



Syria
Archéologie, art et histoire

84 | 2007
Varia

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/syria/344>

DOI: 10.4000/syria.344

ISSN: 2076-8435

Publisher

IFPO - Institut français du Proche-Orient

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 January 2007

Number of pages: 277-285

ISSN: 0039-7946

Electronic reference

Kevin Butcher, « Two Syrian deities », *Syria* [Online], 84 | 2007, Online since 01 July 2016, connection on 01 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/syria/344> ; DOI : 10.4000/syria.344

TWO SYRIAN DEITIES

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Résumé – Cet article prend en considération deux types monétaires, portant deux divinités mâle et femelle, que les savants considèrent habituellement comme cappadociens d'origine. L'étude des lieux de trouvaille et de leur composition métallique conduit à conclure que ces types circulaient en Syrie, non en Cappadoce. Les divinités représentées doivent donc avoir quelque rapport avec la Syrie. On suggère qu'il s'agit des dieux de Hiérapolis, Hadad et Atargatis, que l'on n'a pas reconnus jusqu'ici¹.

Abstract – This article considers two coin types, depicting a male and a female deity, which scholars traditionally considered to be Cappadocian in origin. A study of the find spots, and consideration of their metallurgy, leads one to conclude that these types were issued for circulation in Syria and not in Cappadocia. The deities depicted on the coins should therefore have some relevance for Syria. It is suggested that they are representations of the Syrian Gods of Hierapolis, Hadad and Atargatis, which have gone unrecognised until now.

خلاصة – يأخذ هذا المقال بعين الاعتبار نمطين نقديين: يحملان ألوهتين، ذكر وأنثى، ويعتبرهما العلماء عادة على أنهما كبادوقيا الأصل. وتقودنا دراسة أماكن العثور عليها كما وتركيبها المعدني إلى الاستنتاج أن هذه الأنماط كانت متداولة في سورية، وليس في كبادوقيا. وبالتالي فإنه لا بد أن تكون للألوهتين الممثلتين عليها بعض الروابط مع سورية. ويعتقد أنهما إلهها هيبيرابوليس، حدد وعرتغاتيس، اللذين لم يتم التعرف عليهما حتى الآن.

An issue of silver tridrachms and didrachms of the emperor Trajan, struck during his second consulship (AD 98-99), have reverse types portraying deities that have so far defied certain identification by numismatists, and consequently these images have escaped the notice of scholars working on ancient cults (fig. 2-5). They are normally referred to as “Zeus” and “Hera”, although their unusual headgear suggests a local version of these deities. The deities also carry attributes that help to identify them, but many of the surviving specimens of these coins are too worn for us to be able to see the attributes clearly.

Another reason why they are likely to have escaped attention is that the coins have for a long time been misattributed to the mint of Caesarea in Cappadocia when in reality they appear to have been issued for the province of Syria². In a recent detailed study of the coinage of Caesarea, W. E. Metcalf has

1. I would like to thank Jane Lightfoot for her helpful comments on a draft of this article; Henry Kim and Michel Prieur for kindly providing images for figures 14 and 13 respectively; Susan Matheson, Chief Curator at Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, for kind permission to reproduce the image in figure 1; Megan Doyon, Senior Museum Assistant at the same institution, for prompt assistance; Ted Kaizer, for suggesting I contact Susan Matheson and for generously making his own excellent image of the relief in figure 1 available to me; and Zeina Gabriel, secretary in the Department of History and Archaeology, American University of Beirut, for her expertise in helping to prepare the figures for publication.

2. SYDENHAM 1933, nos. 173-174.

discounted the possibility of a Caesarean origin for the tridrachm and questioned that of the didrachm, but avoided proposing an alternative place of issue for these enigmatic pieces³. That the coins in question circulated in the Syro-Palestinian region can be confirmed by their presence in hoards there, although the number of recorded hoards containing coins of the relevant period is not many. The “Zeus” type has been noted in the Eleutheropolis and Jericho hoards⁴. The “Hera” type occurs in the Murabb’at and “Antioch” hoards, and in a hoard reputedly from near Banias on the north Syrian coast⁵. Both types have been found in a hoard from Hebron⁶. It should be noted that hoards of silver from the Syro-Palestinian area do not otherwise contain coins of Caesarea.

