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Coinage and Conflict: The Manipulation of Seleucid Political Imagery

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a thematic analysis of the historical, political, and economic context of Seleucid portraiture, namely that on coins, but with reference to gemstones, seals, and sculpture where evidence exists. No attention has been given to the aesthetic value of such items, as has been the habit of art historians, as a great deal of the evidence analysed here consists of bronze coins. Nor is this work intended to be a catalogue, as technical information on coins has been well documented in the many catalogues in this field. The first chapter provides a general survey of the issue of autonomy and its relationship to the Seleucids, whether among the Greek *poleis* of Asia Minor or other autonomous areas of the Seleucid empire. This is followed by an obligatory discussion of the influence of Alexander on the Seleucids, which has been kept deliberately short due to the amount of scholarship already completed in this field. The issue of warfare and its effect on Seleucid iconography follows this. The first three chapters cover issues affecting Seleucid iconography, whether for legitimate kings or otherwise, which leads on to a chapter covering the Seleucid usurpers. The function of this chapter within the thesis is twofold; firstly, it introduces the concept of usurpation and its effect on the iconography of legitimate kings; secondly, it contains extensive discussion of the coinages of the individual usurpers. The next four chapters serve to analyse the variation of the royal image for legitimate kings, assessing the effect of autonomy, warfare, Alexander, and usurpation on the changing royal image. The kings discussed in the respective chapters were chosen on similarities of iconography and factors affecting this. The final chapter is a discussion on Seleucid female iconography, affected by many of the same factors as male portraiture.

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to create a thematic and interpretative study of the political functions of and historical context for Seleucid portraiture, for which the bulk of the evidence is coins. Seals and gemstones will also be discussed throughout, with particular reference to their role in the formation of numismatic iconography. Few portrait sculptures remain from the Seleucid period, and even here the identification of these is difficult to make.

It cannot be stressed enough that this work is not intended to be a catalogue. Newell's two catalogues, taken together with Houghton's more recent catalogues are more than sufficient for the creation of a comprehensive view of Seleucid coins, whether in terms of the study of the mints, dies, and general identification. Likewise the various museum catalogues provide detailed lists of all mintmarks, die axes, and other technical information. While these works have been indispensable for this study, the goal here is a thematic one. It must be noted, however, that the large catalogues of Newell and Houghton only cover through the reign of Antiochus III, with the later Seleucids only covered in short articles or by museum specific catalogues. While it is generally accepted that the Seleucids had far fewer mints during the later period, we do not have any comprehensive catalogues to date of the mints assigned to the later Seleucid period, although Houghton's catalogue is forthcoming. Where this dearth of scholarship has affected this study I have attempted to make a note of this.

The consideration of the historical context for coin portraiture must not be confused with assessment of the ruler's personality traits, a highly subjective approach which is nonetheless favoured by many modern scholars. As Green argues, "Both the Louvre bust and the numismatic portraits of Antiochus the Great show the same psychologically penetrating likeness: intelligent, fine boned, even ascetic, the air of cold command offset by a certain subtle weakness around the mouth and chin."¹ This view seems to have been influenced by Green's personal opinions of Antiochus III. After all,

¹ Green (1990) 348

he describes the reign of this king as being part of the “Zenith Century.”² The view in this thesis of Antiochus III, particularly with regard to his incursion of the Roman indemnity is a more negative one than Green’s; if this view were then applied to his portraits then the characterisation of this king would be very different. Newell’s attempts to match the portrait with the personality described in ancient sources is equally problematic. With regard to Seleucus VI, he states, “We can recognise, once more, the large, curved, ancestral nose, as well as an expression which supports Appian’s description of his character as ‘the most violent and tyrannical possible.’”³ While it may seem more sound to assess the portrait in terms of what an ancient source says, this is still a highly subjective approach and does not lead to any real understanding of the function of the royal image.

Closely related to this is the tendency to assess Seleucid portraiture in terms of ideal kingship, a well-studied topic for the Hellenistic world in general.⁴ As Shipley argues, “...coin portraits were probably meant to embody the virtues the kings wished to project: courage, generosity, wisdom, justice, and so on.”⁵ However, Shipley does not elaborate on how these virtues are meant to manifest themselves on coin portraiture. While I do not intend to dismiss the study of ideal kingship, in the absence of an ancient source defining specific aspects of ideal kingship and their exact manifestations in visual media, it is impossible to apply this idea to portraiture. Additionally, such a source, if one were to exist, would need to be contemporary with the king in question and would also need to be written in a close location to the king. In other words, it would be unadvisable to apply a document detailing early Ptolemaic ideals to a later Seleucid king.

The assessment of the historical context of Seleucid coinage has not been covered in scholarship in any detail. Newell’s two catalogues⁶ occasionally offer commentary, while Houghton’s recent catalogue⁷ sets out only to document the existence of various

² Green (1990) 135ff.

³ Newell (1937) 75

⁴ Bulloch (1993); Goodenough (1928) Bilde (1996)

⁵ Shipley (2000) 69-70

⁶ Newell (1941); Newell (1938)

⁷ Houghton (2002)

Seleucid coins, with only limited attention to the historical background. However, both of these works are limited because they only cover through the reign of Antiochus III. Howgego's 1995 work⁸ offers useful general commentary on the usage of coins as historical evidence, and as such gives only a brief account of the Seleucids. An attempt has been made here to cover all of the Seleucid kings, with particular attention to the later kings and also usurpers, and any coins only given limited attention in recent scholarship. However, it must be noted that some Seleucid kings were very short-lived⁹, and it has not always been practical to include them in this discussion.

Media for the Royal Image

Coins

The vast majority of the silver coins under discussion could be deemed as having atypical iconography; however, given the great deal of variation between portraits the extent to which we can talk of a remarkable type is questionable. It is important to keep in mind that unusual types minted in specific locations can be more easily connected with historical events than a more typical portrait. A great many of the portraits in this study are in bronze. The issue of bronze coinage seems to have been in many cases the preserve of local mints, and as such was more prone to change, whether in reaction to a war, a ruler cult, or a grant of autonomy. Bronze coinage has been neglected by many modern scholars, particularly art historians, due to its lack of aesthetic value. However, bronze coinage is of enormous historical value and assists greatly in the wider study of Seleucid portraiture. Every section discussing a particular ruler will begin with a summary of mints in order to place the coinages discussed into a broader context. Only a tiny percentage of each king's coins are discussed throughout this study, and attempts

⁸ Howgego (1995)

⁹ Kings that have been omitted from this study include Seleucus III, Seleucus IV, Philip II and Antiochus XIII Asiaticus. These kings all ruled for less than three years, but more to the point, their numismatic iconography could not be adequately placed into any of the themes present in this thesis. After all, many of the usurpers had very short reigns, but nevertheless present coins types which do require discussion. Generally speaking, the shorter the king's reign, and the more limited the numismatic output, the less they can be discussed, however, exceptions abound.

will be made to place this small percentage within the context of the corpus of coins of a given ruler.

Seals and Gemstones

I have identified several royal portrait seals on the basis of bronze coins, and have come to the conclusion that further assessment and study of this is needed. Plantzos, in his recent work on Hellenistic glyptic, neglects to identify several gems because he bases their identity on royal silver coinage, which could vary drastically from its bronze counterpart. The role of seals in the issue of coinage is a topic that is dealt with throughout this thesis, as it would stand to reason that any royal document ordering the issue of coinage would have contained a seal, perhaps bearing the king's portrait. The extent to which seal portraits affected numismatic iconography is a scholarly topic which needs much more attention in future research, and the extent to which this thesis covers this topic is limited. With regard to engraved intaglios, it is unclear whether or not these doubled as seals¹⁰. It would stand to reason that many of them did, but perhaps intaglios carved out of more expensive materials did not serve this purpose. Additionally, rings were often given by the king to a particularly loyal subject, whether a high military official or a member of the court in exchange for services to the kingdom.¹¹ This would have been crucial in a time of war, especially with a usurper; likewise a usurper could have bestowed such a mark of gratitude on a loyal supporter.

Sculpture

No definite sculptures of Seleucid kings remain available to us, although a few have been tentatively assigned. Destruction of sculptures is easy to understand within the context of constant usurpation; some sculptures would have presumably been placed prominently, and therefore easily found and destroyed. While Antioch was the nominal capital of the Seleucid empire, the reality is that the capital moved with the king. With no definite Seleucid royal palace it is difficult to argue that there would have been a

¹⁰ Boardman (1972)

¹¹ Plantzos (1999) 111

Plutarch's *Life of Lucullus* describes an incident in which Ptolemy IX Soter II offered the Roman general a gem as a token of alliance, and also recounts Athenaios' assertion that the supporters of Mithridates wore rings bearing his image in order to solidify their support.

complete series of family portrait busts. Even if there were, they may well have been destroyed by usurpers who took Antioch, seeking to drown out the image of the Seleucid royal family. We have the additional problem that it is difficult to identify an in-the-round sculpture from the profile portraits on coins. This is obviously not the case with gems and seals, which is why it is easier to identify the portraits on these.

Ancient Literary Sources

An eternal problem in the study of any aspect of Hellenistic history lies in the sheer lack of sources, and indeed the lack of contemporary sources at that. This is compounded by the fact that modern commentaries are scarce, and do not exist for some historical sources. Nevertheless, it is important not to lose sight of the sources we do have and to carefully examine their merits, however relative. Overlaps in the study of individual kings have occasionally proved useful, but this is usually restricted to the case of Antiochus III, which is to be expected due to his lengthy reign. We are not so lucky on other kings, particularly those who only ruled a few years, and even less so for usurpers. Where our knowledge of a figure is limited to one source this has been noted. Problems with interpreting so little evidence suggest themselves.

Polybius 203-120

Polybius' *Histories* is perhaps the most commonly cited ancient author in this thesis, and indeed has received the most attention by modern scholars, most notably Walbank's extensive commentary. It is important to keep in mind that his work only covers 220-146 B.C.; hence, his work only covers through the reign of Antiochus IV, and even here his coverage is patchy. His coverage of the individual kings within the period he covers is also variable; for example his coverage on the civil war between Seleucus II and Antiochus Hierax is poor; therefore we can only assume that his sources on the matter were few and far between. The battles and military campaigns of Antiochus III receive spirited attention, but leave much to be desired when it comes to the issue of non-military matters, the most notable of which is Antiochus III's deification. Like many of our

sources on the Hellenistic world, Polybius wrote after the fact, which is not a problem in and of itself. However, we do not have any extant copies of Polybius' sources, making it difficult to assess the veracity of his account. There is also the problem that the *Histories* focus to a great extent on the Romans, which is only to be expected. However, although he seems well disposed toward some figures, such as Antiochus III, he does not revert to the sort of name calling that is commonly found in Appian. The only real problem with Walbank's commentary is that it is the only one of its kind, any other comments on the merits of Polybius are found scattered throughout modern scholarship. Attempts have been made throughout to note when Walbank is the only commentator.

Appian 95-165 B. C.

Appian's *Roman Histories* is also cited extensively throughout this thesis. His work is particularly useful in that it covers the time period of the accession and reign of Antiochus III all the way to the end of the Seleucids. As a whole, the works of Appian focus on the wars between Rome and Syria, and do not, as Polybius, have any focus on the Ptolemies. The downside to this is that his coverage of the early Seleucids is poor, since they had no interactions with Rome. The content of the *Histories* favours military and political history, rather than social history, much like Polybius. His coverage of the end of the Seleucids is very poor, but it is important to note that in many cases it is the only coverage available. No modern commentaries have been written on his works, and he has received little scholarly attention. He too wrote after the fact, but is far more emotive in his language than Polybius, and often comments on the character of kings and their families, as will be explored in more detail throughout.

Diodorus

Diodorus' *Bibliotheca historica* is only cited once in this thesis, and even in that instance his claims are criticised. His work is filled with errors of all kinds, ranging from chronological mistakes to biases for and against certain historical figures. His coverage of the Seleucids is also very limited.

Plutarch 46-120 A. D.

Plutarch's *Lives* is another literary source, but its use is rather limited. While there are many short references to the Seleucid kings, none of Plutarch's *Lives* are dedicated to a

Seleucid king. As a biographer, Plutarch tends to be biased towards the given subject, and can be dismissive of anyone else. Therefore, he is not a widely cited source in this thesis.

Inscriptions

Inscriptions have been cited throughout, and these are more difficult to discuss in any general sense because of the multitude of “authors” for them. Thus, their merits or lack of same can only be taken individually. As with literary sources, a single inscription can be our only source on particular events and rulers. They can also serve to fill in any gaps left by more literary sources. Fragments also suffer the same pitfalls as inscriptions in their interpretation and historical value.

Modern sources

Problems with modern Hellenistic scholarship abound. In a general sense, the Hellenistic world has received very little attention by modern scholars, and often there is only one modern discussion of a particular subject. Walbank’s commentary on Polybius is a good example of this problem. Where there is overlap, the tendency is for far too much agreement and far too little critique or discussion. This is most evident in the (lack of) debate over the Seleucid debt to Alexander. Thus one general aim of this thesis is to provide discussion of largely ignored topics in Seleucid scholarship and to generate much needed debate.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter details the concept of *autonomia* and all related issues, in particular the Seleucid ruler cult. The definition of autonomy, and more importantly its practical application to everyday political life is difficult to pin down, and can really only be discussed by example. The numismatic evidence for the existence of autonomy, and also the effect of it, is crucial in creating a better understanding of what has come to be termed royal discourse. When granted autonomy, cities chose a variety of approaches to this on their numismatic iconography. Sometimes cities retained the image of the Seleucid ruler, other times they chose the politically neutral portrait of Alexander, and still other cities reverted to classical civic badges. Non-Greek cities of the empire followed a similar pattern, selecting localised imagery in lieu of the Greek civic badge. Closely related to the concept of *autonomia* is the Seleucid civic ruler cult. When granted autonomy some cities awarded the king divine honours in gratitude, others seem to have deified the ruler in anticipation of a grant of autonomy. Both the grants of autonomy and the related civic ruler cult had profound effects on numismatic portraiture, whether on usurpers or legitimate rulers. This chapter therefore serves to introduce these concepts in a general sense, with specific examples to be provided in subsequent chapters. In terms of modern scholarship, there have been a massive number of short articles on the subject of Seleucid numismatic autonomy; in this context this chapter attempts to unite and consolidate scholarly arguments on the subject, creating a survey of this complex issue.

Chapter 2 details the obligatory issue of the influence of Alexander, a topic covered in nearly every work on the Hellenistic world, hence the brevity of the section. It is generally argued that the Seleucid debt to Alexander, whether in terms of politics or portraiture is overestimated, with the main priority of the Seleucid kings being to retain their empire and further their own images as kings.

The third chapter introduces the effect of warfare on numismatic iconography, which is discussed in detail with regard to every Seleucid ruler in the relevant sections. This chapter seeks to challenge the strongly held idea that war had a positive effect on the economy; the majority of modern scholars argue that increases in the minting of coinage

in wartime stimulated the economy. It is argued here that an increase in coin production would only result in inflation, and whatever positive effects may have come about would have been short lived.

The purpose of Chapter 4 is twofold, as it seeks to introduce and define the concept of usurpation, as well as to provide detailed discussion of the coinages of the Seleucid usurpers. Nearly half of the Seleucid kings experienced serious attempts on their reigns, due to both the size and instability of the Seleucid empire. Occasionally they changed their images in order to compete with those of the usurpers, which will be discussed fully in the relevant sections. The coinages of the individual usurpers are of particular interest because they often cultivated an image nearly opposite to that of the ruling king in order to create a separate identity for themselves. They also applied the concepts of autonomy, warfare, and Alexander to their coinages in much the same ways as their legitimate counterparts. There is currently no modern study of the phenomenon of Seleucid usurpation, and certainly no comprehensive study of the coinages of said usurpers; thus, one of the purposes of this chapter is to remedy this considerable gap in scholarship.

Chapter 5 introduces the concept of variation in Seleucid portraiture, which could take either geographical or chronological form. The size of the Seleucid empire meant that there was considerable variation between portraits at different mints. This ties in closely to the concept of autonomy and the ruler cult, as portraits could vary according to local tastes and needs. Within the corpus of Hellenistic portraiture, chronological variation is a phenomenon unique to the Seleucid coin portrait model; since Seleucid coinage depicted the current ruler, the next logical step was to portray the current ruler at his current age.

The next three chapters discuss the practical applications for Seleucid variation. Chapter 6 presents a full discussion of the two bearded Seleucid kings, Seleucus II and Demetrius II. Both kings experienced difficulties with the Parthian kingdom, and both have vague associations with Zeus, thus leading many modern scholars to explain the

unusual use of the beard in these terms. The reality seems to have been that these kings were reacting to wars and usurpations specific to their reigns.

Chapter 7 in a study in the ageing of the royal image, with Antiochus III and Antiochus VIII serving as examples. The study of the ageing of the royal image has been limited in modern scholarship; catalogues list changes without discussing them in detail, while more general studies, such as R.R.R. Smith's monograph¹² dismiss the phenomenon entirely; therefore this chapter serves to provide a detailed and interpretative approach. As the longest reigning Seleucid king, Antiochus III sought to demonstrate his longevity by changing his image according to his age. Antiochus VIII's image does not age according to reality, but rather becomes more extreme and caricatured over time; one purpose of this discussion is to demonstrate that the portraits so often associated with him do not in fact represent his portrait record as a whole.

Chapter 8 discusses the issue of the deification of the royal image specifically on silver coinage, as deified bronzes were issued for most Seleucid kings. The three kings who presented themselves as deified are Antiochus I, Antiochus IV, and Demetrius I. For Antiochus I and IV, this manifested itself in terms of the rejuvenation of the royal image, although Antiochus IV occasionally presented himself more ostentatiously deified. The deification of Demetrius I is more localised, reflecting the extent of localised ruler cults.

