Introduction

> When the senate voted him [Didius Julianus] a statue of gold, he declined to accept it, saying: "Give me a bronze one, so that it may last; for I observe that the gold and silver statues of the emperors that ruled before me have been destroyed, whereas the bronze ones remain." In this he was mistaken, for it is virtue that preserves the memory of rulers; and in fact the bronze statue that was granted him was destroyed after his own overthrow.
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> Dio Cass. 74.14.2a

In a short perspective the reflections of Didius Julianus and Dio Cassius on the preservation of one's memory for posterity were to some extent correct. Until AD 193, the year Didius Julianus for a brief period succeeded in bribing his way to the purple by offering a large sum of money to the praetorians, the Roman Empire had witnessed a long period of stability. Since the murder of Domitian in AD 96 the emperors, even if they were not equally liked, at least had the privileges of choosing their own heir, dying of natural causes and being elevated to divinity. The murder of Commodus some months previously had ended this era and once again brought the Empire to the verge of civil war. It is not entirely clear whether Didius Julianus, in Dio's rendering of the speech, is supposed to be referring to the statues of his two immediate predecessors, the unfortunate emperors Commodus and Pertinax, or to those of former emperors in general; but being a virtuous ruler was apparently no guarantee against having one's statues made of precious metals ending up in the melting pot, and such images generally seem to have had a rather short existence.[1] Dio

1. Pekáry 1985, 66-67 and below p. 47.

Cassius and his audience, knowing the fate of Didius Julianus, could in hindsight of course see the folly of his argument. In a longer perspective, however, it was not necessarily the kind of virtue advocated by Dio that would preserve the memory of an emperor. Nero, who had been hated with good reason by the senatorial aristocracy to which Dio belonged, seems to have been rather popular in the late fourth century to judge from the frequency of his portrait on the *contorniats* of the period.[2]

When it comes to the preservation of the memory of a ruler by means of statues, which was evidently the intention of such monuments to judge from the speech by Didius Julianus, neither bronze nor virtue has proven effective. Instead, the single most important factor for preservation of portraits and statues for posterity was whether they were made of stone. Bronze seems to have been the preferred material for honorary statues in most parts of the Roman Empire, but of the countless bronze statues of emperors made in antiquity only a minute fraction have been preserved because their value as commemorative monuments soon fell below the relatively high scrap value of bronze.[3] Consequently they were melted down for other uses, the same fate that has overcome practically all portraits in precious metal. To a large extent only bronze statues placed out of human reach by unusual conditions, like those afforded by the eruption of Vesuvius or landslides like that in Boubon (or statues lost at sea or in rivers during transport) have survived.[4] The scrap value of marble statues was much lower, and they thus stood a larger chance of survival, although lime kilns have taken their share of these too. This process of selection has profoundly influenced the study of imperial portraits, which naturally must begin with the preserved specimens i.e. the marble portraits. The issue of how these relate to those originally in existence has unfortunately not received the attention it deserves. The primary aim of nearly all studies of imperial portraits has been to compile the genuine specimens, establish a typology, and date the introduction of new portrait types.[5] To this end the numismatic evidence has proven especially useful, since the typology of the coin portraits regularly corresponds to that of the portraits in the round, and

2. Mittag 1999, 128-133.
3. Lahusen & Formigli (2001), in their recent monograph on bronze portraits, include 45 portraits of emperors from the first two centuries AD. In contrast, more than 1,000 marble portraits are known.
4. For the contexts in which bronze portraits have been, see Lahusen & Formigli 2001, 455-459.
5. Pfanner 1989, 162; Rose 1997b, 108-120; Pollini 1987, 8-17. This approach is prevalent in the series *Das römische Herrscherbild* and in most museum catalogues.

the coin legends often supply an exact date. Because of the strong focus on the extant portraits, which often have no archaeological context, and because of the remarkable advances made within the field of portrait studies during the last two generations, other archaeological, literary and epigraphical sources related to the dedication of imperial statues have been relegated to a very subordinate position in nearly all studies of imperial portraits. It is the aim of this study of one of these documentary sources – namely the epigraphical evidence from the statue bases[6] – to compensate for this lack of research and show that the study of statue bases is relevant if not crucial for the understanding of Roman imperial portrait statues.