Further support for an attribution to Syria rather than Caesarea in Cappadocia comes from metal analysis. The purity of the tridrachms and didrachms is much higher than that of comparable issues from Caesarea, and, as David Walker was able to demonstrate through X-Ray Fluorescence analysis of specimens in the Ashmolean and British Museum, is closer to contemporary Syrian tetradrachms, tridrachms, didrachms and drachms⁷. Walker did not identify the bearded male figure, but he called the female deity Hera.

I have stated that the coins appear to have been issued *for* Syria because I am not convinced that they were made there. More recent metallurgical analysis of two specimens of this coinage, by the author and Matthew Ponting, demonstrates that they are indubitably part of the same issue because their proportions of trace elements are virtually identical. This implies that both the tridrachms and didrachms were probably produced from the same batch of alloy⁸. These same trace elements, and the style of engraving, are remarkably similar to contemporary silver issues from the mint of Rome, and therefore it is likely that they were made at Rome for issue in Syria. The phenomenon of provincial silver and bronze being produced at Rome for distribution in another province is now well known, and has been discussed in some detail elsewhere⁹. Where they were made is not so important for the purposes of this article, although if they were indeed struck at Rome, presumably Roman die-engravers had access to accurate images of the deities in question¹⁰.

The tridrachm and didrachm types discussed here are associated with other issues of Syrian silver probably produced at Rome in the same year¹¹. There are tetradrachms with eagles on the reverse, standing on a thunderbolt or an ear of corn; and tetradrachms and tridrachms with a bust of Melqart, the chief deity of Tyre. Both the eagles and Melqart were traditional types for Syrian silver; the “Zeus” and “Hera” types, however, are new and occur only on silver of Trajan’s second consulship.

It seems very likely that these two types have special significance for Syria, and I contend that they are probably representations of Hadad and Atargatis, the deities whose sanctuary was at Hierapolis in Syria¹². The Hierapolis cult received notice in several ancient sources, particularly Lucian of Samosata’s

3. METCALF 1996, p. 105, 148. An attribution to Syria was proposed by WALKER 1977, p. 92-93, 99-100.

4. Eleutheropolis: BUTCHER 2004, p. 273, no. 30; SVORONOS 1907. Jericho: BUTCHER 2004, p. 274, no. 33; *Coin Hoards* 7, no. 234.

5. Murabb’at: BUTCHER 2004, p. 273, no. 31; MILIK & SEYRIG 1958. Antioch: BUTCHER 2004, p. 276, no. 43; METCALF 1975, p. 92, n. 16. Hoard allegedly from the Banias region: summary in BUTCHER 2004, p. 274, no. 35a.

6. Hebron: BUTCHER 2004, p. 274, no. 33a; on file in the British Museum. For another summary of these finds see BUTCHER 1997, p. 288, n. 12.

7. WALKER 1977, p. 99. More recent analyses have shown that the silver standard used is in fact identical to other contemporary Syrian coins (see below).

8. A preliminary discussion of these analyses may be found in BUTCHER & PONTING 1998 (though without drawing special attention to the two types discussed here).

9. CARRADICE & COWELL 1987; BUTCHER & PONTING 1995.

10. For the problem of Roman die engravers having access to accurate images, see BUTCHER 1995-1996.

11. For a more detailed discussion of the types, and illustrations, see BUTCHER 2004, p. 86.

12. In general, see SEYRIG 1960; GOOSSENS 1943; and *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, Zurich-Munich 1981-1998, s.v. Dea Syria, Hadad. I cannot list the extensive secondary literature dealing with the Hierapolis cults here. For a far from exhaustive list, see BUTCHER 2003, p. 459, and, in more detail, BILDE 1990, and, most importantly, LIGHTFOOT 2003. Discussions and references may also be found in SARTRE 1991, p. 482-483, and 2001, p. 171, 888-889.

parody of Herodotus, *On the Syrian Goddess*¹³. It is quite clear that Atargatis was often referred to in Antiquity simply as “the Syrian Goddess”, *Dea Syria* or θεὰ Συρία. In more recent times the cult has been the subject of numerous articles dealing with its iconography. However, these coins have gone unnoticed, probably because they are still commonly considered to be products of Caesarea in Cappadocia and consequently the types are thought to belong to an Anatolian context¹⁴.