The final chapter concerns the portrayal of women on Seleucid coinage, and also serves to conclude the thesis as a whole. Female portraits exemplify very similar phenomena to male portraiture, with the ruler cult being slightly overrepresented. Female portraits never exemplified warlike imagery or any debt to Alexander, but these phenomena are very rare in male portraiture. One function unique to female portraiture was that of legitimisation when the current king was too young to rule; otherwise, female portraiture serves the same function as male portraiture.

¹² Smith (1988)

Chapter 1

Civic Autonomy and the Seleucid Kings: The Numismatic Evidence

Introduction

It is certain that civic autonomy, in its varying degrees, could have a profound effect not only on Seleucid numismatic portraiture, but also on other iconography, particularly on the reverses of coins. This is only natural since the very invention of coinage arose alongside the rise of the ancient Greek *polis*, due not only to social and economic necessity, but also to the increase in civic pride, sparking a need to create a visual representation of the city's ideals.¹³ Due to its everyday use and wide distribution, coinage had the potential to be one of the most effective media for reinforcing public awareness and belief in civic autonomy. While the political significance of civic coinage is clear, the practical implications of autonomy and the relationship between the Seleucid king and the individual *poleis* are a matter of considerable controversy. Civic autonomy is traditionally associated with the ancient Greek *polis*, which, in terms of the Seleucid empire, meant the Greek city-states of Asia Minor, over which Seleucid control was particularly unstable. Admittedly this type of autonomy was, or at least had the potential to be relevant only through the reign of Antiochus III, before these areas were permanently lost, whether to Rome, or to the many breakaway kingdoms. As mentioned

¹³ cf. Howgego (1995) 14-18 for a discussion of the rise of coinage alongside the rise of the ancient Greek *polis*. In short, the need for coinage arose due to the increasing economic power of the *polis* and the accompanying need for a consistent form of exchange both within the cities themselves and between neighbouring *poleis*. From an ideological perspective, Howgego (1990) 20-1 discusses the impossibility of divorcing the minting of coinage from civic identity, a point which cannot be underestimated, as the connexion between the minting of coins and civic autonomy was strongly felt throughout the *poleis*, as epigraphic evidence indicates (Howgego, 1995, 41). Among some scholars it has become popular to focus on the economic aspect of coinage (Meadows, 2001, 56) (Aperghis 2004 *passim*), or even to go so far as to dismiss the political importance completely (Martin, 1985 269). One cannot ignore the economic importance of coinage, but downplaying and ignoring the ideological element in civic coinage is equally problematic. Thus one of the purposes of this thesis is to consider both the ideological and economic values of coinage. These approaches cannot always be applied equally to all coins as the proper political and economic contexts must always be taken into account. For further discussion, see **Numismatic Evidence for Autonomy**

before, possession of the cities of Asia Minor also fluctuated considerably during the Hellenistic period, with the Ptolemies, Antigonids, and Seleucids all contesting for power. Asia Minor was also a hotspot for breakaway kingdoms such as Bithynia and Pergamum, with the latter being a formidable threat to Seleucid power. In any case, we have available numerous epigraphic decrees detailing grants of autonomy to specific cities in this unstable region, but the application of said decrees could vary in reality. Autonomy does not have a single definition in the context of the Seleucid empire, and therefore could signify anything from complete freedom to considerable encroachment on the part of the king, and all things in between. These varying applications of traditional, ancient Greek autonomy will be discussed extensively with regard to their implications for localised coinage, royal or otherwise.

Towards the end of the Seleucid period, we have official grants of autonomy given to the Seleucid controlled cities of Phoenicia, with inscriptions on coins being the main evidence for this. Seleucid control over the area was weak; even coinage minted in the name of the king did not necessarily signify royal authority. As Grainger argues, “What the coins show is in fact the name of the king whose employees minted them, and it is an inference from that fact that the king thus controlled the whole city. This may not actually have been the case, or it may be that the coins were produced for the king by an autonomous city.”¹⁴ As with Asia Minor, rule over these cities was heavily contested among the Seleucids and Ptolemies, at least during the early part of the Seleucid era. These were also ancient cities with their own specific cultural and economic traditions, although the classical Greek concepts of *autonomia* and *eleutheria* are not strictly applicable to the cities of Phoenicia, as these cities were, of course, not Greek. Because it was not always clear exactly which Hellenistic monarchy was in control of Phoenicia at any given time, these cities, at least in practical terms, were almost certainly often left to rule themselves. There is also the issue that Phoenicia, not unlike Asia Minor in the early Seleucid period, was extremely important militarily and economically, and autonomy may well have been granted in exchange for services to the Seleucids such as the use of the harbours, whether for military or commercial purposes.

¹⁴ Grainger (1991) 139

Judeo-Seleucid relations are yet another example of the practical application of autonomy. The ability of the Seleucid king to establish an effective relationship with Jewish areas became a vital aspect to retaining that part of the kingdom. Written sources, both Judaic and Greek, detail the increasing autonomy of the Jewish state. As modern scholarship on this subject is extensive, the focus of this section will mainly concern the drastic difference in attitude to the ideological value of coinage between Jews and Greeks.

We do not, however, have any written decrees of autonomy for either the Seleucid foundations or for any of the non-Greek cities further east, even those which were heavily colonised by the Seleucids. On a superficial, theoretical level this is hardly surprising; new settlements had no tradition of autonomy and therefore no reason to seek it, and the daily business of running the local government would surely have been carried out by appointees of the Seleucid king. In the case of Seleucid (Greek) colonists, it may be presumed that they were given control over these areas to the extent that they did not need to seek autonomy. In practical terms, however, these cities and their surrounding areas often experienced a great deal of self-rule. This may initially be explained by the varying role of the satraps in these regions. We do not have any accounts of the exact duties of the satrap¹⁵, but we may assume that this role could involve anything from direct involvement on the part of the king himself, to the satrap being left to govern his assigned area on more or less his own terms. What is clear is that the function of the satrap varied according to political necessity. Generally speaking, the less central the area to the king's particular interests, the less he was involved in dictating terms to the satrap. It is important to keep in mind that although Antioch became the seat of Seleucid power, Seleucid rule had begun in Babylonia, and the court tended to move wherever the king was. Still, the far-eastern regions tended to be left to their own affairs particularly after the reign of Antiochus III, when the Seleucid capital was moved more or less permanently to Antioch. Given that Seleucid kings were often preoccupied with other affairs, namely military, these cities may well have ruled themselves simply because the opportunity presented itself. Moreover a more or less autonomous situation may have

¹⁵ It must be noted that the term satrap does not seem to have been the preferred one in Greek texts, with *strategos* being the usual one when any title is used (Grainger 1997 811). Usually, the name of the individual is used in lieu of any title, with Timarchus of Babylon being a good example.

arisen in the east out of necessity, as cities may well have found themselves in the position of having to defend themselves without the king's help. This is particularly relevant for the eastern reaches of the Seleucid empire such as Bactria. Such practical autonomy could occasionally lead to usurpations, such as those in Babylonia, or more permanent rebellions, such as that of Bactria and the regions further east.

Although it is argued throughout this thesis that Seleucid coinage was extremely varied in its iconography, and that these variations depended largely on the personal circumstances of the kings, numismatic autonomy remains a common thread that affected virtually all Seleucid rulers, legitimate or otherwise. This chapter will therefore serve to introduce the various manifestations of autonomy, with particular consideration of the reverses and non-portrait iconography. While portraiture will certainly be mentioned in this chapter, full discussions of this are reserved for the sections concerning the respective kings, queens, and of course, the usurpers.

Asia Minor

The motivations behind the Seleucid kings' grants of autonomy to the Greek cities of Asia Minor are many and varied and indicate a great deal about the relationship between king and *polis*. Creating a single model for the relationship between king and city is impossible, but there is a variety of reasons for the need to establish effective diplomacy. From a cultural perspective, the Seleucids needed to establish a sort of Greek solidarity, recognising the local history and civic cultural tradition of these cities. As Shipley argues, "It was natural for the kings – themselves culturally Greek - to employ and develop existing symbolic codes when presenting a public image to their subjects through coins, sculptures, and written documents. The cities did the same, in their petitions and in the honours they bestowed."¹⁶ Indeed, the territory of Asia Minor served to connect the Seleucids with the rest of the Greek world and "...prevented a political

¹⁶ Shipley (2000)60

and cultural isolation which would soon have given it an Oriental character.”¹⁷ While one may argue whether or not the Seleucid empire would have become “orientalised”¹⁸ without the possession of Asia Minor, it was still of massive sentimental and political value to the Seleucids themselves; indeed Rostovtseff’s statement may well sum up the Seleucid kings’ perception of the possession of these Greek cities, if not the reality.

There were also a great many practical reasons for the Seleucids to establish positive relations with the Greek cities of Asia Minor.¹⁹ From an economic perspective, cities in this area were wealthy, and taxation (which has been cited as an example of the lack of autonomy for these cities²⁰) provided much needed revenue for the Seleucid economy.²¹ Furthermore, many cities such as Miletus and Smyrna (both of which received official grants of autonomy) were vitally important centres of trade both within Anatolia and for the rest of the Greek world.²² Politically, Asia Minor served as a sort of buffer zone between the Seleucids and their rival kingdoms, Greek or otherwise. Moreover, establishing a friendly relationship with the cities of Asia Minor was particularly important in fending off encroachment from other Hellenistic monarchies, namely the Ptolemies, who could potentially win over a city by offering it greater freedom than her Seleucid counterparts. The other ever-present threat was internal

¹⁷ Rostovtseff (1941) 525

¹⁸ Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993 *passim*) argue that the Seleucid empire was inherently “orientalised”, and attribute much of the Seleucid administrative practices such as the retention and use of satrapies to their Achaemenid predecessors. While it is fair to say that essentially the Seleucids made use of institutions already in place, local satraps were more often than not replaced with Greek ones, and many Greek cities were founded throughout the Seleucid eastern territories. In fact, the city of Babylon became much less relevant to Seleucid rule than the Greek foundation of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, which militates against Kuhrt’s and Sherwin-White’s characterisation of the Seleucid empire. Whether the loss of the territories of Asia Minor gave a more “oriental” character to the Seleucid empire is another matter entirely. Although the Seleucids retained Asia Minor for a relatively short period, by the time it was lost, the eastern Greek cities were well established, along with the Greek language, religion and culture. Many or indeed most of even the last Seleucids seem to have received a Greek education, with Antiochus VIII being educated in Athens.

The Seleucid court remained very much a Greek institution, and particularly in terms of marriage practices; there arose after the reign on Antiochus III a greater tendency among the Seleucids to marry other Greeks, namely Ptolemies, whereas earlier in the Seleucid era, starting with the dynasty’s founder, marriage to non-Greeks was commonplace. Thus in many important ways the later Seleucids were even more hellenised than their earlier counterparts, as the retention of Greek customs seems to have been a high priority.

¹⁹ cf. Ma (2002) *passim* and Hoover (2004) *passim* on royal “discourse.”

²⁰ Rostovtseff (1941) 525

²¹ *ibid*

²² *ibid*

usurpers, who could, and in many cases did, exploit the autonomous sensibilities of these cities in order to gain control and solidify their power.

The specific meaning of the term *autonomia* is a controversial matter, as its exact definition remains open for interpretation by modern scholars, much as it was in ancient times. At one extreme is the idea that autonomy meant full political sovereignty and that the right to this was completely “inalienable.”²³ Ma correctly demonstrates that this view is flawed because many cities theoretically granted autonomy were still forced to contend with garrisons, taxation, and countless other infringements upon anything that might be defined as absolute freedom.²⁴ Since autonomy was something that had to be granted by the king, there is the problem that self-governance was inherently impossible, as it ultimately derived from the king and could be withdrawn at any time.²⁵ While Ma’s points are certainly valid, in fairness to the views of Heuss et. al., there is no reason why cities granted autonomy could not, at least potentially, rule themselves unmolested. Moreover this could also be practical reality for cities not officially granted autonomy. In other words, it would be very difficult to argue that the Seleucid kings would concern themselves with the day-to-day business of running a city, autonomous or not; mundane problems such as the care of public buildings, refuse collection, and even the drafting of city laws would not and indeed could not have been of any importance to the king. Rostovtseff defined autonomy as “a promise by the king not to make any change to the existing constitution of the city and not to interfere with it in minor matters”²⁶ However, Rostovtseff’s definition of autonomy is perhaps better understood as a definition of

²³ Ma (2000) 152-3 Ma states that this theory originated with Heuss 1937 and was followed by Tarn 1948: ii 199-227 and Magie 1950 56-7 However, this particular publication of Tarn’s is not especially relevant to the issue at hand because it is only a treatment of Alexander the Great’s attitude to civic autonomy, and does not address the attitude of subsequent rulers. While Tarn (1948 201) does present a very optimistic view of Alexander’s approach to civic autonomy, and while one may make many legitimate objections to his theories, they are irrelevant to any argument on specifically Seleucid attitudes to autonomy. Moreover, although Tarn (1948 200 n. 2) does speak positively of Heuss, it is impossible to argue that Tarn follows Heuss, because Tarn clearly states that Heuss, although generally useful to him, “does not deal with Alexander.” However positively he may present Heuss in his 1948 monograph, Tarn (1938) 83, which, it must be emphasised, is a review of Heuss, and which Ma does not cite, is quite critical of many aspects of Heuss’ theories, arguing that the book “would have been a stronger one had he more frankly admitted that some kings sometimes encroached very considerably on the city-state.”

²⁴ Ma (2000) 157

²⁵ Ma (2000) 153

²⁶ Rostovtseff (1932) 527-8

political reality, as the interference in the everyday affairs of a city would have been impossible in an empire the size of the Seleucid.

Not all cities were of equal importance, whether in political, cultural, or economic terms, and so to attempt to construct a generalised model of the Seleucid attitude to autonomy is impossible and can really only be considered on a city by city basis, and, perhaps more importantly, a ruler by ruler basis. More to the point cities could vary in importance over time, due to the expansion or contraction of the Seleucid territories. Seleucid kings were often preoccupied with other matters such as external wars or internal rebellions, rendering the interference in the affairs of these often tiny *poleis* practically impossible. There is also the very basic problem of the sheer number of cities; Ma's (2000) Map 1 lists over forty individual *poleis*, and this is certainly not exhaustive. Keeping records on the status of these cities would have been a daunting task, let alone interfering with their daily affairs. Although it is perhaps ill-advised to pass judgement on the abilities of kings, whether or not every Seleucid king was competent enough to encroach on cities' autonomy remains questionable. In short, the fact that kings could interfere with legally autonomous cities does not mean that they did.²⁷

More to the point, unnecessary interference in civic affairs could threaten a king politically, as an unfair king would increase the appeal of a would-be usurper. While we do have extensive literary and epigraphic evidence for the violation of autonomy,²⁸ such scenarios may well be the exceptions that prove the rule, as there was little logical motivation for a king to violate this autonomy. The most prominent example of a

²⁷ Gruen (1993) 339 argues that the "conventional clichés" on the subject of autonomy in the Hellenistic world present the diametric opposite to the views of Heuss. He quotes the opening statement of Chapter III from Tarn and Griffiths (1979, 79), "Man as a political animal, a fraction of the polis or self governing city-state, had ended with Aristotle." This quotation is placed completely out of context, as Tarn and Griffiths go on to argue that this dissolution of the *polis* was should be seen in the contexts of the sentiments of Zeno, who "dreamt of a world which should no longer be separate states, but one great City under one divine law..." Whatever one may think of these sentiments, one cannot interpret Tarn and Griffiths' statement in terms of presenting the Hellenistic kings as the oppressors of the Greek *polis*. For my part, I disagree with Tarn's characterisation of the retraction of the polis, but I do not see the academic value of criticising his views too harshly, as much of the epigraphic evidence we have available today may not have been available to him. In any case, it is very difficult to argue that the view of the Hellenistic kings as the oppressors of autonomy is at all "conventional" when we consider that much of that scholarship at the time Gruen's article was written took a more moderate or opposite view, eg. Heuss.

²⁸ Ma (2000) 152-3

violation of autonomy would be Antiochus III's attacks on Lampsacus and Smyrna in 196. According to Livy, Antiochus III promised these cities their freedom, but only after they acknowledged that such autonomy was strictly on his terms, and could be given or taken as he pleased.²⁹ Bias may well have been an issue for Livy, especially given that the Seleucids were very much at this point a formidable enemy to Rome; indeed, it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which Livy could have presented the Seleucids in a positive light. Even if we were to assume that Livy is completely correct, Antiochus III was, in terms of his success as a king, exceptional in his achievements when compared to the other Seleucid kings. A Seleucid king would need to be very certain of his capabilities in order to take the political risk of violating a city's autonomy, and Antiochus III was nothing if not capable. However, it is impossible to construct a model of Seleucid approaches to civic autonomy based on one king, let alone one of the most exceptional kings.³⁰

As far as more general allegations of encroachment are concerned, the issue turns to whether or not these are actually based in reality. Autonomy had the very strong potential to be an emotional issue, as civic association was an integral part of the individual's life³¹, and I suspect, but will say no more than that, that these violations could well have been exaggerated. While it is clear that the Seleucid kings were not democratic, and while it is unfair to say that their legitimacy rose from popularity, indiscriminately violating a city's autonomy would certainly have been a costly mistake.

The Civic Ruler Cult

Closely tied with *polis* life was the civic ruler cult, which must not be confused with the official, centralised ruler cult of the living king, first put in place by Antiochus

²⁹ Livy 33.38 5-7

³⁰ cf. Green (1990) 196-98

³¹ From the Classical period, Martin (1994) 126 cites the tragic portrayal of Oedipus as *apoptolis* in *Oedipus at Colonus* 208 as an example of the considerable attachment an individual had to his respective city. The sentiment that the individual cannot be separated from the *polis* was later discussed by Aristotle (*Politics* 1253a). These ideas would have certainly been shared by the majority of the educated citizens of the Greek cities of Asia Minor and would have been at the forefront of their pursuit of the retention of autonomy, at least at the ideological level. Kings, perhaps more than anyone else, also would have been educated about such sentiments, and would have needed to consider them carefully when deciding whether or not to grant autonomy.

