

Mint: Rome

Date: circa AD 213 (under Caracalla)

Weight: 24.70 grams

Maximum Diameter: 31.27 millimeters

Die Axis: ↓

Obverse: IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG, diademed and draped bust of Julia Domna right, her hair elaborately waved in ridges and turned up low behind.

Reverse: SAECVLI FELICITAS (around), S — C (in field), Felicitas standing left, sacrificing over lighted altar from patera held in extended right hand and resting on long caduceus held in left.

References: RIC (Caracalla) 590; BMCRE p. 470, 215 and pl. 74, 3 (reverse only); Cohen 178; Cayón, p. 488, 34; Banti 42; Hill (*The Coinage of Septimius Severus and his Family of the Mint of Rome, A.D. 193-217*) 1394; Sear (*Roman Coins & Their Values II*) 7119.

Grade: good F, hairline striking-crack at 4 o'clock, slight double-string on reverse

Historical & Numismatic Note: Julia Domna, from all accounts a woman of great beauty and considerable intellect, married Septimius Severus as his second wife in AD 187. She was only seventeen at the time whilst her husband was forty-two and still six years away from becoming emperor. She was the younger daughter of the very wealthy Julius Bassianus, high priest of Elah-Gabal, the sun god of Emesa in Syria. When Severus married his Syrian bride, he could have been risking his career. Conservative Roman circles still looked with disapproval on the marriage of a Roman officer with an eastern wife. However, he was obviously willing to take that chance because of her father's great wealth and when he himself won the imperial throne in the confused period following the assassinations of the emperors Commodus and Pertinax any hint of disapproval on the part of Roman society would have quickly evaporated. Julia Domna bore her husband two sons — Caracalla, born in 188, and Geta who was born the following year. At the age of twenty-three she became empress of Rome and gathered about her a coterie of men of learning. Her political power undoubtedly was considerable, but from AD 200 to 205 she was partially eclipsed by the powerful praetorian prefect Plautianus, who seems to have exercised influence over the emperor. In 208, she accompanied Severus to Britain for the prolonged military campaigns of the *expeditio felicissima Britannica*. On her husband's death in *Eboracum* (York) in early 211 she did her best to reconcile the jealousies that existed between her two sons, now joint emperors. Tragically, on their return to Rome Geta was murdered in his mother's arms by agents of his elder brother (late 211). During the last five years of her life, Julia Domna virtually ran the government while Caracalla embarked on various military adventures. In 217, whilst on campaign in the East, he fell victim to a conspiracy of his officers and on hearing of her son's death the 47-year-old Julia Domna committed suicide at Antioch. She had been empress for almost a quarter of a century and her coinage is probably more extensive and varied than that of any other imperial lady. This orichalcum sestertius, never a common denomination under Severus and his sons, was issued about AD 213 during the early stages of Caracalla's sole reign. It has the late form of obverse legend incorporating the titles *Pia* and *Felix* ('dutiful' and 'fortunate'), which were thought to be in keeping with Julia's new role as empress-mother. The goddess Felicitas, appearing on the reverse, here celebrates "The Happiness of the Age" (*saeculi felicitas*), unfortunately not a true reflection of the state of affairs in the imperial family.

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