Type 1: “Zeus”. This type occurs on Syrian tridrachms of Trajan with the reverse inscription ΔΗΜΑΡΧ ΕΞ ΥΠΙΑΤ Β (fig. 2-3), and can be described as follows: half-length draped bust of bearded deity facing right. On his head he wears a cylindrical head dress, decorated with vertical and horizontal cross-hatching, usually with a pellet at the centre of each square. In his left hand he holds a thunderbolt, and in the other a staff or sceptre topped with the small figure of an animal, probably (but not certainly) a standing bull.

BMC Galatia, p. 52, no. 46; SYDENHAM 1933, p. 61, no. 173.

Warwick Wroth describes this type in the *BMC* catalogue as follows: “Bust of bearded male figure (Zeus?) r., wearing tall head-dress and himation; holds thunderbolt”. He does not mention the animal-tipped sceptre, perhaps because on the worn specimen in the British Museum it is invisible. Sydenham’s description of the type in his catalogue of the coinage of Caesarea essentially repeats that of Wroth.

There is little doubt that the deity is meant to represent a form of Zeus, because the figure holds a thunderbolt. Hadad was an Aramaean god, and is normally considered to have been a bringer of storms and rains. He is usually equated with Zeus and, indeed, Lucian refers to the chief male deity at Hierapolis as “Zeus” only¹⁵. One of Hadad’s animal consorts was the bull, and hence, surely, the small figure on the sceptre.

Unfortunately Lucian does not describe the deity in any detail, other than noting that he sits on bulls and that otherwise he resembles Zeus in his appearance¹⁶. We need to turn to other representations of Hadad, on reliefs and coins of Hierapolis, to appreciate the similarities between these images and the silver tridrachm type described above. First, however, we should consider the didrachm with the “Hera” type.

Type 2: “Hera”. Found on Syrian didrachms of Trajan with the reverse inscription ΔΗΜΑΡΧ ΕΞ ΥΠΙΑΤ Β (fig. 4-5): half-length draped bust of female deity facing left (or, less commonly, right)¹⁷. On her head is a cylindrical head dress like that worn by the bearded deity on the tridrachms. In the hand furthest from the viewer she holds a sceptre, and in the hand nearest to the viewer, another sceptre or a distaff.

BMC Galatia, p. 52, no. 47; SYDENHAM 1933, p. 62, no. 174.

Sydenham’s description again follows Wroth, who describes both objects held by “Hera” as short sceptres. The attribution of this type to Caesarea was retained by Metcalf “with the greatest reluctance”¹⁸ because one specimen was found in a large hoard of Caesarean coins. However, as we have seen, the type is encountered in several Syrian hoards, and analysis of its silver content demonstrates that it ought to belong with the contemporary Syrian silver issues rather than the Cappadocian.

13. Assuming that it is truly a work by Lucian rather than an unknown author. In general, see ODEN 1977 and LIGHTFOOT 2003. The cult is also described by Macrobius in his *Saturnalia* (for parallels between Lucian and Macrobius see LIGHTFOOT 2003, p. 218-219), and pseudo-Meliton, *An Oration of Meliton the Philosopher* (English translation in CURETON 1855, p. 44-45). For an assessment of the evidence, see MILLAR 1993, p. 242-247.

14. The types are not discussed in the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, s.v. Atargatis, Hadad, Hera, Zeus.

15. See the comments in BUTCHER 2003, p. 344-345.

16. Lucian, *On the Syrian Goddess*, 31.

17. The right-facing type may be simply a mirror image of the left-facing one, rather than an attempt to show the cult image from another angle.

18. METCALF 1996, p. 105, *Conspectus* no. 58.

Lucian, describing the Syrian goddess, likened her to Hera and a host of other deities: “In one hand she has a sceptre, and in the other a distaff (*atraktos*), and on her head she bears rays and a tower (*pyrgos*), and the girdle with which they adorn Urania alone”¹⁹.