III, and presumably followed by his successors. That having been said, civic ruler cults do seem to have continued after Antiochus III, with the isolated radiate bronze coins of Antiochus VIII being a good example of numismatic evidence for this.³² The civic ruler cult arose when a city bestowed divine honours on the king in question during his lifetime, although we do have examples of Seleucid kings being worshipped as gods after their death, the most notable example of this being the temple of Seleucus I at Lemnos.³³ Like many aspects of the Hellenistic world, the ruler cult has its origins with Alexander, whose cult was first established in Asia Minor, apparently after he freed them from the Persians, but which slowly spread throughout the areas he conquered.³⁴ In light of this, it is interesting to note that much of our evidence for the civic ruler cult for the Seleucid period comes from Asia Minor.

Although in the strictest sense, the ruler cult did not come into being until the advent of the Macedonian monarchy, it was also not an entirely Hellenistic invention, as it had its roots in classical Greek *polis* life. In the first place, Greek cities had long had their patron deities, which often became synonymous with the city itself, the most famous example being the cult of Apollo at Delphi.³⁵ The Greek *polis* also had a tradition of bestowing divine honours onto a local benefactor, which, in many cases, took the form of inscriptions on *stelae*, or, when their deed was particularly extraordinary, an altar or statue in a prominent location.³⁶ While war-heroes were certainly considered in many instances to qualify as benefactors, in some cases this benefactor would have been a person of political significance (and indeed a war hero may well have been elevated to political status if he did not have this status already) and in these cases such cults were designed to “...accommodate the power of a dominant individual”³⁷ and essentially justify the elevation of a prominent individual, in an otherwise democratic, autonomous city-state. Thus the foundation of the cult of Alexander and the subsequent Seleucid ruler

³² Newell (1919)

³³ Chaniotis (2003) 439 Athenaios *Deipnosophistai* 254f-355a Plutarch *Moralia* 790-a-b

³⁴ Walbank (1984) 90-91

³⁵ Potter (2003) 414

³⁶ Potter (2003) 416-417

³⁷ S. Price (1984) 47-49

cult is basically an extension of the well-established benefactor cult³⁸, with the only difference being that the individual in question happened to be royal.

Grants of civic autonomy and the establishment of civic ruler cults, were, at least in some instances, inextricably linked. There is no set pattern as to the order in which each phenomenon took place, and this is sometimes impossible to ascertain. Likewise the motivations, aims, and objectives of the respective parties are not always clear. One possible scenario is as follows: a king could first grant autonomy and then receive divine honours as an effective reward. This seems to have been the case when Seleucus I liberated Lemnos from Lysimachus, and granted it autonomy³⁹; subsequently the city set up a ruler cult in his honour, which lasted until well after his death, and possibly included a sizeable temple.⁴⁰ Seleucus' motivation for granting this autonomy may well have been a political manoeuvre, as presenting himself as the city's benefactor was an excellent way for him to solidify his power in the politically unstable region.⁴¹ However, it is difficult to imagine that Seleucus' grant of autonomy was completely insincere, as there was a very serious risk that Lemnos would simply ally itself with another kingdom if he were to withdraw this autonomy. As for Lemnos' motivations for establishing a ruler cult, they were almost certainly, at least as far as some of the city's inhabitants were concerned, completely genuine⁴², especially considering that the cult continued after the king's death. Moreover, the case of Lemnos is proof that these ruler cults were not simply a fleeting

³⁸ Potter (2003) 418 Potter defines a "benefactor-cult" as the cult of the living individual which is not to be confused with the term "hero-cult," which he distinguishes as honouring the deceased individual. Alcock (1991) 457 does not make this distinction, arguing that the Hellenistic ruler cult ultimately arose from Bronze Age hero-cults. In the first instance, distinction is needed between the cult of the living and dead individual simply to avoid confusion. In terms of ruler cult, the distinction is necessary in order to gain a view of Hellenistic religious life. Also, the worship of the living ruler had profound effects on the relationship between king and city.

³⁹ Gruen (1984) 139

⁴⁰ Chaniotis (2003) 439

⁴¹ Billows (1995) 74

⁴² Tarn and Griffiths (1959, 52), citing Wendland (1912 361), argue that the ruler cult was a "political religion" that had "nothing to do with religious feeling. To the king, it was a political measure which gave him a footing in the Greek cities and ensured the continuing validity of his acts after death." While this statement has long been proved factually incorrect due to its implication that the ruler cult was set up by the king rather than the cities, it is impossible to dismiss all religious feeling from ruler cults. Given the effort, money, and time that a city invested in the ruler cult, particularly after the king's death, there had to be some genuine belief in the apotheosis of the king. Granted, the fact that their ancestors were being worshipped as gods could hardly displease the current king, and this could have all manner of political implications, nevertheless it is simply too cynical to dismiss the ruler cult as purely political.

attempt to win the king's favour, but that there was genuine belief in the king's divine status, at least in some instances. Considering Seleucus' liberation of the city, it would seem that the continuation of the ruler cult until after the ruler's death tended to arise when the king had performed some sort of unusually heroic deed, but the extent to which this is clear in all cases remains to be seen. We must also take into account the fact that against a religious background of benefactor and hero-cults a genuine ruler cult is not difficult to envision. From a more practical, political perspective, however, the establishment of a ruler cult may well have formed a sort of insurance in the event that the king should decide to renege on his promise of autonomy. In this context, the continuation of the ruler cult would also perhaps have served to retain the goodwill of the Seleucid kingdom.⁴³

We also have examples of cities bestowing divine honours onto a king, apparently in anticipation of a grant of autonomy. This was the case with the city of Erythrai under the reign of Antiochus I or II⁴⁴. Our epigraphic evidence of the deification of this king is only fragmentary but still sufficient⁴⁵. However, the letter of response from the king preserved in this inscription stands out in particular because it makes it clear that the city sought not only autonomy, but also tax exemption, while carefully reminding the king that his predecessors, in particular Alexander, had done the same.⁴⁶ Furthermore, Antiochus was more than willing to grant this request for autonomy as this letter indicates, and so it is clear that this type of persuasion on the part of the cities was effective.⁴⁷ And indeed this is not the only example of this sort of diplomatic relationship between king and *polis*, as we have available another inscription detailing the presentation of a "sacred crown" to Seleucus II from an embassy from Miletus, followed by a request for some sort of favour from the king, probably autonomy.⁴⁸

⁴³ See above n. 25

⁴⁴ Billows (1995) 76 citing *Inschriften von Erythrai und Klazomenai* I nos. 30 and 31

⁴⁵ *ibid*

⁴⁶ Billows (1995) 76 citing *Inschriften von Erythrai und Klazomenai* I nos. 30 and 31

⁴⁷ *ibid*.

⁴⁸ Billows (1995) 77 cf. OGIS 227 In fact, Miletus had been granted autonomy under Antiochus II according to OGIS 226, which Billows does not cite in this instance, and so it is very probable indeed that this request from Miletus was aimed at preserving this autonomy, rather than instating it.

Billows presents these scenarios in terms of the successful manipulation of a king at the hands of the cities⁴⁹, and while this is certainly possible, there are clearly other factors at work here. It is interesting that both cities apparently had been autonomous before this, but we do not have the details of exactly how this autonomy manifested itself. In any case these inscriptions, at least initially, serve not so much as evidence for the manipulative nature of the *poleis*, but surely as evidence that autonomy was not to be taken for granted when leadership changed. Furthermore, due to the similarities between these two inscriptions, and due to the fact that they were written several years apart, one can easily see that there was clearly a set of protocols for both the king and city in their diplomatic relationship, which has come to be termed royal discourse.⁵⁰

Additionally, to dismiss the establishment of ruler cults and other divine honours as mere manipulations is to ignore the fact that cities were willing to provide more concrete support to the king when the need arose. Smyrna established a Seleucid ruler cult from the reign of Antiochus I through the reign of Seleucus II.⁵¹ We do not have any clear evidence of autonomy for the city before the accession crisis of the reign of Seleucus II, at which point we do have evidence of the city's request not only for autonomy, but also for the protection of its temples.⁵² While we do not have any evidence for Smyrna's autonomy prior to the reign of Seleucus II, it would be very surprising indeed if the city had not enjoyed at least some freedoms in return for its long loyalty to the Seleucid kings. In fact, the royal mint does not seem to have been active in prior reigns,⁵³ perhaps indicating the minting of civic coinage. Indeed it would be unfair to argue that Smyrna was taking advantage of this difficult time for the Seleucid family, as Houghton argues⁵⁴, because in addition to the ruler cult, Smyrna provided military support for Seleucus II both in his war against the Ptolemies and in the civil war with his brother Antiochus Hierax.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Billows (1995) 76ff.

⁵⁰ See above n. 4

⁵¹ Houghton (2002) 239

⁵² *ibid* cf. OGIS 228-9

⁵³ Houghton (2002) 239

⁵⁴ *ibid*.

⁵⁵ Billows (1995) 79 cf. I. *Smyrna* 573 1-3

This raises the question as to whether a city which provided military support to the king was truly autonomous. One could take the sceptical view that kings granted autonomy in the anticipation of needing military troops, or in fact with an eye to effectively conscripting soldiers. While there may well have been cases of this, there was always the risk that the city would simply ally itself with another power. In the above situation, Smyrna had the opportunity to ally itself with the Ptolemies or Antiochus Hierax, or even to declare itself independent, and the fact that they chose to honour their commitment to the Seleucids is crucial. Whether this was true for all cities is impossible to say, but the case of Smyrna is evidence that the provision of soldiers was not simply something that the kings demanded in exchange for autonomy.

However, the case Smyrna presents raises additional questions about the nature of civic autonomy. In addition to autonomy, Smyrna was awarded a *sympoliteia* with Magnesia on the Sipylus; effectively the cities were combined into one entity, with massive benefits to Smyrna, including a fortress and the usage of Magnesian soldiers.⁵⁶ As with *autonomia*, *sympoliteia* was extremely varied in its application, and does not have a single definition.⁵⁷ It does not seem to have occurred very frequently during the Seleucid occupation of Asia Minor, with Smyrna being the only extant case. Unfortunately Smyrna quickly passed out of Seleucid hands with the reign of Antiochus Hierax and its subsequent loss to the Attalids, so we do not have further evidence of exactly how this conglomeration continued.

Numismatic evidence would suggest, however, that the mint of Magnesia on Sipylus was either absorbed completely by Smyrna, or that it was carefully controlled by Smyrna. Portrait types for the coins of Seleucus II at Smyrna are virtual replicas of a series of coins Houghton tentatively assigns to Magnesia; both portraits feature the king with a curly sideburn.⁵⁸ Houghton only tentatively suggests that these coins were influenced by the mint of Smyrna (barring the styles of inscriptions); however, I would

⁵⁶ Reger (2004) 156 Smyrna, does not, however, seem to have been a very powerful military centre after it fell out of the hands of the Seleucids (Zanker 1993, 228)

⁵⁷ Reger (2004) 149

⁵⁸ Houghton (2002) 240 cat. 651 (Magnesia) and 239 cat. 647

push this even further, and argue that combined with the evidence for a *sympoliteia* that Smyrna definitely controlled this mint. While it may be tempting to attribute the similarity of these portraits to the close proximity of the mints, this is a most unreliable method because we have numerous examples of mints in close locations producing very different coins; a good example of this would be the fact that the winged diadem of Antiochus Hierax does not appear at all of his mints, even though his territories were limited. Therefore, it is suggested in this case that mint officials in Smyrna controlled the mint at Magnesia.

While it cannot be stressed enough that, at least in this case, *sympoliteia* ultimately derived from the king, it is obvious from the case of Smyrna that cities were more than willing, when the opportunity presented itself, to encroach on each other's rights to autonomy, militating against the idea that kings and only kings were the oppressors of the *polis*. It must be admitted that Smyrna is the only definite case of royally sanctioned *sympoliteia* for the Seleucid period; however, further studies of epigraphic evidence may prove otherwise. Whether there are other cities who encroached on each other in an unofficial capacity is unknown. However, it is common sense to assume that some cities were more powerful than others, and that situations like the one with Smyrna and Magnesia were not uncommon occurrences, although perhaps not all of these occurred in an official capacity. Further analysis of the numismatic evidence is difficult in the absence of written evidence, but will be attempted nonetheless.

Asyilia

Closely related to the issues of autonomy and the ruler cult is the concept of *asyilia*, a grant of which, at least in theory, was meant to render the city inviolable, immune to attack. We have numerous written grants describing various Seleucid cities with the term *asyilia kai hieras*, and numerous coins bearing the same inscription,⁵⁹ but little information on what this actually meant in reality, with little modern discussion of the practical implications of these grants.⁶⁰ Grainger is sceptical, arguing that the status

⁵⁹ For a full list of these cities, along with supporting documents, see Rigsby 1996 passim

⁶⁰ Rigsby (1996) 1-30

could not have had much meaning since nearly every Seleucid city sought it.⁶¹ It would seem that this status was meant to render the city immune to war, at least in theory, but Seleucid political reality would suggest that this was impossible to guarantee. However, it is possible, as with autonomy, that this could have a wide range of definitions. Many examples of grants of *asylia* come from the later Seleucid period, which was the most tumultuous, suggesting that these grants were intended to protect the cities in a time of war.

As with grants of autonomy, kings seem to have used grants of *asylia* in order to win the favour of cities for the purposes of political gain. For example, Tyre was granted *asylia* by Demetrius after the rebellion of Tryphon, who had failed to conquer Phoenicia,⁶² after which the status is recorded on coinage.⁶³ This seems to have been an effort on the part of Demetrius II to solidify his rule at Tyre⁶⁴; as a weak king in a time of war it was necessary for the king to establish a functional relationship with the cities he ruled. Moreover, Tyre had remained loyal to Demetrius II during the rebellion of Tryphon⁶⁵, and the award of *asylia* may well have been in recognition of this.

Numismatic Evidence for Civic Autonomy in Seleucid Asia Minor

The extent to which civic autonomy and the right to mint coins were linked is a matter of some controversy. On one extreme, some scholars dismiss the notion entirely: as Martin argues, “It is my contention that the numismatic, historical, documentary, and literary evidence uniformly fails to support the idea that there was operative in the classical Greek world a strongly felt connection between an abstract notion of sovereignty and the right of coinage...”⁶⁶ This is a very problematic argument in the first instance due to epigraphic evidence; this argument completely fails to consider the Sestos inscription.⁶⁷ Austin’s translation of this decree is as follows “when the people decided

⁶¹ Grainger (1997) 799

⁶² Baldus (1970) 217-239

⁶³ Seyrig (1950) 482

⁶⁴ Rigsby (1996) 485

⁶⁵ Seyrig (1950) 11 Sidon also remained loyal to Demetrius II during the rebellion of Tryphon, but it is uncertain when it received a grant of *asylia* (Rigsby 1996 493).

⁶⁶ Martin (1985) 269

⁶⁷ Howgego (1995) 41 cf. *OGIS* 339

to use its own bronze coinage, so that the city's coin type should be used as a current type and that the people should receive the profit resulting from this source of revenue, and appointed men who would safeguard this position of trust piously and justly Menas was appointed, and together with his colleague in office, showed suitable care, as a result of which the people, thanks to the justice and assiduity of these men, can use its own coinage."⁶⁸ The use of the city's ancient civic image (Demeter) on a "current" coinage shows a great degree of civic pride. There is also the issue that the minting of said civic coinage is cast in terms of piety and justice (*eusebos te kai dikaios*); Robert argues that this piety is reflected in the choice of a religious image on this civic coinage.⁶⁹ I would argue that the fact that the image is religious is co-incident, and that it is piety towards the city's personal image that is referred to in the inscription. While it must be noted that the inscription does mention profit, the ideological element in coinage receives much more emphasis; additionally Howgego makes the convincing argument that these bronze coinages would have brought very little real profit to the city, as bronze coinage brings little mint profit in an absolute sense.⁷⁰

In a more general sense, if the right to mint coinage was not linked to autonomy, then it is difficult to see why so many cities granted autonomy reverted to their ancient city badges at the first opportunity. While few scholars take such an extreme view as Martin's of the ideological elements in coinage, there nevertheless has been a tendency in modern scholarship to perhaps overemphasise the economic aspect of coinage, due in no small part to the recent upsurge in the study of the Hellenistic economy.⁷¹ While the study of the Hellenistic economy is undeniably important, it is important to keep in mind that if coins had no ideological value, there would not have been much point in minting coins with any design whatsoever.⁷² Even a coin with a seemingly politically neutral design, such as Alexander, was inherently political.

⁶⁸ Austin (1981) cat. 215

⁶⁹ Robert (1973) 51

⁷⁰ Howgego (2008) 32

⁷¹ Aperghis (2004 *passim*) Archibald (2001 *passim*) Meadows (2001 *passim*)

⁷² See below the discussion of early Judaic coinage for an example of coinage whose imagery lacks an ideological element.



Figure 1 Autonomous silver tetradrachm of Alabanda under Antiochus III. Boerhinger (1972) 188

Examples of numismatic evidence for civic autonomy are varied and can really only be discussed on a case by case basis. One difficulty in analysing the numismatic history of a mint is the fact that mints could often pass from one dynasty to another. Another basic problem is calculating the production at different mints; there is every possibility that some mints lay dormant at times, and so it can be difficult to pin down a timeline for the transition between royal mint to autonomous mint. For example, we know that the city of Alabanda used autonomous civic coinage (Figure 1) under Antiochus III, but the mint does not seem to have been active for any of the other Seleucid kings prior to him.⁷³ Whether this means that it minted autonomous coinage that cannot be traced to earlier kings or that it did not mint at all during the reigns of the earlier Seleucid kings is impossible to ascertain.