In his significant study *The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire*, Ramsey McMullen observed that "Papyri and ostraca from Roman Egypt survive in sufficient numbers to invite statistical analysis and thus to teach us something out of the numbers themselves that is not evident in the body of any single text".[7] This applies to the statue bases of Roman emperors as well. By themselves the inscriptions from each individual base yield information about the specific statue once placed on the base, but since these almost invariably have been lost or moved beyond recovery of their original context, the immediate testimony has little direct value for the study of imperial portraits. Of the limited number of portraits that have been found with their accompanying inscriptions, only the relief from Ostia dated AD 160 showing Lucius Verus in the portrait type, thought to have been created on his accession a year later, has modified the chronology of an emperor's portrait types during the period under consideration here.[8] By systematically compiling the statue bases and using them as statistical data, however, they can reveal valuable information about where imperial statues were erected, when, by whom and for what reason; questions that cannot be answered by studying the extant portraits.

6. The term "statue base" will be applied below to all types of inscribed monuments intended to carry a sculpted representation of the emperor, see p. 19. In the text, statue bases are referred to as numbers in the catalogue.
7. MacMullen 1982, 234.
8. Fuhrmann 1939, 294-302 = (Lucius Verus 16). Other first and second century portraits of emperors that have been found with accompanying inscriptions: Herculaneum (Tiberius 13 (theatre); Claudius 8 (basilica); Lanuvium (Claudius 9 uncertain); Misenum (Vespasian 8 [*augusteum*]); Neúilly-le-Real (Augustus 75 [bronze bust]); Lepcis Magna (Augustus 114, Tiberius 76, Claudius 73 [Temple of Roma and Augustus]); Olympia (Antoninus Pius 201, Lucius Verus 108 [Nymphaeum of Herodes Atticus]); Aphrodisias (Claudius 115, Nero 40, 41, [Sebasteion]; Domitian 37 [theatre]); Boubon (Lucius Verus 113); Perge (Hadrian 373 uncertain); Philadelphia (Commodus 87 [relief]); Cyrene (Tiberius 109 [Strategeion]).

The epigraphical evidence from statue bases has been discussed before in connection with imperial portraits. The first person to systematically compile the statue bases for an emperor was Meriwether Stuart, who collected all the documentary sources relating to statues of Claudius in 1938.[9] Soon afterwards followed studies along similar lines concerning the other Julio-Claudian emperors[10] and the family of Augustus.[11] The statue bases of empresses have been systematically compiled for Sabina[12] and Julia Domna,[13] and so have those for the emperors from the mid-fourth century AD to the end of antiquity.[14] Although the results of these studies were noteworthy, they have had limited impact for two reasons. Firstly, a direct relationship between the chronological distribution of the statue bases and that of the extant portraits has not been established. Secondly, the studies have been too scattered chronologically to offer comparative evidence that could reveal any consistent patterns in frequency and geographical and chronological distribution of the statue bases. It is characteristic that the recent works on the portraits of Augustus,[15] Caligula,[16] Hadrian[17] and the Antonine princes[18] that do include investigations of the epigraphical evidence make limited use of it for questions relating to the extant portraits. Other studies have dealt more or less thoroughly with the statue bases relating to portraits in a certain setting or region. Examples of these are the excursus in Inan and Rosenbaum's study of the portraits from Asia Minor,[19] the regional studies of statue bases in Conventus Tarraconensis and in Venetia et Histria,[20] and recent works concerning Julio-Claudian statue groups[21] and imperial women in the Greek East.[22]

To overcome the obstacle of lack of comparative material, this study compiles the imperial statue bases from a long continuous period. It includes all the emperors from Augustus to Commodus, a period of approximately 250

9. Stuart 1938.
10. Stuart 1939, 601-617.
11. Hanson & Johnson 1946, 389-400.
12. Carandini 1969.
13. Fejfer 1985, 129-138.
14. Stichel 1982.
15. Boschung 1993a.
16. Boschung 1989.
17. Evers 1994.
18. Fittschen 1999.
19. Inan & Rosenbaum 1966, 42-53.
20. Alföldy 1979, 177-275; Alföldy 1984.
21. Rose 1997a; Boschung 2002a.
22. Hahn 1994.

years that covers a large part of the principate including the second century AD, when the production of portraits of emperors reached its height. The compiled corpus of statue bases comprises 2,300 monuments from nearly 800 different sites throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. The broad chronological perspective of this large sample shows that the statue bases provide a consistent and reliable picture of the geographical and chronological distribution of imperial statues in antiquity which challenges previous assumptions regarding the principles that governed the erection of imperial statues in a number of ways.