Other representations of Hadad and Atargatis together support my proposed identification of these two deities on Trajan’s silver, though it must be admitted that there is some variety in the details of the various images. A relief found in the Temple of Atargatis at Dura-Europos on the Euphrates is the clearest representation of these deities surviving today (**fig. 1**)²⁰. The general similarity of the figures on this relief to the images on the coins is easy to appreciate. On the relief, both wear cylindrical head dresses, and that of Atargatis is adorned with rays, as Lucian states. The objects that they hold are unclear: one object in Hadad’s hand has been described as a sheaf of corn²¹, the other hand contains a hole for an attribute such as a staff or sceptre; Atargatis appears to have her right hand raised, palm outward, and her left hand resting on a lion’s head (the left hand also has a hole into which an attribute such as a sceptre or distaff could be slotted). Both are seated on thrones flanked by their appropriate animals: Hadad the bull, Atargatis the lion. Between them is an object which has been the focus of considerable interest, a *semeion*, or cult ensign, which looks like a Roman military standard²². This object does not appear on the coin issue discussed here, which may lend support to the suggestion by Fergus Millar that the *semeion* was a late addition to the cult²³. On the relief Atargatis is shown larger than Hadad, but perhaps nothing should be made of this, as other representations of the divine couple show them as being of equal size.

Another relief, its features less distinct, was published by Henri Seyrig and reputedly came from the Syrian Jazirah (Mesopotamia)²⁴. It shows Hadad and Atargatis, the *semeion*, and a third figure which is interpreted as a bearded Apollo (referred to by Lucian and Macrobius)²⁵. The relief, though informative about the cults of Hierapolis, is too badly mutilated to be of relevance to the coin types described above.

The civic bronze coinage of Hierapolis, which was issued between the reigns of Trajan (AD 98-117) and Philip I (AD 244-249), concentrates on Atargatis, with the reverse inscriptions almost invariably reading “of the Goddess of Syria, of the Hieropolitans” (ΘΕΑC CYPIAC IEPOΠOΛITΩN: **fig. 6-7**)²⁶. Even when the bull of Hadad appears as a type (**fig. 9**), the inscription accompanying it remains the same. Atargatis is commonly shown either riding on the back of a lion, holding a sceptre (**fig. 7**), or seated on a high-backed throne, holding a drum and a sceptre or a distaff (**fig. 6**). The throne is flanked by lions. The drum suggests a link with the Anatolian Cybele, and, indeed, Lucian talks of *Galloi*, the eunuch-priests commonly associated with Cybele²⁷.

A rare bronze coin type, issued under Severus Alexander (AD 222-235), is the only depiction of Hadad and Atargatis together on the civic coinage, and the representation is very like the image from Dura, except that the two deities are of equal size and clearly hold sceptres in their right hands (**fig. 10-12**). The images are too small to be certain of the details, but both deities wear the cylindrical head dresses and sit on thrones flanked by their animals. Atargatis also holds an object which looks like

19. Lucian, *On the Syrian Goddess*, 32.

20. Yale University Art Gallery kindly supplied the photograph of the relief reproduced here. For other images and descriptions, see BAUR, ROSTOVITZEFF & BELLINGER 1932, p. 100-107; PERKINS 1973, p. 94-96 and pl. 38. Although anepigraphic, there seems to be no doubt that the relief depicts Hadad and Atargatis.

21. See PERKINS 1973, p. 95 (“sheaf of grain”). It closely resembles the object held by some Syrian priests in various cult reliefs, which has been identified as a bunch of leaves used as a ritual sprinkler: see NORDIGUIAN 2005, p. 57 and 71.

22. CAQUOT 1955; LIGHTFOOT 2003, p. 446-448, 540-547.

23. MILLAR 1993, p. 247.

24. SEYRIG 1972.

25. Lucian, 35. For this deity, see SEYRIG 1972 and LIGHTFOOT 2003, p. 456-469.

26. For this coinage, see BUTCHER 2004, p. 445-453.

27. Lucian, 22; 27; 50-53; LIGHTFOOT 2003, p. 19-32, 61-65.

a distaff. Hadad holds another object apart from the sceptre, but its nature cannot be determined from the surviving specimens. The *semeion* is shown between them, bearing a kind of pedimented structure at the top, with what looks like long strips of cloth or some other material hanging down either side from the two bottom corners of this structure (or is this an attempt to show the pediment supported by side walls?). The same material may be noted hanging from a cross bar of the *semeion* on the Mesopotamian relief, and is rendered rather more crudely on the Dura sculpture. On the coins, a bird is shown perched at the top of the pediment²⁸. This time the accompanying inscription reads “of the Gods of Syria, of the Hieropolitans” (ΘΕΟΙ CΥΡΙΑC ΙΕΡΟΠΟΛΙΤΩΝ).