Figure 2 Silver tetradrachm from Miletus under Antiochus II. Although the city was autonomous, the coins remained strictly royal. <http://www.freemanandsear.com/displayproduct.pl?prodid=5202>

These difficulties aside, it is possible to place the various manifestations of numismatic autonomy into several categories. In the first instance, even when a city was formally granted autonomy by the king, it could still be forced to mint strictly royal silver coinage, devoid of any civic significance, as shown on Figure 2.⁷⁴ Such was the case for Miletus under Antiochus II, for which we have clear epigraphic evidence for the grant of

⁷³ Houghton (2002) passim

⁷⁴ Bronze coinage was less of a concern for kings unless an absolute need arose, such as pay for the provisions of lower ranking soldiers.

autonomy.⁷⁵ This grant of autonomy does not come as a surprise, as Miletus bestowed divine honours upon the king once he had defeated their Ptolemaic overlords, whose rule had been very unpopular in the region.⁷⁶ Although this grant of autonomy clearly did not include the right to mint coins, the city's mint seems to have received at least some recognition of its good deeds, as it was permitted to strike gold, a privilege not granted to any of the other cities of southern Ionia.⁷⁷ This would have resulted in a high mint profit, but we do not know how much of this profit was turned over to the city itself and how much benefited the Seleucid government, but there was at least some potential for the mint to gain from this. The privilege of gold coinage also implied a degree of trust perhaps not allocated to other mints. Thus, the issue of a royal Seleucid coinage need not be seen as oppressive, because in the first instance it cannot be inferred that the city was actively forced to mint a royal coinage. Secondly, Seleucid rule, however absolute, seems to have been favourable to the citizens of Miletus.⁷⁸ Thus Seleucid coinage, particularly when compared to Ptolemaic, would have signified protection. From the Seleucid perspective, political realities may have prevented the granting of the right to mint civic coinage because the city was within easy reach of the Ptolemies. Simply put, the Seleucids therefore could not afford to leave any room for doubt as to who was in power. However, it is still clear that there was at least some attempt at a balance of power between Seleucid and civic interests, as the minting of gold coins was not a right given to many cities.

⁷⁵ Rostovtseff (1941) 526 cf. *OGIS* 226 1.5

⁷⁶ Appian *Syr.* 65

⁷⁷ Houghton (2002) 194 In a relative sense, however, gold coinage brought the least amount of mint profit, as the value of the coinage was comparatively close to that of the raw material (Aperghis, 2004 225-226). Bronze, due to the low value of the metal versus the relatively high value of the coinage, brought the greatest mint profit. However, in an absolute sense, the minting of gold brought the greatest profit.

⁷⁸ Because of the precarious political situation, we may also safely assume that the Seleucids would have put in place a garrison in Miletus. Garrisons have often been seen as a serious infringement on civic autonomy, and not without good reason, as the presence of Seleucid troops in the city would have been potentially disconcerting at the best of times. However unpopular they may have proved, garrisons also provided protection for these sometimes vulnerable cities, and in this context they need to be seen as a political reality rather than a symbol of Seleucid oppression. In the case of Miletus and in the cases of cities that had been liberated from unpopular governments, the presence of a Seleucid garrison seems to have been preferable to a Ptolemaic one.



Figure 3 Gold stater of Antiochus II from Aegae Notice the small goat's head on the bottom of the reverse of this coin. Houghton (2002) cat. no. 632. Image courtesy of wildwinds.com.

With regard to the coinage of many of the other cities he conquered from the Ptolemies, Antiochus II seems to have shown at least some consideration for civic sensibilities, if not autonomy *qua* autonomy. However, this seems only to have been the case for the Greek cities of the Hellespont, Troas, Aeolis, northern Ionia and Caria, but not for pre-existing Seleucid mints nor for the new mints in Lydia.⁷⁹ Sadly, we do not have any literary or epigraphic evidence in the case of these cities, but this is one instance in which numismatic evidence reveals otherwise unavailable information on the relationship between king and city. Although the royal portraits indicate that these mints were under the strict control of the king, civic mintmarks appear on the coins of these cities, such as the amphora on the coins of Myrina and the goat on the coins of Aegae, illustrated by Figure 3.⁸⁰ While it cannot be stressed enough that our knowledge of the status of these cities is in most important ways lacking, it is fair to say that these cities received these numismatic concessions in exchange for their loyalty or other services to Antiochus II.⁸¹ Such mintmarks also invalidate Martin's thesis discussed above, as it is difficult to see why these cities would have placed these mintmarks on their coins if they did not have at least some significance about the city's sovereignty, however difficult it may be to define. Indeed, the artistic and technical talent required to place these intricate designs on the coinage would seem to indicate a strong local feeling for them.

⁷⁹ Houghton (1995) 167

⁸⁰ Houghton (2002) Myrina: cat. nos. 498-501 Aegae: cat. nos. 494-6

⁸¹ Houghton (2002) 167 states that the issue of the civic mintmarks on these coins will be dealt with in a forthcoming issue of *AJN*, but the article does not seem to have been published as yet.

Grants of autonomy in Asia Minor during the early years of the Seleucid empire could, on occasion, extend to the minting of precious metal coinage, usually silver. The iconographic programme tended to fall into one of two categories: posthumous Alexanders and ancient Greek city badges. The usage of Alexander has several explanations, the first one being that the Alexander image was a politically neutral one.⁸² Alexander had been deified for many years at the time that many of these cities had been granted autonomy, which itself eliminated any opposition to the coin design within the *polis*. Alongside this, it is important to keep in mind that Alexander may well have been seen as a liberator of the Greek cities of Asia Minor from their Persian overlords, and in this context his image may be seen in the context of the posthumous ruler cult. Featuring Alexander had the added benefit that it did not express an alliance with any other Hellenistic ruler, considering that the cities of Asia Minor swayed between the control of the various Hellenistic kingdoms. Moreover, the usage of Alexander also had universal appeal in the Hellenistic world and certainly would not have offended any of these kingdoms in the event that any of these cities approached them seeking aid. Autonomous or not, these *poleis* were often tiny and unable to defend themselves, and needed to establish a friendly relationship with surrounding powers. From an ideological perspective, placing Alexander on one's coins was guaranteed to be equally appealing and inoffensive.

However, the placement of Alexander on autonomous silver also had its practical uses. Meadows argues that these cities needed, for pragmatic, economic reasons, a coinage that would be widely acceptable if they expected their economies to survive.⁸³ Asia Minor was a centre for trade throughout the Greek world and a consistent, universal currency was a must. Additionally, many of these tiny *poleis* must have traded with each other, and consistent coinage would have prevented a great many trade disputes at the local level.

⁸² Price (1991) *passim*

⁸³ Meadows (2001) 56

Once granted the right to mint coinage cities could also opt to depict their classical city-badge on their coinage, although these seem to have appeared less frequently than Alexanders. Of the cities who seem to have been granted the right to mint by Antiochus III, Alabanda, Skepsis, and Side used their own autonomous designs, whereas Mylasa, Kolophon, Teos, Phaselis, and Perge used Alexanders.⁸⁴ However, it is important to note that there is no epigraphic or literary evidence to confirm the exact nature of this autonomy; only numismatic evidence, which is admittedly imprecise.⁸⁵ It must be noted that we also do not have any hard evidence of situations in which cities minting autonomous coins were definitely under the strict control of the king. There are also further difficulties in interpreting this use of apparently autonomous coinage. Of the “civic” cities, it is interesting to note that none of these mints seem to have been active for the Seleucids prior to this.⁸⁶ What we may well have in this situation is not so much a grant of numismatic autonomy, as the foundation of a mint. Due to the ideological and economic appeal, it is not surprising that Alexander proved to be a more popular design. The usage of a civic badge could also appear inflammatory against any Hellenistic kings from whom these cities had sought aid. Creating a recognisable image was another problem; if the city had not used a civic badge in recent memory, it would not necessarily have been accepted as a means of trade. With the exception of Mylasa,⁸⁷ none of the cities who used Alexander had used a city-badge in recent memory. In short, cities needed to have a well-known civic badge to begin with if they were to use it once granted autonomy.

Given that civic badges were statistically very rare, this raises questions as to whether these cities really did experience autonomy at all, given the apparent loss of civic markers. In terms of economic independence and the right to rule over their day-to-day affairs, it is fair to say that, barring evidence to the contrary, they were relatively autonomous. However, from an ideological perspective, their traditional civic ideals appear to have been seriously undermined, as the ability to project their independence on coins gave way

⁸⁴ Ma (2002) 162-3.

⁸⁵ *ibid*

⁸⁶ Houghton (2002) *passim*

⁸⁷ see above

to their imperial overlords, whether Alexander, the Seleucids, or other Hellenistic kingdoms. The speed with which an imperial power could eradicate a city's personal imagery perhaps attests to their lack of autonomy.

The Civic Ruler Cult: The Numismatic Evidence

Closely tied with the numismatic evidence for autonomy is numismatic evidence for the civic ruler cult. The evidence for this in portraiture is widespread, and is discussed in other chapters with regard to the specific kings. Portraiture aside, the use of particular inscriptions on coins is often indicative of a localised ruler cult. The usage of religious epithets such as Theos, Soter, Kallinikos, and Ephiphanes, among Seleucid kings, and indeed other Hellenistic rulers, is well known, both from numismatic and written evidence.⁸⁸ Such epithets often serve to identify the Seleucid kings for historical purposes, especially given that not all scholars agree on the numbering of various Seleucid rulers.⁸⁹ Walbank argues that these titles ultimately had their origin in the civic ruler cult.⁹⁰ While this is not an entirely unreasonable supposition, we have the problem that different cities conferred different titles upon the same king; by way of example, Antiochus II was known as Soter in Bargylia in Caria, but as Theos in Miletus, and yet only Theos is used as an identifying epithet in modern scholarship.⁹¹ Some kings received a title in some cities, but do not seem to have used this title elsewhere; Demetrius I is known as Soter in Babylonia but not elsewhere.⁹² Thus there does not seem to have been any single, "official" epithet for a king, although doubtlessly some epithets were more widely used than others. Most written sources seem to settle on one such title, which is perhaps dependent on what coins of the respective kings they or their

⁸⁸ Chaniotis (2004) 433 Chaniotis point out that these epithets were shared by many of the Olympian gods, and indeed that the protection the kings offered their kingdoms equated the kings with the gods, at least in the eyes of their subjects.

⁸⁹ The most prominent example of this is complete failure of any agreement on the numbering of the various Laodikes.

⁹⁰ Walbank (1984) 93

⁹¹ Bickerman (1938) 244 Bickerman gives an exhaustive list of the various titles of single kings, using epigraphic, written, and numismatic evidence. This does not seem to have been considered extensively by modern scholars (cf. Walbank 1984 84 ff. Chaniotis 2004 passim), who tend to discuss the more general background of the Hellenistic ruler cult, and the Ptolemaic and Antigonid ones at that, rather than the Seleucid ruler cult. The exact applications of the Seleucid ruler cult have the potential to be a complicated subject, and only a brief introduction is possible here, as this thesis focuses on the numismatic evidence for the ruler cult rather than the literary or epigraphic.

⁹² *ibid*

source were most familiar with.⁹³ However, some kings seem only to have had a single epithet, and this suggests that they may have chosen the title for themselves, rather than having it given to them by a city.

Autonomy after the loss of Asia Minor: the reforms of Antiochus IV

The loss of the cities of western Asia Minor did not mark the death of civic autonomy in the Seleucid empire. Moreover, the death of Antiochus III saw a dramatic rise in civic autonomy throughout the Seleucid territories, although it is important to keep in mind that these areas were not traditionally Greek, and therefore did not apply the same ideals of autonomy to their cities. Various cities within the empire, particularly those of Phoenicia, slowly began to assert their independence. As the Seleucid empire became increasingly fragmented, and as both foreign and domestic wars became increasingly problematic, cities often needed to effectively fend for themselves. Perhaps the greatest indicator of the extent of the decentralisation of the Seleucid empire, if one is not content to call it fragmentation⁹⁴, is the introduction of autonomous coinages in the great Seleucid capital of Antioch in 92/1.⁹⁵



Figure 4 Municipal bronze coin of Antiochus IV from Byblos. Note that the reverse contains an image of the 6 winged god Serapis. Houghton (1983) 696 Image courtesy of wildwinds.com

One of the innovations of Antiochus IV was the introduction of the so-called “municipal coinages” in 169/8, for which the only evidence is numismatic, and which were restricted

⁹³ However, the issue of multiple names was well-known to ancient authors, as Polybius ii:71 states that although officially known as Kallinikos, Seleucus II also was known by the informal nickname pogon, or bearded.

⁹⁴ Mørkholm (1984) 101

⁹⁵ Mørkholm (1984) 102 Mørkholm does not discuss in detail the designs, historical background, or the context in which they were produced, nor does he provide any pictures of the civic coins of Antioch.

to nineteen mints.⁹⁶ Although limited to bronze, and although the obverse consistently featured the sometimes radiate portrait of the king, the legends always included at least the name of the city.⁹⁷ In the cases of both Byblus (Figure 4) and Sidon, local gods adorned the reverses.⁹⁸ Because our evidence is limited strictly to the numismatic, it is impossible to determine whether or not Byblus and Sidon enjoyed privileges that other cities did not, although such conclusions are tempting. With some cities, the reverses of these coins feature Zeus or the eagle, as on the coins of Ake-Ptolemais and Hierapolis respectively, which Meadows takes to mean that these coins are royal rather than municipal.⁹⁹ This need not have been the case, as these cities may have simply been concerned that a more creative design would not have been universally acceptable; it is significant that Ake-Ptolemais, as its name indicates, had formerly been part of the Ptolemaic kingdom, and the use of the eagle may well have facilitated trade in the area. Additionally, Ake-Ptolemais was a recent foundation, and so it *de facto* did not have the civic tradition of either its western Anatolian counterparts, or the increasing localised pride of the Phoenician cities, and so the lack of originality must be seen in terms of the lack of historical precedent, rather than simple royal control. With regard to Ake-Ptolemais in particular, we have the additional problem that Antiochus IV was first deified there¹⁰⁰, and based on this, the eagle may be interpreted as an indication of the effective local ruler cult, especially considering Antiochus IV's association with Zeus. The same could possibly be argued for Hierapolis, although we do not have written evidence for the establishment of the ruler cult there.

These municipal coinages do not seem to have been instituted on the Tigris and further east, namely at the mints of Seleucia on the Tigris, Susa, and Antioch on the Erythrean Sea, where only royal bronze coinage was used.¹⁰¹ There are several possible explanations for this, although nothing is certain. Although these areas were relatively quiet during the reign of Antiochus IV, they still formed the effective borders of the

⁹⁶ Mørkholm (1984) 101 for a full list of said mints.

⁹⁷ *ibid*

⁹⁸ *ibid*

⁹⁹ Meadows (2002) 60

¹⁰⁰ Brett (1945) 19

¹⁰¹ Mørkholm (1984) 101

Seleucid empire, and thus needed constant military garrisons. The Seleucid empire had already seen the loss of Bactria, and could not afford to risk losing the wealthiest region in the empire. Such a military force would have required payment, whether in terms of silver coins for officers, or in the case of lower ranking soldiers, the royal bronze coinage. Municipal coins were perfectly acceptable for daily use in the more central regions of the Seleucid kingdom, but for the pay of soldiers, a royal coinage was needed to establish solidarity between king and army. Another issue is that soldiers would have travelled considerably more than civilians, and would have needed a more universally accepted coinage, rather than a municipal one which would only have been accepted currency on a local basis.

Moreover, this area, due to its distance from the king, was relatively autonomous and had been for some time. Given that numismatic iconography from this region tended to be unique and unusual, as discussed throughout the Variation sections, Antiochus IV may not have felt the need to extend the privileges of this area as they already effectively experienced a great deal of numismatic autonomy. From an economic perspective, this area was already extremely wealthy, and thus would not have needed the economic boost that minting profit may have provided.

The question then turns back to why Antiochus IV instituted these municipal coinages to begin with, a problem that is not easily solved. As Mørkholm argues, “It is often assumed that the introduction of the new municipal coins by Antiochus IV heralded a period of disintegration of the Seleucid Empire. This is hardly the case. Royal bronze coins and truly autonomous coinages were sometimes produced concurrently at the same mints.”¹⁰² To this I would add that Antiochus IV sought to establish a friendly relationship with the Greek and non-Greek cities of his kingdom, in a very similar manner to his predecessors’ relationships with the cities of Asia Minor. Far from

¹⁰² Mørkholm (1984) 101. Mørkholm leaves much to be desired in terms of detail in this section and in this article as a whole. He does not discuss which scholars have assumed that the rise in municipal coinages indicates a decline of the Seleucid empire. Further to that, he does not provide any examples of mints producing municipal and royal coins at the same time. Additionally, he does not provide a bibliography or any references to museums in which such coins are held. However, scholarship on this topic remains scanty and Mørkholm is the only scholar to my knowledge who has attempted a discussion of this topic.

signalling a period of disintegration of the Seleucid empire, the allowance for municipal coinage seems to have been an attempt to strengthen the empire. However, it must be said that with the loss of Asia Minor and the final loss of Bactria, the Seleucid empire seems to have, in many practical senses, already begun to disintegrate under the reign of Antiochus III, and indeed his predecessors, and so the introduction of municipal coinages, even if they are seen in terms of decline, certainly did not signify the beginning of this.¹⁰³

Mørkholm goes on to argue that Antiochus IV wanted to strengthen the economies of these cities by allowing them a share of the mint profit.¹⁰⁴ This is almost certainly the case, as Antiochus IV, regarding his royal silver coinage, reduced the weight of this coinage considerably, following a common practice in many contemporary Hellenistic dynasties.¹⁰⁵ This also had the effect of increasing royal mint profit.¹⁰⁶ Taking both of these factors into account, this made the institution of municipal coinage a possibility, as it is uncertain that such changes would have been in any way practical before his reign, since few kings could afford the significant loss of revenues that the total abandonment of royal bronze coinage would have brought. Thus Antiochus IV was an admirable opportunist, as he used the current economic situation to curry favour with the cities.

Mørkholm further suggests that royal mints may not have been capable of supplying all the bronze coinage necessary for the local economies.¹⁰⁷ The evidence on which this is based is uncertain; indeed it is not clear what difficulties the royal mints may have had in the minting of bronze, especially given that the minting profit for this

¹⁰³ Kuhrt and Sherwin-White *passim* argue that the Seleucid empire was a much stronger political unit than has generally been accepted among modern scholarship. While prior to and including the earlier part of Antiochus III's reign, this may well have been the case, the same cannot be said for the later Seleucids. Kuhrt and Sherwin-White concentrate mainly on the early Seleucid period, and do not consider the later Seleucids in any great detail, and in this light, their view of Seleucid stability is perhaps not unreasonable. Additionally, scholarship on the later Seleucids, with perhaps the single exception of Antiochus IV, remains piecemeal at best, scanty at worst. Bellinger (1949) *passim* is the only source, to my knowledge, that explores in any depth the later Seleucids, and more evidence, particularly numismatic (Houghton 1984 101 n 22), had rendered many of his ideas outdated.

¹⁰⁴ Mørkholm (1984) 101

¹⁰⁵ Aperghis (2004) 226

¹⁰⁶ Mørkholm (1963) 40, Aperghis (2004) 226 estimates that Antiochus IV reduced the weight of royal silver by 2%.

¹⁰⁷ Mørkholm (1980) 102

was extremely high.¹⁰⁸ In light of wars and other state expenditures, however, bronze coinage for local, everyday usage seems to have often been left under the care of the local mints, as its minting was not hugely important to the Seleucid government. Thus Antiochus IV's granting of municipal coinages to the cities may have been intended to put into legal terms a practice that was already taking place.

These practical elements aside, it is important to note that many of the portraits adorning the obverse of these coins are radiate, which is generally taken to be a sign of deification.¹⁰⁹ This leaves open to question whether these grants of numismatic autonomy and deification are related, as was often the case with autonomy in Asia Minor. One possibility is that the cities deified Antiochus IV and the municipal coinages were an effective reward for this. Another possible scenario is that the cities received the right to mint municipal coinages and deified Antiochus IV as a means of gratitude. While these are possible, they are simplistic, as the changes in the economic atmosphere, more than any other factor, enabled Antiochus IV to allow municipal coinages. We also have the issue that Antiochus IV had a centralised policy of self-deification independent of the cities, and thus would not have needed them to reward him with deification, although the fact that these cities reinforced his apotheosis, especially considering that it was on municipal coinage, would certainly not have been objectionable to him.

Phoenician Autonomy

Perhaps following in the footsteps of their counterparts in Asia Minor, the cities of Seleucid Phoenicia began to seek and receive civic autonomy, with evidence for this being exclusively numismatic. Such manifestations of autonomy do vary from city to city; sometimes this is only an inscription, other times it is a civic badge which completely occupies the reverse, the examples of which will be considered individually below. This does create problems in the interpretation of the exact nature of the relationship between the Seleucid kings and Phoenician cities. However, given that there were fewer cities in Phoenicia, and that these cities tended to be much larger than their

¹⁰⁸ Aperghis (2004) 226

¹⁰⁹ Extensive discussion of portraiture is normally reserved for other chapters, but for the sake of continuity it is discussed here with regard to Antiochus IV.

counterparts in Asia Minor, it is much easier to get a clearer picture of the status of mints and the numismatic history of the respective cities than it is for the numerous *poleis* of Asia Minor. Phoenicia had a long tradition of minting coinage, which was replete with civic and political significance. In relative terms Phoenicia began to mint coinage later than its ancient Greek counterparts, around 455 B. C, although this varied from city to city. Initially this coinage seems to have been limited in economic significance, because at this point the Phoenicians traded mainly with the Achaemenids, who did yet not use coinage extensively.¹¹⁰ The introduction of coinages in Tyre, Sidon, Byblos, and other prominent Phoenician cities must therefore be seen in terms of asserting their civic independence; it has been argued that these cities needed to reassert their civic pride after their defeat at the hands of the Greeks.¹¹¹ However, the need for coinage was not completely ideological, as the Phoenician cities of Cyprus traded extensively with Salamis, which perhaps indicates a Greek influence on the introduction of Phoenician coinages, however indirect.¹¹² Thus the usage of civic coinages was already a well-established phenomenon in Phoenicia, although the tradition was not nearly as ancient as it was in Asia Minor. Although not culturally Greek, the Phoenician cities seem to have shared similar ideals to those of their Greek counterparts.

Tyre

The city of Tyre provides a specific case study of the transition from royal mint to autonomy. Phoenicia was not fully in the hands of the Seleucids until the reign of Antiochus III, and even then many of the Phoenician mints were not of great importance to the Seleucids, as very little royal silver was produced there, even after the Seleucids were firmly in place.¹¹³ Shortly after Antiochus III's conquest of Phoenicia in 200, the city of Tyre was permitted to produce royal Seleucid coinage, but with the significant concession that it placed civic designs on the reverses of nearly all the coins, with a wide range of symbols, including a prow and a stern, both symbols of Tyre's naval and

¹¹⁰ Markoe (2002) 123

¹¹¹ Markoe (2002) 123

¹¹² Markoe (2002) 123

¹¹³ Grainger (1991) 121-122

financial power.¹¹⁴ This may well have been due to Tyre's support for the Seleucids; as early as 218 Tyre had supported the effort of Antiochus III to conquer the area from the Ptolemies.¹¹⁵ The civic status of Tyre at this point remains unclear; Hoover argues against any sort of pure autonomy for the city of Tyre on the grounds that this right could be taken away by the king at any given time.¹¹⁶ Theoretically, Hoover is correct, but it is difficult to envision a scenario in which Antiochus III would revoke the autonomy of a city that he had only recently re-conquered. Considering the economic and naval power of Tyre, Antiochus III would have definitely wanted to keep the city within his realm, and provisions of autonomy, however relative, would have secured his control over the city. Furthermore, this military strength may well have proved a serious threat to Antiochus III; he had two choices: either allow Tyre some concessions of autonomy or face a rebellion. There was also the additional threat of the Ptolemies; Antiochus III needed to convince the Tyrians that Seleucid rule was preferable.



Figure 5 Silver semi-autonomous coin of Alexander Balas from Tyre. The eagle sits atop a Tyrian galley. Newell (1941) cat no 58

Until the reign of Alexander Balas, Tyre was permitted to mint what may best be described as semi-autonomous coinages, which presented a variety of civic symbols on their reverses, namely the traditional galley, but also the club of Tyrian Heracles.¹¹⁷ Under Alexander Balas, the Ptolemaic eagle perches atop the galley (Figure 5).¹¹⁸ Taken together with the fact that Balas introduced the Ptolemaic weight standard to Seleucid coinage, and that he was essentially put in power by the Ptolemies, this eagle can only be interpreted in terms of the desire to show Ptolemaic domination over both Tyre specifically and the Seleucids generally. This does not seem to have changed under Balas' successor, Demetrius II, which was perhaps an unwise move on the king's part,

¹¹⁴ Hoover (2005) 486, citing Houghton and Lorber (2002) cat nos. 1078, 1079-80, and 1082-1013

¹¹⁵ Hoover (2005) 487 cf. Polybius 4.37.5

¹¹⁶ Hoover (2005) 488 citing Ma (1999) 164-5

¹¹⁷ Newell (1921) 16

¹¹⁸ Rogers (1927) 15

considering that he was later murdered at Tyre in 125.¹¹⁹ That having been said, Tyre seems to have remained remarkably faithful to Demetrius II's rule, as it was the only city to continue to mint his first portrait during his second reign.¹²⁰

Tyre gained full autonomy from 125 onwards, never again minting coins for the Seleucids, but the precise reason for this is unclear. As far as the historical background is concerned, Cleopatra Thea refused refuge for her former husband in Ake-Ptolemais, forcing him to retreat to Tyre, where he was later murdered. Rogers argues that Cleopatra Thea awarded Tyre autonomy in exchange for the murder of her estranged husband¹²¹, but this is problematic for several reasons. First of all, it assumes that Cleopatra was capable of organising this murder; it is unlikely that she would have had time to inform the governor of Tyre that her husband was set to arrive, and even then, this assumes she knew where he was going.¹²² If Cleopatra wanted to kill her husband, then it is not clear why she did not simply kill him at Ake-Ptolemais.¹²³ Therefore it would seem best to assume that the governor of Tyre, who was, incidentally, placed in power by Demetrius II, acted independently of Cleopatra Thea in his murder of Demetrius II.¹²⁴

The question of why Tyre remained autonomous still remains open, but it is questionable whether this was a mark of gratitude on the part of the Seleucid government; as Grainger puts it, "...kings and queens who were murderers, rebels, and usurpers are not the beings most likely to allow feelings of gratitude to affect their conduct."¹²⁵ That having been said, kings knew well the consequences of failing to carry out diplomacy with cities. Grainger further argues that city officials may have been outraged at the Seleucid government's handling of relations with them, that they simply followed Aradus' example and became autonomous, without any act on the part of the Seleucids.¹²⁶ I think that this is the most likely explanation; the Seleucid government

¹¹⁹ Rogers (1927) 3

¹²⁰ Rogers (1927) 5

¹²¹ Rogers (1927) 3

¹²² Grainger (1991) 136

¹²³ Grainger (1991) 135

¹²⁴ Grainger (1991) 136

¹²⁵ Grainger (191) 137

¹²⁶ *ibid*

became increasingly chaotic from this point forward, and it is very likely that we are dealing with a situation much akin to practical autonomy; as Seleucid rule became increasingly irrelevant, the city naturally reverted to autonomy. The Seleucids were therefore unsuccessful at establishing a positive relationship with the city of Tyre, and it reacted by breaking away.

Aradus

Unlike many of the other Phoenician mints, Aradus never produced royal Seleucid silver, although the city was nominally controlled by them. It does not seem to have been an active mint until around 137 when it issued an astounding quantity of autonomous coins, at the time when Antiochus VII was in need of support in his campaign against the usurper Tryphon.¹²⁷ Due to its military forces, this city was indispensable to Antiochus VII, and Seyrig correctly argues that these autonomous coinages were a concession for its services to the Seleucids. The case of Aradus is a good example of successful diplomacy between the Seleucids and their cities. It is also an extreme example, as completely autonomous coinage did not often accompany Seleucid rule.

The Mint of Ascalon

The grant of autonomy did not always affect numismatic iconography. Ascalon retained the portrait of Antiochus VIII on the obverses of its coins, while still inscribing the coins using an autonomous dating system.¹²⁸ Indeed, Ascalon continued using the portrait of Antiochus VIII for at least a few years after his death.¹²⁹ On an ideological level, it would appear that Ascalon was attempting to express some sort of gratitude to Antiochus VIII for his grant of autonomy. Posthumous issues may well indicate a ruler cult, especially considering that the image becomes increasingly stereotyped and idealised. Indeed, on these grounds I cannot accept Spaer's attribution of a tetradrachm

¹²⁷ Seyrig (1950) 18

¹²⁸ Spaer (1984) 230 We only have coins available starting with year six of Ascalon's autonomy

¹²⁹ Spaer (1984) 230 Antiochus IX did manage to control Ascalon for a very short time in 113-112 and issued a few coins. Surprisingly, he does not seem to have employed the beard that he used at other mints. (Spaer 233 cat. 16-17) Perhaps this is because he did not have a very strong hold on Ascalon, or that it was not central to his rule. In any case, he does not seem to have used his portrait for self-advancement.

dated to year 12 of Ascalon's era (91/90 BC) to Antiochus XI, Antiochus VIII's usurping half-brother, who was already deceased at this point,¹³⁰ since he was the sworn enemy of the city's liberator. In any case, this coin is very difficult to attribute to any one king due to its poor quality and stereotyped portrait. However, the numismatic connexion between autonomous Ascalon and the Seleucids possibly did not end with Antiochus VIII. Spaer attributes some coins from 91/0 to Antiochus X, who seems only to have struck coins at Antioch. However, the portraits of this king do bear a strong resemblance to those of Antiochus VIII, mostly due to the large, hooked nose. It is therefore probable that these late coins are simply posthumous portraits of Antiochus VIII.

In practical terms, Ascalon's choice of iconography seems to have been dictated by economic necessity¹³¹. The repetition of the Seleucid portrait would have guaranteed that the coinage was universally accepted, which was highly necessary if Ascalon expected its autonomy to survive. The continued usage of Antiochus VIII after his death is also reminiscent of Ptolemaic practice, and given that Ascalon swayed between the Ptolemies and Seleucids, this is not difficult to understand. Interestingly enough, Ascalon began to employ Ptolemaic imagery on its coins around 103 when Seleucid power had become increasingly irrelevant, and so it would seem that Ascalon minted in accordance with economic necessity rather than for propaganda reasons. Moreover this phenomenon predates the Hellenistic period considerably. Some of the earliest coins of Ascalon, dated to around 479 BC, copy virtually every detail of contemporary Athenian owl coins, right down to the waning moon above the owl's right wing.¹³² Thus Ascalon had a long history of latching onto the imagery of the major contemporary political and economic powers, presumably with an eye to enhancing its trade opportunities.

Other cities

Seen in this context, it is unsurprising that Sidon and Byblus placed their civic symbols on the reverses of their coins after the reforms of Antiochus IV. As with the coinages of Asia Minor, if coinage was to make use of civic badges, said badges needed

¹³⁰ *ibid*

¹³¹ Meadows (2004) 56

¹³² Gitler (1996) 4

to have been used in recent memory if the coinage was to be acceptable as currency. The fact that the cities of Phoenicia had begun minting coinage much later than their counterparts of Asia Minor may well have been a deciding factor in ensuring the survival of their civic symbols. Phoenicia's late absorption into the Seleucid kingdom also played its part in the usage of traditional civic symbols on coinage.

Jewish Autonomy

Since much has already been written of Seleucid-Jewish relations¹³³, only a brief discussion will be given here, with particular emphasis on numismatic autonomy. As with any other influential group governed within the Seleucid kingdom, the Seleucids needed to maintain a positive relationship with the Jews in order to retain their empire. Antiochus III, upon capturing Palestine from the Ptolemies, introduced a number of measures to solidify a positive relationship with the Jews, including the rebuilding of temples and temporary tax cuts.¹³⁴ In the interests of keeping this section brief, substantial commentary on the Maccabean revolt will not be included here; however, it is fair to say that its escalation was the result of a massive failure in relations between Antiochus IV and the Jews.

The Jewish attitude to the ideological value of coins seems to have been drastically different from that of the Seleucids. It is interesting to note that although Antiochus VII¹³⁵ granted the Jews the right to mint their own coins that they do not seem to have done so.¹³⁶ It was not until the Hasmonean state fully emerged that coins began to be struck, only bronze ones at that¹³⁷. These coins bear no political propaganda, only inscriptions to indicate their value. This may initially be explained in religious terms, due to the Jewish ban on graven images, but it is not clear why other means of propaganda were not used.¹³⁸ Early Hasmonean bronze seems to have been created out of economic

¹³³ For a complete list of recent works on Seleucid-Judaic relations see Gruen (2004) *passim*.

¹³⁴ Jos. AJ. 12.138-48

¹³⁵ I Macc. 15-16

¹³⁶ Rappaport (1976) 172

¹³⁷ Meshorer (1982) *passim*.

¹³⁸ Rappaport (1976) 174

necessity only¹³⁹, while silver, including Seleucid, seems to have circulated for larger transactions.¹⁴⁰ Thus it is clear that early Hasmonean coinage did not place any emphasis on political or ideological value and seems to have been minted only out of economic need, and forms a useful contrast to the Greek coinage, whose iconography had political functions as well as economic.

Bactria and the East: practical autonomy

Given our lack of written sources, the extent to which the Seleucids controlled the eastern reaches of their empire remains especially unclear. By and large, these regions seem to have needed to fend for themselves, creating a sort of *de facto* autonomy. As Rostovtseff puts it, “The Iranian satrapies were never very loyal to Seleucus and his successors, and the Greek settlements in the richer of these satrapies always tended to be separatist in order better to protect themselves against the Iranian tide.”¹⁴¹ Self-defence was but one aspect of the separatist attitude of these regions. In the case of the Babylonian usurpers, pure greed was clearly a motivating factor behind their rebellions. Bactria under Antiochus II had become isolated from the rest of the Seleucid empire by the Parthians, affecting not only defence, but also trade, as they were effectively cut off from the Seleucids by the hostile Parthians. The eventual secession of Bactria must not be seen in terms of rebellion but in terms of putting into law what was already the case. These areas were so far removed from the Seleucid centres that they became hotspots for rebellion and secession, as a more or less autonomous situation arose out of practical reality. The implications for coinage in these regions are many, as some of the most unusual images of legitimate kings come from these areas, which will be discussed in other chapters.

Conclusion

The definition of autonomy is as imprecise today as it was in ancient times. Written decrees of autonomy in Asia Minor do not shed much light on the exact implications of daily life in cities granted autonomy, although it is clear that some concessions were made. Numismatic evidence, particularly on precious metal coinage,

¹³⁹ *ibid*

¹⁴⁰ *ibid*

¹⁴¹ Rostovtseff (1941) 429

indicates a great degree of economic freedom, but given the general loss of civic imagery the ideological elements in autonomous coinage had disappeared in many important ways. In any case, the relationship between most *poleis* and their kings seems to have been overwhelmingly positive, given the establishment of civic ruler cults. Given the early autonomy of the cities of Phoenicia, it is clear that cities in this region allied themselves with the Seleucids on more or less their own terms. Phoenician coinage retained much of its civic character on the reverses of its coins, but many cities used the king's portrait in order to secure economic stability. Whether in terms of distance from the king or relative irrelevance, many regions, particularly in the east, experienced de facto autonomy in the king's absence. The coinage of these areas took on a unique character even when it remained royal, but became a vehicle for usurpation and secession.

Chapter 2

Alexander's Influence on Seleucid Portraiture

We now come to the problematic issue of the influence of Alexander's portraiture on that of the Seleucids. Because this is a much-discussed topic in scholarship, this section has been deliberately kept short, presenting a brief summary of the main arguments in this field. It will be argued throughout this section, and indeed this thesis, that the influence of Alexander, whether historical or iconographic, has been largely overestimated by the majority of modern scholars. Discussion of Alexander's influence on specific Seleucid rulers will be limited to the relevant sections.