Earlier in the third century, during the sole reigns of Caracalla (AD 212-217) and Macrinus (AD 217-218), silver coins were issued at Hierapolis. These lack the civic ethnic typical of the bronzes, but the attribution to Hierapolis seems secure²⁹. The reverses normally bear an eagle with wings spread, and between the eagle’s legs is a subsidiary symbol of a striding lion, thought to identify the mint or place of issue. More rarely Atargatis is shown riding on a lion. Another rare type shows Hadad, the *semeion*, and Atargatis together, this time placed above the eagle (**fig. 13**). The representation is essentially the same as on the civic bronzes of Severus Alexander. The *semeion*’s shrine is topped by a bird, and Hadad and Atargatis hold sceptres. Atargatis again holds what looks like a distaff; the second object held by Hadad is quite uncertain, but it could be a thunderbolt or a sheaf of corn.

The general similarity of the Trajanic coin types to known images of the Syrian Gods seems clear enough, but without explicit labels we cannot be absolutely certain of the identifications. The likelihood that the two denominations were produced from the same batch of silver bullion, in the same mint, suggests, but does not prove, a strong association of the two types. They certainly look like a pair, though in the absence of decisive proof it must be admitted that they could represent other deities, perhaps even from two different cult centres. However, the Syrian Gods of Hierapolis seem the most likely candidates. Several Syrian cities depicted deities with sceptres and *kalathoi* on their civic coinages, but none of these seems as good a match for the tridrachm and didrachm types as the Hierapolitan Hadad and Atargatis³⁰.

If my identifications are correct, these Syrian silver tridrachms and didrachms of the late first century AD bear the earliest representations of the Syrian Gods in the Roman period. There are some earlier representations on silver coins of the Persian and early Seleucid period, with Atargatis identified in many cases by the Aramaic inscription ‘TR‘TH (‘Atar‘ateh) or ‘TH (‘Ateh)³¹. On these coins she appears seated on a throne or riding on a lion. There are also some profile and facing busts where the goddess wears a cylindrical head dress (topped by merlons, perhaps the “rays” referred to by Lucian: **fig. 14**)³². Hadad also appears, and on one type he is identified by the inscription HDD MNBG (“Hadad of Manbog” = Hierapolis). However, the image is simply copied from the reverse of tetradrachms of Alexander the Great which depict Zeus, and he has no special features or attributes. Other Hadad types of this early period imitate coins of Tarsus depicting Baaltars³³.

These particular half-length bust portrayals of a male and female deity found on the coins of Trajan were never used again on Syrian coinage. Whether or not they are accurate renditions of the images in the temple at Hierapolis cannot be determined, and, if the coins were made at Rome, it is possible that

28. The same image appears in more detail on an *intaglio* in the Cabinet des médailles, Paris: SEYRIG 1972, p. 106 and fig. 6; there seems to be a general consensus that the bird is a dove, thought to be appropriate for Atargatis.

29. BELLINGER 1940, p. 41-44, no. 93-108. I am grateful to Michel Prieur for providing me with an excellent photographic enlargement of this type.

30. The possibility that they are deities that did not otherwise appear on coins remains, but given that the other divine figures found on Syrian silver were well-known “iconic” images (Tyche of Antioch, Melqart) and the fact that hoards suggest widespread circulation of the types, some well-known deities seem more likely than obscure ones.

31. I am grateful to Henry Kim of the Ashmolean Museum for providing the image reproduced in figure 14. The dates of some of these pre-Roman issues are debated: see RONZEVILLE 1940; SEYRIG 1971; MILDENBERG 1999.

32. LIGHTFOOT 2003, p. 23.

33. See the comments in SARTRE 2001, p. 290.

other renditions of the cult statues served as models. It is doubtful whether we should assume from the fact that Hadad appears on the larger denomination that he was the more important at this period, only to be eclipsed by Atargatis. The first civic bronze issues of Hierapolis begin with Trajan, and all bear the inscription “of the Syrian goddess” without mention of her male consort. Atargatis was clearly already the main element of self-identity for the Hierapolitans. An issue of civic coins struck under Commodus has Hadad’s bull on a larger denomination, and Atargatis’s lion on the smaller (**fig. 8-9**), but, as noted above, the accompanying inscription remains “of the Syrian goddess” in both cases. The later coins of Caracalla and Severus Alexander with the seated “triad” (Hadad, *semeion*, Atargatis) give precedence to neither deity, but the commonest type at Hierapolis during these reigns was Atargatis alone, not the “triad” type.