From an historical perspective, it may be tempting to argue that, as the initial conqueror of what was to become the Seleucid empire, Alexander's legacy was to have a profound impact on Seleucid politics and identity. It is not difficult to see the similarities between Alexander's conquests and those of Antiochus III, but the aggressive, outward-looking foreign policies of Antiochus III were unusual among the Seleucids, since the retention and protection of Seleucid territories seems to have been the rule for most kings.¹⁴² As has been demonstrated in the chapter on autonomy, retaining a positive relationship with the cities of the empire was a high priority for the Seleucids, the day-to-day management of which would have comprised a significant part of the king's time. Wars with external invaders and usurpers were another high priority for Seleucid kings, the nature of which often had very specific effects on the coinage. Of all factors that could affect the coinage of a legitimate king, the imitation of Alexander does not seem to have been a high priority. For usurpers, the main objective in establishing themselves was to create an identity separate from the king (with the exception of Seleucus II, who changed his image as the result of his brother's formidable usurpation). Sometimes this meant recalling the portraits of Alexander, as was the case with Tryphon, but with most usurpers the priority was to create an individual image.

¹⁴² Seleucus II's reign, for example, centered on defending the empire from the Parthians and recapturing land from his brother Hierax.

It is interesting to note that no legitimate Seleucid ever took the name Alexander when he became king; of the kings, it would seem that only Seleucus III had originally been named Alexander, changing it when he became king.¹⁴³ The very fact that he would choose the name Seleucus shows that more emphasis was placed on the dynasty's founder than on Alexander himself, at least for the early years of the Seleucid empire. After Antiochus III, the tide seems to have turned towards him as the pivotal historical figure in the Seleucid dynasty. Originally named Mithridates, Antiochus IV changed his name just before his Roman captivity.¹⁴⁴ After this, even the name Seleucus is statistically very rare, with only two kings named Seleucus after this point.¹⁴⁵ Cleopatra Thea had three sons who took presumably took the name Antiochus when they became king, although we do not know either their original names, or what they were called in everyday life to avoid inevitable confusion.¹⁴⁶ Alexander also does not seem to have been a common name among Seleucid children who did not eventually reign.¹⁴⁷ Thus it would seem that the Seleucids placed a much greater emphasis on their own family than on Alexander, if their choices of names are of any significance.¹⁴⁸ This makes a good deal of sense when we consider that each king seems to have been highly concerned with establishing his own identity, with numismatic evidence being a very good source for this.

The only two "Seleucids" who took the name Alexander were usurpers, a choice which would seem to speak of a desperate attempt at legitimacy. It is also interesting to note that both were heavily influenced by the Ptolemies, who would have had a much closer affinity with Alexander than the Seleucids, if for no other reason than the name of their capital. Alexandria was also a greater centre for learning than any Seleucid city, and the Ptolemies had a reputation for being patrons of the arts and education in a way

¹⁴³ Porphyrius FGrH 32.9 Eus. Chron. 1.40.1

¹⁴⁴ Livy 33.19.9-10

¹⁴⁵ Grainger (1997) 65

¹⁴⁶ Laodike also seems to have been a sort of royal or official name, if for no other reason than the unwieldy number of queens with this name. The many Laodikai came from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. It is hard to believe that a Greek name like Laodike was the original name of the Bithynian princess who married Antiochus Hierax, as her father and brother carried the conspicuously non-Greek names Ziaelas and Prusias respectively.

¹⁴⁷ Grainger 1997 *passim*

¹⁴⁸ Alexander's name also does not appear on any inscriptions relating to the ancestor cult of the Seleucids, with all of these beginning with Seleucus I. This is not the case with the Ptolemies, whose dynastic cult originated with Alexander. (Rostovtseff 1935 62).

that the Seleucids did not¹⁴⁹. Thus they may well have been far more aware of the accomplishments of Alexander than the Seleucids. This is not to say in the least that the Seleucids were ignorant of Alexander, but a peaceful empire such as the Ptolemaic would simply have placed a greater emphasis on its history than the unstable Seleucid empire, which was mainly concerned with maintaining its borders. There is also the more general issue that usurpers sought to conquer areas, thus recalling the exploits of Alexander. However, the majority of the Seleucid kings do not seem to have drawn a great deal of influence from Alexander in political matters.

The majority of modern scholars argue that the portraiture of Alexander had a profound influence on the Hellenistic kings. Pollitt argues that the Lysippian and post-Lysippian portraits of Alexander "...emphasized [sic] the idea of the ruler as a divinely favored [sic] child of Fortune," and that "...later rulers who were attracted to that idea tried to assimilate elements of the Alexander type into their own portraits."¹⁵⁰ Some of Pollitt's evidence for this is perfectly sound; for example, the radiate crowns that appear on the portrait coins of some of the Seleucid kings can be traced to the apotheosis of Alexander, at least ideologically.¹⁵¹ However, it is important to note that Alexander never made use of the device himself. Obvious imagery, such as the horns of Ammon and the lion cloak of Heracles certainly relate to Alexander, but features such as these are rare in Seleucid coinage.¹⁵² However, much of Pollitt's language is vague; it is difficult to see exactly how Alexander's portraits are meant to appear as "divinely favoured."

Moreover, Pollitt pushes the idea of Alexander's influence too far when he argues that the Seleucid usurper Tryphon wanted to imitate Alexander with "...an excited, leonine mane of hair, one lock of which overlaps his diadem and seems to echo Alexander's ram's horns..."¹⁵³ I would argue that the overlapping of hair over a diadem is in the first instance convention and can be seen on the portrait coins of most Seleucid

¹⁴⁹ There is, of course the issue that the sarcophagus of Alexander was located in Egypt, but this seemed too obvious a point to place in the main body of this chapter.

¹⁵⁰ Pollitt (1986) 31

¹⁵¹ Pollitt (1986) 32

¹⁵² *ibid.*

¹⁵³ Pollitt (1986) 35

kings; however, it is unlikely that the feature appears on all Tryphon's coins. This should also be taken as an example of the technical expertise and attention to detail that has come to typify Hellenistic portraiture, and not as a sign of the imitation of Alexander in the guise of Ammon. Indeed the overlapping lock of hair is often an indication of mint rather than the device of any one king. Demetrius II is depicted with definite ram's horns on some coins¹⁵⁴, clearly intended to recall Alexander. It is interesting to note however, that Demetrius II is the only Seleucid, at least within our knowledge, to depict himself with the ram's horns of Ammon, and these only on a few rare coins. This scarcity serves very well to illustrate exactly how little emphasis was placed on Alexander, at least as far as political imagery was concerned. Deification, and indeed most imagery in Seleucid portraiture is rarely subtle; most kings chose a definite, easily recognisable image, particularly among the later Seleucids. In short, if Tryphon wanted to be depicted with horns, he would have depicted himself with horns.

As Smith argues, "The royal head was modelled broadly on a combination of Alexander and young gods and heroes. It was intended to have a Dionysian *éclat*: smooth, youthful, dynamic, godlike. The early Hellenistic royal portrait refers clearly to Alexander but is careful to define itself as recognisably different. Alexander portraits have the longer hair of Greek heroes, like Achilles, and the distinctive *anastole* of hair over the forehead. The early kings wear a thick wreath of hair, but it is not as long at the sides and back, and they carefully avoid the *anastole*, which was Alexander's personal sign."¹⁵⁵ One downfall with this argument is that Smith does not differentiate between ruler portraiture and non-ruler portraiture. Another problem is that Smith's connexions between Alexander's iconography and that of kings is vague, as he gives no more comparisons than that they both have a generically youthful appearance and abundant hair. There is, additionally, the problem that Antiochus I depicted himself as frail and elderly, and so it is extremely difficult to place his portraits within Smith's view of portraiture.

¹⁵⁴ Houghton (1983) 18

¹⁵⁵ Smith (1993) 208

Plantzos also exaggerates the idea of Alexander’s influence on later portraiture when he argues that Alexander’s image was the archetype for all Hellenistic portraiture, stating, “Upon this prototype the portrait of the current king would be modelled, keeping the individual features of the king himself to a greater or lesser degree of realism, but also allowing for the recognisable Alexander traits to be employed.”¹⁵⁶ At the risk of being overly critical of Plantzos, at best this argument is too vague to be of any use, as he does not provide any discussion of how these traits of Alexander manifest themselves, especially with regard to the portraits of the Seleucids, in particular the later coins of Demetrius II and Antiochus VIII, whose “warts and all” portraits are as far removed as one can get from the idealised Alexanders. How female portraiture fits into Plantzos’ thesis is equally difficult to determine. At worst Plantzos is engaging in special pleading. Following his argument to its logical conclusion, one could simply argue that the more unflattering Seleucid portraits simply resemble Alexander less than others. Although I do not think it is possible to generalise about the effect of Alexander’s portraiture on subsequent portraiture, some rulers, but definitely not all, did base their image on Alexander’s, and these will be considered on an individual basis.

An additional problem with Plantzos’ theory is his interpretation of Plutarch 4.2, which follows the famous statement of how Alexander only allowed Lysippus to carve statues of him. At 4.2 Plutarch states: *kai gar malisth’ ha polloi tôn diadochôn husteron kai tôn philôn apemimounto, tên te anastasin tou auchenos eis euônumon hêsuchê keklimenou kai tên hugrotêta tôn ommatôn, diatetêrêken akribôs ho technitês*. Plantzos interprets *diadochôn* very specifically as Successors¹⁵⁷, but even a cursory examination of the Greek reveals that Plutarch simply states that many (*polloi*) of the successors and their friends imitated images of Alexander, which would imply that some did not. Indeed Plutarch gives us no clue as to exactly who these successors are, and is even less clear who the friends are. Furthermore, Plutarch is not specific about how exactly the successors, whoever they may be, imitated Alexander’s portraiture in their own except for a vague description of the poise of the neck to the left and the “melting” glance of the

¹⁵⁶ Plantzos (1999) 60

¹⁵⁷ Plantzos (1999) 60

eyes. I suppose that one could argue that any Hellenistic royal portrait with the neck posed to the left ultimately derives from Alexander, but, as Smith points out, this is only one aspect of the royal image,¹⁵⁸ and a relatively insignificant one. Indeed, there are only a limited number of ways in which the neck can be posed. As far as the “melting” glance goes, what this means is anyone’s guess. Also important to keep in mind is that Plutarch was first and foremost a biographer and not an art historian, and wrote many years after the death of Alexander.

Even more moderate treatments of the influence of Alexander on Seleucid portraiture can be problematic. As Smith succinctly puts it, “Alexander’s portrait style provided the basic mode for the majority of subsequent Hellenistic royal portraits in that it was youthful/clean shaven and had a measure of implicit divinising. It is, however, false or exaggerated to say...that Alexander’s successors closely imitated his portraits or assimilated their image to his.”¹⁵⁹ Although Smith qualifies this by describing the influence of Alexander as affecting the “majority” of Hellenistic kings, how far this pertains to the Seleucids is questionable. Considering the elderly portraits of Antiochus I and Seleucus I, it would seem that very early on the Seleucids had abandoned modelling themselves after Alexander, preferring instead to emphasise their own identities as kings. Portraits were occasionally youthful and flattering after this, particularly those of Antiochus III, but on the whole the so-called youthful portrait model does not seem to have been highly applicable to the Seleucids. It is impossible to determine what exactly is meant by “implicit divinising,” but where the Seleucids are concerned, it is clear that they tended toward obvious divine imagery or none at all, with little to no room for subtlety.

Stewart addresses the problem of Alexander’s influence on later portraiture when he points out that “...the entire edifice of Alexander’s iconography erected by scholars since the nineteenth century is derived from only three sources, all of them posthumous:

¹⁵⁸ Smith (1991) 59 n. 20

¹⁵⁹ Smith (1988) 59

the inscribed Azara herm, the Alexander mosaic, and the coins of the Successors...¹⁶⁰ Indeed we do not have any extant images of Alexander from his lifetime or any of the works of his three court artists. In addition, his images on early Seleucid coins are not homogenous. For example, although the most common Seleucid Alexander depicts him in a lion's skin helmet¹⁶¹, we also have some depicting him with a bull's ear and horns, draped in a panther's skin¹⁶². The latter coins of Seleucus I present serious problems in identification because of their variation, sometimes to the point that they have been confused with Seleucus himself (Figure 6).¹⁶³ Given that our portraits of Alexander vary so considerably, it is impossible to connect any portrait of the Seleucids to him, at least in a general sense, but it may be possible to connect specific ruler portraits to specific Alexander portraits.



Figure 6 Silver Tetradrachm of Alexander, or Seleucus I as Alexander. Houghton (2002) cat. no. 592

However, I do not intend to completely dismiss the idea of Alexander's influence on later ruler portraiture. It is important to keep in mind that Alexander was the first ruler, living or dead, to be portrayed extensively in any medium, and so by the very act of creating a ruler portrait the subsequent Hellenistic kings imitated him. Since very few Seleucid kings, with notable exceptions, are depicted fully bearded, it is perhaps fair to say that Alexander started this trend. We are still left with the problem that many early Seleucid kings were depicted with some facial hair, and so to what extent we can even speak of the beardless king remains questionable. However, it is important to keep in mind that until the mid second century the Seleucids continued to mint portraits of Alexander alongside their own¹⁶⁴, thus severely damaging the idea that Seleucid

¹⁶⁰ Stewart 43

¹⁶¹ eg. Houghton (2002) 34 cat. No. 34

¹⁶² Houghton (2002) 78 cat. No. 199

¹⁶³ Smith (1988) 60

¹⁶⁴ Aperghis (2004) 243 n. 65

portraiture was meant to recall Alexander. In short, when the Seleucids wanted to recall imagery of Alexander, they minted Alexanders. As with the autonomous cities which minted Alexanders, these coins presented an ideologically neutral image virtually guaranteed to be economically acceptable. Seleucid portrait coinage, by contrast, served to establish the ruler himself; obvious similarities with Alexander portraits are rare, while subtle similarities are coincidental.

Chapter 3

Warfare and Seleucid Coinage

With few exceptions, the Seleucids rarely depicted themselves with ostentatiously warlike imagery; the main exceptions to this rule are the helmeted portraits of the usurper Timarchus and the rare helmeted portraits of Demetrius II, which, more often than not, simply allude to Alexander. Allusions to wars are often limited to the reverses of coins, and even here these allusions can be vague. For example, it might be tempting to assign coins depicting elephants to specific battles, but it is important to keep in mind that, at least under Antiochus III, the elephant became a sort of personal symbol, far too common to be linked to specific wars (Figure 7). Likewise coins depicting horses are far too common to be definitively linked to specific cavalry victories.¹⁶⁵ This is not to diminish the obvious military significance of images of horses, elephants, and also Nike on the reverses of coins; suffice to say that it is too dangerous to assume that they can be linked to specific events.



Figure 7 Silver drachm of Antiochus III from Nisibis depicting an elephant on the reverse. Houghton (1986) cat. nos. 42-44. This is from a very large series of coins all depicting elephants

Far more dangerous is to attempt to assign any warlike traits based on the physiognomy of the portraits. Richter argues that the portraits of Seleucus I, with their muscled face and furrowed brow, refer to his prowess as a warrior.¹⁶⁶ Grainger rightly refutes this point on the grounds that these portraits were minted after the founder's death.¹⁶⁷ Additionally, it is subjective in the extreme to attempt to read any personality traits from portraiture. Hart argues that these portraits indicate a great deal of physical fitness,¹⁶⁸ which does not sound completely unreasonable, but as before it is important to

¹⁶⁵ The horned horse reverses on the coins of Seleucus I would appear to be a personal symbol of this king rather than an allusion to war.

¹⁶⁶ Richter POG III 270 1865-6

¹⁶⁷ Grainger (1990) 25

¹⁶⁸ Hart *passim*

keep in mind that these portraits are posthumous. There is also a great deal of difficulty involved in making medical diagnoses on the basis of ancient portraiture, as Hart attempts to do.¹⁶⁹ In any case, on the rare occasions when the Seleucids chose to depict themselves as warriors, they did so in an extreme fashion. As with deification, the Seleucids tended to portray themselves in an extremely warlike fashion or not at all, with no room for subtlety.

Warfare was inextricably linked with the production of coinage, and based on this many scholars assume that war was a phenomenon profitable to kings. Austin describes Alexander's eastern campaigns as "A booty raid on an epic scale,"¹⁷⁰ and casts the Hellenistic age as "...the most bitter and prolonged dispute over sharing out the spoils of victory between the conquerors."¹⁷¹ Baker puts this in much more obvious terms "...is it really necessary to point out that war was a source of profit? Even if the objectives in expanding a kingdom's borders were primarily political or strategic, the spoils of victory served both to satisfy the troops in the field and fill the royal treasury..."¹⁷² Few Seleucid wars were motivated by the type of imperialism Baker imagines, with a great many of them being defensive, such as the numerous conflicts with usurpers. Whether this was true of wars waged by other kingdoms remains questionable, but this was definitely the case for the Seleucids. One could make the reasonable argument that the Syrian wars were *motivated* by the wealth of Phoenicia, but the fact that Phoenicia was in many important respects autonomous could undercut any notion that the wars brought any economic gain to the Seleucids. Likewise the number of cities of Asia Minor that were exempt from taxes does not suggest that the wars fought to retain this region were in any way financially profitable.

Furthermore, Baker cites no specific examples of war being profitable to the individual or to the kingdom. Where evidence exists, however, it would suggest that war was a very costly endeavour to the Seleucids, the best example being the indemnity

¹⁶⁹ *ibid*

¹⁷⁰ Austin (1986) 454

¹⁷¹ Austin (1986) 455

¹⁷² Baker (2003) 376

incurred by Antiochus III to the Romans.¹⁷³ Further to this Antiochus III also would not have levied taxes of 150 talents against Seleucia if the wars with Molon had not been expensive operations.¹⁷⁴ While it is true that this indemnity was charged as punishment for the Seleucians' siding with Molon, an unnecessary indemnity would not have endeared them to the king, thus creating the risk of further usurpation. Thus the indemnity needs to be seen primarily in financial terms. Baker and others might be tempted to cast this tax in terms of profit, but one would need to analyse the costs of war versus the amount of tax to make a sound argument in favour of profit. Of course, figures for the costs of war are not contained in the sources, and estimating costs is a risky endeavour. Aperghis estimates that the total cost for simply maintaining the Seleucid army during a time of war was around 10,000 talents a year,¹⁷⁵ and based on this the taxation of 150 talents would not suggest profit, but a rather massive loss. This is compounded by the fact that the general Hermias had originally demanded 1,000 talents,¹⁷⁶ which, based on Aperghis' figures, would have brought about economic equilibrium if we assume that the campaign lasted a month, when in fact it lasted the best part of two years.¹⁷⁷ In short, even a relatively insignificant campaign constituted nothing short of an economic disaster.

War nearly always necessitated the minting of extra coinage, a phenomenon which Aperghis terms a "wartime coinage", designed to cope with payment of soldiers, equipment, and other related costs.¹⁷⁸ Green attempts to explain upsurges in coinage as evidence of economic growth,¹⁷⁹ an idea first advanced by Mørkholm.¹⁸⁰ This could not be further from the case, as an unneeded increase in coin production would surely cause

¹⁷³ Green (1991) 421 gives a full discussion of the economic repercussions of this indemnity, including the resented temple raids of Antiochus IV, and cites said indemnity as one of the causes for the eventual decline and fall of the Seleucids. From the Roman perspective, this indemnity was motivated by more than avarice, as the war would have been costly to them as well.

¹⁷⁴ Polybius 5.48.10

¹⁷⁵ Aperghis (2004) 205 For the purposes of this argument, Aperghis' methods and their relative merits will be taken as correct. There are a number of problems with Aperghis' estimations; namely he is very unclear on exactly how he arrived at them. Even if his estimations are incorrect, any study of war and profit must take into account the costs of war versus gain, which Baker and Austin ignore.

¹⁷⁶ Polybius 5.48.10

¹⁷⁷ Bar-Kochva (1976) 117

¹⁷⁸ Aperghis (2004) 237-8

¹⁷⁹ Green (1990) 431

¹⁸⁰ Mørkholm (1963) 51-63

severe inflation and devaluation of currency. Increases in coin production can only be explained in terms of need, and the two major causes for this would be war or other coin shortages; for example, in a recently annexed area. An increase in coin production may have brought some economic benefits to the mints in the form of mint profit, but it is important not to overestimate this. For a start, much of the coinage minted to fund a war would have been in the form of silver tetradrachms, which brought little profit to the mints themselves, with much of the profit going to the Seleucid government. Bronze would have brought slightly more mint profit, but since the issuing of bronze coinage was largely left to the cities, mint profit would not have directly affected the central administration. Another issue is that any mint profit would have been extremely short-term, ending with the war. As Aperghis argues, "...a 'wartime' issue at one mint might reduce or even supplant 'peacetime' issues for a number of years at the same or different mints, provided that those receiving payment (mainly soldiers and suppliers of military equipment and provisions) spent their earnings in the regions served by those mints."¹⁸¹ From this we can see that a wartime issue might have a variety of negative economic consequences. First of all, a large issue from one mint could effectively destroy the business of other local mints. If soldiers spent a large sum of their pay in a restricted area it could lead to inflation. On the other hand, if a large percentage of the coinage were transported out of the mint city, then the city would receive little economic benefit and inflation would occur elsewhere. In short, if war brought any economic benefit, it was only in the short term and was far outweighed by economic damage.

Even if the minting of coinage did bring profit, it is not always clear to whom, as Houghton has identified at least 75 "Uncertain Mints."¹⁸² At least some of these mints must have come into existence due to localised conflict, only to disappear once the war had ended.¹⁸³ These coins had the potential to de-stabilise local economies not only because of the inevitable rise in inflation, but because they bore no universally recognised mintmark. This would have been particularly problematic in Seleucid Asia Minor, where many mints used civic symbols as mintmarks. It would stand to reason that a coinage that

¹⁸¹ Aperghis (2004) 238

¹⁸² Houghton (2002) 365

¹⁸³ Houghton (2002) XVII for a list of examples of this phenomenon.

did not bear a commonly recognised civic symbol may well have been rejected in economies accustomed to a more established coinage. The long history of many of these civic symbols would raise further questions about the authenticity of a coinage not bearing them. However, due to the number of these “Uncertain Mints,” the coinage must have been widely accepted, but it still would seem likely that the value of these coins aroused some doubt.

Further to the “Uncertain Mints,” it would also stand to reason that some of them may have travelled alongside the army, with the express purpose of minting bronze coins to pay soldiers, particularly for provisions.¹⁸⁴ These coins were of often poor workmanship,¹⁸⁵ and thus would have created difficulties in local economies due to acceptability. It is also difficult to see how a mint essentially employed by the army would enjoy any economic benefit, namely mint profit. The military would also undertake to pay for the coins to be minted. In short, military mints were an economic drain, as they only served the interests of the military itself.

While it cannot be denied that one of the main functions of the minting of silver tetradrachms was to fund the military and its campaigns, it is also possible to overestimate this function of coinage.¹⁸⁶ Most recently Aperghis has argued that the silver tetradrachm could not have been a coinage intended for everyday usage. As he puts it, a silver tetradrachm “...could purchase five and a half months’ supply of barley for a man in Babylon at the rate of 1.5 litres per day. Thus it too was unlikely to have been common in the local marketplace.”¹⁸⁷ He states that soldiers of lower rank received seven to eight tetradrachms per month, and officers and officials more.¹⁸⁸ This is problematic in the first instance because the prices given are restricted to a specific region

¹⁸⁴ Houghton (2002) XIX

¹⁸⁵ *ibid*

¹⁸⁶ Howgego (1995) 34 argues that state expenditure was the main motive for the minting of a new coinage Foraboschii (2000: 38) argues that military expenditure was the top priority for the Seleucid state, followed by public works, followed by trade.

¹⁸⁷ Aperghis (2004) 220

¹⁸⁸ *ibid* However, Aperghis cites no sources, ancient or modern detailing how he gathered these statistics. No attempt is made here to challenge these statistics in their own right, as this is intended as a discussion of the difficulties in determining the value of a coinage.

in a specific time period, and therefore cannot be applied to the Seleucid empire as a whole whether in geographical or chronological terms. Secondly, while the amount of grain listed would be an unwieldy amount for one man, it would not be unreasonable for a family, particularly if the household contained slaves, and doubly the case if the man in question owned livestock. Thirdly, grain is only one consumer good and it is impossible to gain a clear picture of an entire economy based only on it. One would suspect that grain was much cheaper in Babylonia than elsewhere due to its abundance, which makes it even more unsound to use the price of it there as the basis for an economy. While it is true that tetradrachms were of a relatively high value, they must have had a wider distribution in local economies than many scholars believe. Applying common sense, it would be absurd for a king to demand the issue of a coinage unintended for circulation, especially considering the large number of tetradrachms we have available to us today.

This raises questions as to whether iconography had a wider appeal in terms of political propaganda, and was not simply restricted to the military classes. If coinage were largely restricted to the consumption of soldiers, one would expect a much greater emphasis on militarism, which we clearly do not have. In any case, even if tetradrachms were aimed mainly towards paying soldiers, the soldiers would have spent it primarily in sectors other than military. Soldiers may in many instances have been the first to see a particular image on a coin, but these coins would have quickly found their way into the wider economy. In this context it is not difficult to see why militarism was de-emphasised on Seleucid tetradrachms in particular but also on their coinage in general. Wars were often conducted on a local basis, with local economies suffering the most ill effects, and a heavily militarised image of the king would have proved unpopular. This is not to say that the king derived legitimacy from personal popularity, but if he did not ensure at least some local support, he could face a serious rebellion.

There is also the question of the extent to which the king himself was actually involved in the fighting of the war. With Antiochus III's campaign against Molon, for example, he sent several generals (all failed) to fight the usurper before travelling east himself. While it is generally true that Seleucid kings fought in war alongside their

soldiers, the exact circumstances for this are unclear. It would not make a great deal of sense for the king to enter battle until it was clear that he had no other options. Many Seleucid kings died in battle, and the death of a king, particularly when there was no named successor could and would have been a de-stabilising force. The idea of the Hellenistic king as a warrior is a real one, but it is all too easy to overestimate this. It is interesting to note that few Seleucid kings carried epithets relating to war, with Seleucus I Nicator, Seleucus II Kallinikos, and Demetrius II Nicator being the main exceptions, with all the rest choosing religious or familial epithets.

Also to be considered are the limitations of source material from the Hellenistic period. Austin argues that the role of a warrior was central to the legitimacy of the Seleucid king, citing Polybius 11.34, which describes Antiochus III as a worthy king based on his military abilities¹⁸⁹. Polybius was not born at the time of Antiochus III's reign, and his high opinion of the king may not have reflected public opinion at the time, which was plagued by a number of wars and ended with a massive indemnity, followed by Antiochus III's raiding of the temple of Susa. There is also the problem that Polybius is one historian writing about one particular king, and so this should not be taken as a sign of any general Hellenistic or Seleucid attitude towards the ideal king. As mentioned before, it is not clear how early the king involved himself in conflicts versus sending subordinates, but if the war with Molon is indicative, it would seem likely that there were considerable delays for the king's entrance to the battlefield.

Despite the fact that few Seleucids depicted themselves in military garb in the manner of their Bactrian counterparts, coinage still constitutes vital evidence for the many conflicts that affected these kings. When the king's image came under threat, he changed it to suit the occasion; this is doubly true for usurpers, whose very existence remained in the hands of the legitimate king. The mere existence of coinage at a particular mint can speak volumes about the local political situation when it is volatile. In fact, unless the king experienced a particularly peaceful reign, his portrait record

¹⁸⁹ Austin (2003) 128

usually carries references to the wars that affected him. These circumstances are highly specific to the king in question, and can really only be discussed by example.

Chapter 4

Coinages of the Seleucid Usurpers

Introduction

Many recent works on the Seleucid Empire have something to say about its structural instability, but this not always qualified or presented in as much detail as one would like.¹⁹⁰ Sherwin-White argues that the Seleucid empire was a very strong political unit, mainly on the basis of its longevity.¹⁹¹ I would argue for a more modified view, namely that while it is true that the Seleucids managed to hold the vast majority of their empire, it came at a major cost. Warfare and concessions to civic sensibilities have already been discussed as a source of these costs; this chapter will concern the Seleucid phenomenon of usurpation.

Because the Seleucid Empire was in a nearly constant state of political turmoil, it can be difficult to define exactly who the usurpers are; and so at least initially, it is easier to define usurpers by what they are not. Assassination, particularly at the hands of a family member, seems to have been the leading cause of death for Seleucid kings, and so if we were to conflate usurpers with assassins, nearly all Seleucid kings would qualify.¹⁹² Usurpers also must not be confused with the kings of breakaway kingdoms such as Bactria, Pergamon, and Parthia, as these kings established their own dynasties which lasted for several generations, a feat which no usurper managed; however, such kingdoms may well have provided the inspiration for some of the usurpers to be discussed here, who perhaps hoped to break away themselves.¹⁹³ With these things in mind, a usurper may be broadly defined as anyone who managed to seize a tract of land for a limited amount of time, before being deposed by the legitimate king. Thus a usurper is not a

¹⁹⁰ Tarn (1952, *passim*), Will, Green (1990, *passim*) and others take the view of a generically weak Seleucid kingdom

¹⁹¹ Sherwin-White (1991) *passim*

¹⁹² Green (1990) 438 conflates usurpation with assassination, at least on this occasion, but otherwise does not seem to have a clear definition. Smith (1994, 13) makes the very useful observation that usurpers were quick to establish coinages, but does not develop this any further.

¹⁹³ Peters (1972) 21

pretender, as none of them managed to take over the Seleucid empire in its entirety, although some came close.¹⁹⁴

Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that usurpers did not always, or even often, claim to be part of the Seleucid royal family. Whether close relatives of the king, appointed satraps, or rogue military generals, all of the usurpers under consideration had at least some legitimate political power, which they abused only too gladly. In all cases, however, this quickly caught up with them. However, it must be said that, at least early in their careers, most usurpers had a significant amount of popular support, whether from their military officers or from the wider public; otherwise they could never have conceived of usurpation in the first place, but, like most aspects of a usurper's career, popularity was short-lived. A usurper also needed a great deal of his own financial resources to pay mercenaries; mercenaries were an integral part of the Seleucid army for every king, and a usurper had to be prepared to pay them more than the legitimate king. Military prowess was a given if one wanted to achieve power in the Seleucid Empire, and all of these usurpers had it, and all of them were, or were perceived to be meritorious, at least by their supporters.

Because the individual stories of these usurpers can be incredibly fascinating, it can come as a surprise that both ancient and modern scholarship, can, in places, leave a great deal to be desired. Given that ancient sources from the Hellenistic period are largely lost to us, and given that many of them were written many years after the events they describe, it is not surprising that ancient coverage of the usurpers can be spotty in places. Not all modern studies deal with all of the usurpers under discussion here, particularly for the later period,¹⁹⁵ and more often than not, will perhaps contain a

¹⁹⁴ Morkholm defines Tryphon as a pretender, and I think that this is not entirely unreasonable, as Tryphon conquered Antioch and many other major Seleucid cities. However, as the legitimate king, Demetrius I still ruled over a few cities, albeit of lesser importance, I still prefer to define him as a usurper, although a highly successful one. Alexander Balas does present some contradiction to the definition, as his agents managed to kill the king he deposed. See the discussion below. Alexander Zabinas did outlive the king from whom he usurped the kingdom, but the Seleucid royal family managed to defeat him.

¹⁹⁵ For example, Houghton's 2002 catalogue, while providing coverage on Antiochus Hierax, Molon and Achaëus, does not discuss Andragoras of Parthia, who rebelled sometime during the reign of Seleucus II. Nor does he discuss why he eliminates the study of said usurper. Grainger (1997) 246 discusses some usurpers in his chapter titled "Subjects of the Kingdom," but places other usurpers in the section on kings.

sentence or two about each usurper. This is understandable in one sense, because individually, usurpers did not have an enormous impact on the broader course of Seleucid history, since many of them only ruled for a year or even less. In most cases they did not even have a significant impact on the king whose territories they seized, as their reigns were usually short lived. Moreover, legitimate kings did not spend a great deal of time or indeed energy fighting these usurpers, as they were often easily defeated, and so even if the reign of the usurper was long usually the battles to regain territory were short and decisive. However, the importance of usurpation is that it was a uniquely Seleucid problem, virtually unknown in the rest of the Hellenistic world; in fact, seven out of twenty-eight Seleucid kings experienced serious attempts on their reigns, less successful attempts presumably would have been commonplace.

Usurpers were necessarily opportunists, and opportunities nearly always presented themselves. This may be explained firstly in terms of the great size of the Seleucid territories. The majority of usurpations occurred in the outskirts of the empire, with Babylonia and Asia Minor being particular favourites. Doubtlessly usurpers in these areas played on local sentiments toward autonomy in the case of the latter, and cultural tradition in the former. Assuming that the usurpation occurred at a peaceful time when the king was in Antioch, it would have still taken the kings' armies a considerable amount of time to quell such rebellions. But the majority of usurpations took place when the king was occupied with other military matters, whether a full scale war, or indeed another usurper. This is in stark contrast to the Ptolemaic Empire, where it was difficult to get very far from the king. Because Seleucid kings were highly militarised, and therefore likely to travel with their armies, it would have been difficult to track down the king if one wanted to assassinate him, and usurpation may well have been a second choice, especially for usurpers who took over Antioch. Further to that, military training was so common among the Greco-Macedonian ruling classes that it ultimately trained usurpers, bringing about particular problems if the usurper was a more able general than the king. Many usurpations took place during the reigns of unpopular kings, who, fortunately for them, had plenty of places to hide. The Seleucid Empire has a reputation for having had more political unrest than other Hellenistic kingdoms, which is generally a

fair assessment. However, all Hellenistic dynasties had their problems, but with the Seleucids, these disputes were necessarily far more indecisive, with usurpation being the major manifestation.

However, the size of the Seleucid empire was not the only factor that led to usurpations. A great source of trouble, particularly at the end of the Seleucid empire, was the fact that marriage and inheritance laws seem to have been vague at best.¹⁹⁶ A king could take many wives, and the accession rights of children were not clearly defined. This easily explains usurpations within the Seleucid family, but this is not the whole picture, as a non-family usurper could have easily seen family crisis as an opportunity to seize an area. We also have no evidence of anything like a coronation ceremony, religious or secular, and usurpers could exploit this as well. However, usurpers were not exactly law-abiding, and so even had stricter rules of succession been in place, chances are they would have broken them. All a usurper really needed was military prowess, significant finances, and possibly popular support in order to stage a successful rebellion.

But what exactly defines a successful usurpation, when all usurpations ultimately ended in defeat? Coinage is the hardest evidence we have for the success of the usurpers, and the ideological element in it was similar to that of legitimate kings, but much stronger, given that the issue of a coinage was a major undertaking. A usurper would need to take over the local mints, and either hire a new engraver, as seems probable in the case of Molon, or commission a new design for his coins at the very least. Coinage would have spoken volumes about the economic and political stability of the usurper, whether real or perceived. He would also have needed to make some effort at drowning out the image of the legitimate king, although this would have been variable in success. He could have levied a tax in order to collect coins to be re-struck, but this would have been a serious blow to his personal popularity. Raiding temples for metals was another option, but again, this would not have endeared him to the local population. It is my view that usually they would have to have made the best of limited supplies of metals, whether those at the mints they conquered, or any other supplies they were able to find, and that

¹⁹⁶ Ogden (1999) *passim*

they almost never succeeded in fully removing the legitimate king's coins from circulation, and that, at best, they would have settled for only attempting to impose their new coinage.