In the final analysis, the description of these types as representing Zeus and Hera may be considered correct, but it is the particular, rather than the generic, aspects of these types that need to be emphasized. However, the coins may not have been issued solely for use at Hierapolis and finds show that they circulated widely in Syria. Like other contemporary Syrian silver depicting familiar “icons” like Tyrian Melqart or the Tyche of Antioch, the images of the two Hierapolitan deities formed part of a religious iconographic tradition which could be recognised by contemporaries as “Syrian”.



Figure 1: Relief from Dura-Europos. On the left, Hadad; on the right, Atargatis; between, the *semeion*. Photo courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Archive.



Figure 2: Silver tridrachm of Trajan's second consulship, AD 98-99. Obverse: bust of Trajan. Reverse: bearded male deity seen half-length, facing right, wearing drapery and cylindrical head dress, holding thunderbolt in right hand and bull-tipped sceptre in left. Private collection, UK.



Figure 3: Enlargement of the reverse of fig. 2.



Figure 4: Silver didrachm of Trajan's second consulship. Obverse: bust of Trajan. Reverse: female deity seen half-length, facing left, wearing drapery and cylindrical head dress, holding sceptre in left hand and distaff or second sceptre in right. London trade.



Figure 5: Enlargement of the reverse of fig. 4.



Figure 6: Civic bronze coin of Hierapolis, from the reign of Severus Alexander (AD 222-235). Obverse: bust of Alexander. Reverse: Atargatis seated right on throne flanked by lions, wearing cylindrical head dress and holding drum. British Museum.



Figure 7: Civic bronze coin of Hierapolis, from the sole reign of Caracalla (AD 212-217). Obverse: bust of Caracalla. Reverse: Atargatis, wearing cylindrical head dress. K. Butcher, *Coinage in Roman Syria*, London 2004, no. 54.



Figure 8: Civic bronze coin of Hierapolis, from the sole reign of Commodus (AD 180-192). Obverse: bust of Commodus. Reverse: lion walking right, within wreath. K. Butcher, *Coinage in Roman Syria*, London 2004, no. 52.



Figure 9: Civic bronze coin of Hierapolis, from the sole reign of Commodus. Obverse: bust of Commodus. Reverse: bull running right, crescent above. K. Butcher, *Coinage in Roman Syria*, London 2004, no. 51.



Figure 10: Civic bronze coin of Hierapolis, from the reign of Severus Alexander. Obverse: bust of Alexander. Reverse: Hadad (on left), seated on throne, facing, between two bulls, wearing tall head dress, sceptre in left hand and uncertain object in right; Atargatis (on right), seated on throne, facing, between two lions, holding sceptre in left hand and distaff in right; between them, an ensign topped by a triangular pediment-like structure with long pennants hanging from it, at the summit of which is a bird. Beneath, lion walking right. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Münzkabinett.



Figure 11: Enlargement of the reverse of fig. 10.



Figure 12: Another specimen of the same type. Private collection, UK.



Figure 14: Stater of Manbog (Hierapolis), late fourth century BC. Obverse: bust of Atargatis facing, wearing cylindrical head dress decorated with annulets and merlons. To right, 'TR' TH; to left, crescent and annulet. Reverse: distyle building, within which, male figure in long robe, standing left, wearing conical head dress, right hand raised, left hand holding an offering over an altar before him; in field to right, behind him, 'BDHDD. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.



Figure 13: Detail of the reverse of silver tetradrachm of Caracalla, sole reign, AD 212-217. Eagle, with wings spread, lion walking right between eagle's legs; above, image of the Syrian Gods: Hadad (on left), seated on throne, facing, between two bulls, wearing tall head dress, sceptre in left hand and uncertain object in right; Atargatis (on right), seated on throne, facing, between two lions, holding sceptre in left hand and distaff in right; between them, an ensign topped by a triangular pediment-like structure with long pennants hanging from it, at the summit of which is a bird. Private collection, Paris.

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