Some usurpers only conquered one or two cities, which had mints and available metals of varying quality, and the fact that they were even able to conceive of issuing coins is amazing in and of itself. Usurper coins are not often technically brilliant,¹⁹⁷ but their individual character is what makes them remarkable, especially considering the hostile circumstances in which they were produced. Given the extent of some of our usurper coinages, and given that most of their reigns lasted only a couple of years or less, it is evident that they began issuing coins very early on in their reigns, which shows how much importance they attached to self-advertisement. As with all Seleucid coinages, reception is a key issue, and without a doubt the most important member of the audience would have been the usurper himself, who, at least to my mind, would have taken perverse pleasure in drowning out the image of the legitimate king, or at least attempting to do so. Given that completely removing the legitimate king's coinage from circulation was virtually impossible, the personal satisfaction gained from issuing one's own coins would have been of consolation to the usurper.

For the reigning king, the issue of a usurper coinage would have represented a serious economic and political blow; usurper coinages were always condemned by the legitimate king¹⁹⁸ once he regained the territory; however, this was carried out with only variable degrees of success, with the coins under discussion being hard evidence for this. For subjects within the usurper territories, by and large, the introduction of a new coinage would have simply represented a change in power, an all too common phenomenon, which would not have come as much of a surprise. Subjects within the legitimate king's realm are less relevant to this issue as they would not likely have seen the usurper coins, but, in the event that they heard of the manufacture of such coins, may have been duly outraged or amused, depending on their view of the king.

¹⁹⁷ Molon's single silver coin is of poor quality, and the portrait has odd proportions.

¹⁹⁸ Timarchus' coins were overstruck by Demetrius I (Newell 1937, 69); doubtlessly this was the case with other kings.

But to what extent was the usurper involved in deciding how to portray himself on his coins? I would argue that since many of them only conquered a few mints, that in practical terms, their involvement in the engraving of dies would have at least the potential to be greater even than a legitimate king. In the case of Antiochus Hierax, whose coins present a great deal of variation according to mint, it is clear that he was highly involved in the decisions about the iconography of the individual coins. In the case of Tryphon, who minted prolifically but without much variation, it would appear that he decided on a particular style for his coins early on in his reign, and subsequently distanced himself from the manufacture of coins. The involvement of the usurper would, of course, vary according to the stability of their reigns, and it is interesting to note with regard to the above that Hierax's revolt was a relatively peaceful one and Tryphon's far more unsettled.

As a general rule, it is fair to say that, the more tumultuous the reign, the more extreme the imagery of the Seleucid king on his coins, and the same is true for the usurpers. The iconography of usurper portraits is notable both for uniqueness and individuality, and apart from that, very little can be said in general about usurper portraiture due to the variations in personal circumstances. Often they tried to portray themselves as the opposite of the legitimate king, and sometimes they abandoned Seleucid conventions altogether, but this is not always the case, and so, as far as iconography is concerned, it is best to consider them individually.

We have far fewer non-coin portraits of usurpers, but some exist, particularly on gems. This is not surprising because this is generally the case with all Seleucid kings, legitimate or otherwise. However, percentage-wise, when compared to legitimate kings, far more usurpers seem to have commissioned gemstones. A usurper would need to gain support from high military officials, and rings featuring the king's portrait would have been a reward for loyal service, something on which the usurper would have been highly dependant, much more so than a legitimate king. The function of these rings as seals would also have been central to a usurper, as it would have aided in the establishment of their individual brands. We have very few identified seal impressions that can be

attributed to the usurpers. This may be explained initially in terms of the fact that any document sent by the usurper would have been destroyed on the quelling of the rebellion, and the seal with it. The other issue is that we do not have a great deal of surviving bronze portraits of usurpers, whose iconography corresponds more strictly with seals.¹⁹⁹ Given the short reigns of the usurpers, it is not surprising that we do not have any large statues available to us as it is not clear that they would have had the time, or indeed the money to commission such monumental pieces. In the unlikely event that they did, they almost certainly would have been destroyed when the legitimate king reclaimed the territory.²⁰⁰

Asia Minor

Asia Minor was a hotspot for rebellions first of all due to its relative wealth, both in terms of agriculture and in terms of the potential for trade, especially in the coastal areas. Its location at the fringes of the Seleucid empire was particularly remote, especially when one considers the rough, mountainous terrain the Seleucid armies would have needed to cross in order to quell a rebellion, assuming that they started out in Antioch.²⁰¹ Asia Minor was also a rich source of mercenary soldiers, particularly the Galatians,²⁰² and so a usurper would have plenty of local help, provided he could raise the funds, and this is worth remembering, considering that our two Asia Minor usurpers were connected with the Seleucid royal family. A considerable percentage of the cities of Asia Minor were Greek, and so the inhabitants would have had a shared cultural identity with the usurpers, thus facilitating rebellions,²⁰³ whereas this was not even always the case in all areas of the Hellenistic world, let alone the Seleucid empire. Moreover, these cities had traditionally, at various points in their respective histories, been autonomous, and usurpers could easily exploit these sensibilities.²⁰⁴ For example, the usurpers of Asia Minor seem to have allowed civic coinage either to continue, or to be reinstated, which

¹⁹⁹ Rostovtseff (1932) 34 Although Molon issued bronze, no known bronze coins feature his portrait. Achaeus and Hierax seem to have allowed civic bronze to continue.

²⁰⁰ The destruction, where documented in the sources, will be given as it pertains to each usurper.

²⁰¹ Ma (2002) 3-4

²⁰² Griffiths (1935) *passim*

²⁰³ Shipley (2000) 60

²⁰⁴ See chapter on Autonomy

would have gained them a great deal of personal popularity. Opportunism notwithstanding, taking all of these factors into account, it is easy to see why the usurpers of Asia Minor were the longest lasting.

Antiochus Hierax 241-227

Historical Background

Our first usurper chronologically, Antiochus Hierax, who took over in Asia Minor between 241-227, is on most accounts the least typical of the lot, at least as far as his personal circumstances are concerned. He was of the immediate Seleucid family, and was especially unusual because he was the full brother of Seleucus II, who put him in charge of Asia Minor at the insistence of their mother Laodike.²⁰⁵ He made alliances with Mithridates of Pontus²⁰⁶ and married a Bithynian princess.²⁰⁷ He made further alliances with the Galatians, with whom he victoriously fought against his brother at Ankyra in 237, after which much territory was ceded to him.²⁰⁸ Although little is known of his ensuing civil war with Seleucus II, numismatic evidence indicates a great deal about the areas he conquered, which included Alexandria Troas, Cyzicos, Lampsacus, and Magnesia ad Sipylus.²⁰⁹ Little is also known of his attempt to invade Antioch and Mesopotamia²¹⁰, which ultimately failed, but from which he escaped with his life.²¹¹ He was killed in 227 by a band of Galatians, for which the reasons are not known, but if Aelian 7.44 is to be believed, his horse avenged his death by killing a Galatian chief.

Summary of mints and coins

Houghton lists a total of 35 mints for Antiochus Hierax, all of which minted exclusively silver.²¹² Over 120 types are listed, each with many variations; thus only a tiny portion of

²⁰⁵Justin 37.2.7. The only other usurpation within the immediate Seleucid family was between Antiochus VIII and his half brother Antiochus IX

²⁰⁶ Pol.5.74.4

²⁰⁷ see below for a fuller discussion

²⁰⁸ Justin 38.5.3

²⁰⁹ Head (1910) 760

²¹⁰ Polyainos 34.17 For a discussion of the impact of this invasion on Seleucus II's coinage, see the relevant section.

²¹¹ Grainger (1997) 35

²¹² Houghton (2002) 295-296

the total corpus of Antiochus Hierax's coins is discussed here.²¹³ The mints of Lampsacus, Alexandria Troas, and Ilium are the main focus of this discussion because they depict him with a winged diadem, although certainly not always. The attribution of coinages to Antiochus Hierax, as will be noted throughout, is a controversial matter since he did not always portray himself. Inscriptions are equally unhelpful because he never uses the name Hierax or any other epithet (Figure 8).

Coinage



Figure 8 Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus Hierax from Alexandria Troas. Newell (1937) cat. no. 1575. Note that the inscription reads *Basileos Antiochou*, and that no mention is made of his nickname, *Hierax*.

Although a civil war broke out between the brothers when Hierax proclaimed himself king, the dispute ended peacefully,²¹⁴ with Seleucus ceding the territory to his brother, which sets him in direct opposition to the other usurpers, who met a violent death at the hands of the king. It must be noted that although he is the longest reigning of our usurpers, he left behind a relatively small number of coins because firstly he controlled only a few mints and secondly because he seems to have allowed bronze civic coinage to continue. In the main, he seems to have issued silver tetradrachms, which makes sense considering that although he may have needed to make large purchases for the support of his military, he did not have the enormous state expenditures that would have necessitated an extensive gold coinage.²¹⁵ We do, however, have available two gold staters from the later part of Hierax's reign, both depicting Athena on the obverse, with Nike on the reverse.²¹⁶ Price (1991 cat. no. 1951) argues that these coins were issued late in Hierax's reign, as he may have needed them to cover extensive military expenditures. I agree with

²¹³ Houghton (2002) cat. nos. 835-914. Catalogue number 835 lists 6 variations and 836 lists 13.

²¹⁴ Grainger (1997) 35 n. 14

²¹⁵ Aperghis (2004) *passim*

²¹⁶ Houghton (2002) cat 847, 873

this completely, and would add that the warlike imagery on both sides of these coins is further evidence of their military usage. If this furnished a state expenditure, however, imagery of gods would present an ideologically neutral image, expressing no alliance with any one king. We know few details of the Fratricidal War, but large gold coins such as these are almost certainly evidence of significant military expenditure, possibly between governments; it is worth remembering that Hierax married into the Bithynian royal family and had other alliances in addition to this.

The identification of Hierax's coins can be problematic, because particularly during the earliest part of his reign he did not place his image on his coins at all, preferring to honour his uncle Antiochus II and grandfather Antiochus I.²¹⁷ Further complicating the issue is that the name Hierax never appears on any of his coins, with inscriptions limited exclusively to the vague *Basileos Antiochou*.²¹⁸ All Seleucid kings prior to Seleucus II issued coinage with images of their ancestors before replacing them with their own portraits, but even there it was only the immediate predecessor who appeared on coins.²¹⁹ In honouring his relatives on his coinage it is fairly obvious that Hierax was trying to establish his legitimacy, but I would further argue that he was also attempting to outdo his brother, who did not follow in this practice, thus selling himself as a better king on grounds of family piety, if not to his generals, then definitely to the Bithynian royal family into which he married. A further advantage to issuing portraits of his relatives would be that the coins would be more economically acceptable than coins with a new image. This would not have helped to establish Hierax's own image, but it would have served to solidify Hierax's economic status as the new "king." Another advantage to minting portraits of Antiochus I in particular is that he was largely seen as the liberator of many of the cities of Asia Minor.²²⁰

²¹⁷ I am not interested, for the purposes of this study, in arguing over which coins represent which king, and follow Houghton's identifications.

²¹⁸ Houghton (2002) 291-325

²¹⁹ As with Antiochus I and II

²²⁰ See relevant section in *Autonomy*

Houghton has deemed several youthful portraits on coins minted by Hierax to be unidentifiable.²²¹ It is a distinct possibility that these may have been intended to represent sons that he may have had (although the details of his family are sketchy at best), thus further establishing his image of familial piety, particularly within the context of his tendency to honour several of his ancestors on coins. That having been said, this is a highly speculative matter and should not be taken as fact.²²² Given that his mother facilitated his rise to power, it is perhaps surprising that he does not seem to have honoured her on coinage, although it is very rare for women to appear of Seleucid coins. However, we do have a large number of unidentifiable female portraits, whether on gems or sculpture, that may have been created in her honour.



Figure 9 Silver Tetradrachm of Antiochus Hierax at Ilium. Houghton (2002) cat. no. 650. This coin bears no winged diadem and does not present a dramatic departure from earlier Seleucid iconography.

Problems with identifying the portraits on Hierax’s coins notwithstanding, in terms of his actual portrait, Hierax’s coins are not a departure from any aspect of Seleucid iconography, as he appears beardless, generally youthful, with a similar wavy hairstyle to his predecessors (Figure 9). Initially one might be tempted to argue that, being the first of our usurpers, Hierax did not fully recognise the ideological value of coinage and thus did not feel the need to create a highly specific image. While this is possible, it is important to keep in mind that Hierax was a member of the immediate Seleucid family and could well have seen himself as the legitimate king, and therefore felt no need to depart from Seleucid iconography. Indeed, usurpers doubtlessly saw themselves as the legitimate king. His reign was also relatively stable, the continuous civil wars notwithstanding, that he may not have felt the need to emphasise his military prowess, as so may other usurpers

²²¹ Houghton (2002) 293-294

²²² Fischer (1973 220-1) attributed a youthful portrait of what he deemed to be Tyre minted during the later part of the reign of Antiochus III to his son. Mørkholm (1984 185) refuted this attribution on the grounds that the mintmark refers to Nisibis, and therefore dates from the early reign of the king. This illustrates the need for what Mørkholm describes as “rational numismatic considerations” (ibid. 186) when identifying portraits, rather than a desire to create a complete Seleucid royal family portrait record.

did. In addition, Hierax usually used the seated Apollo on the reverse of his coins, which was a mainstay of Seleucid coinage, and often usurpers departed from this.



Figure 10 Silver Tetradrachm of Antiochus Hierax from Alexandria Troas with prominent winged diadem. Newell (1941) 1572.

What really distinguishes Hierax's coinages, both those depicting his ancestors and those depicting himself, is his use of the winged diadem,²²³ which is unique to Hierax, at least among the Seleucid royal family (Figure 10). Because of this, the prevailing view has been that it was a personal device of Hierax, and that it may refer to his name, meaning hawk, and for many practical purposes this is true.²²⁴ It is unlikely that this double meaning would have been lost on Hierax, but conversely, it would seem likely that there is more to the story than this. This is because the winged diadem is by no means a constant, particularly early in his reign, and it seems to have been restricted to the mint at Alexandria Troas, with exceptional specimens at the lesser mints of Lampsacus and Ilium, all in the same geographical area.²²⁵ MacDonald suggested that because the device is restricted to this specific geographical area, it must have some local religious significance, although sufficient supporting evidence was not available to him at the time he wrote his article.²²⁶ Following from this, I would argue that the answer may be found in the coins of the otherwise unknown Roman republican senator Q. Titius that depict Priapus with a winged diadem, dating from about 90 B. C (Figure 11).²²⁷ What is

²²³ Bellinger (1961) makes no attempt to discuss the winged diadem even though he catalogues several.

²²⁴ Smith (1988) 45 advocates this view, but does not acknowledge that MacDonald brought this into question.

²²⁵ Houghton (2002) 309

²²⁶ MacDonald (1903) 102

²²⁷ Wiseman (1964) 131 argues that the head on these coins is copied from sculptured heads of Priapus of Lampsacus, whose other name was Mutunus Titinus. The senator in question Q. Titius, is given the further name Mutto in Cicero's *Scatur.* 23, and thus Wiseman argues that the similarity in names was what inspired Titius to portray Priapus on his coins. Crawford (1974) 364 is vaguer in his identification of the god on the coins, although I am not certain as to why this is. He refers to Wiseman's identification as the traditional one, but again with no explanation.

interesting is that the cult of Priapus is strongly associated with Lampsacus²²⁸, a mint known for coins depicting Hierax with a winged diadem. Lampsacus is also known generally for some sculptured heads of Priapus bearing a winged diadem, and seems to have been unique in this, as Priapus, to put it subtly, is better known for displaying other attributes.



Figure 11 Silver coin of Q. Titius. Crawford (1974) cat. no. 341

What further connects both Hierax's coins from Lampsacus (only) and Titius' coins is the fact that they both contain an image of Pegasus on the reverse, thus destroying any idea that the winged diadem might be a coincidence.²²⁹ The question then turns to the usage of Pegasus on the reverse, which is easily contextualised by the fact that Pegasus was the civic badge of Lampsacus²³⁰. Therefore, these coins may be read in terms of Hierax's desire to respect the autonomy of the city, therefore solidifying his power. The fact that the entire reverse is occupied by Pegasus, rather than a small mintmark is also significant; the coins would suggest a partnership between the king and city, as each is given equal attention on the coin.

In terms of the more personal significance of the winged diadem, in light of Hierax's emphasis on family, it is not difficult to imagine that he would want to associate himself with a god of fertility. Priapus is often considered a bit of an unsavoury character,²³¹ but it is clear that this is not the complete picture; given that at Lampsacus at least, he is portrayed much more subtly than elsewhere, I would argue that he may be

²²⁸ *ibid*

²²⁹ Hierax, with exceptions, prefers the Seleucid Apollo on the reverse of his coins, with the exceptions proving the rule. Lampsacus is the only mint that seems to have used the Pegasus motif on the reverse of the coins.

²³⁰ Houghton (2002) 309

²³¹ Wiseman (1964) 131

seen as a more benevolent god of fertility, rather than simply lust. In fact, it is unlikely that Hierax would have wanted to associate himself with a god of wantonness, given the respect he had for his ancestors, and for his children, as is evidenced by his coins, and so this necessitates a more moderate view of Priapus. I would also argue that the use of the winged diadem may shed some light on Hierax's poorly documented reign. Perhaps he won a battle at Lampsacus and wished to honour the local god as a result, thus giving the coins a sort of commemorative and honorific quality. The winged diadem may also have had a familial significance, perhaps commemorating a marriage or birth.

Although among the Seleucids, Hierax is unique in his usage of the winged diadem, and although for many practical reasons it does appear to have been his personal device, it does reappear in Hellenistic coinage with the most obvious example of this being Prusias II of Bithynia (Figure 12). Eusebius tells us that Hierax married a daughter of Ziaelas of Bithynia, named, rather predictably, Laodike.²³² Justin tells us that the woman's nationality was Cappadocian.²³³ While it is not impossible that he could have married two women, the numismatic evidence would suggest that Laodike of Bithynia is the only possible candidate.²³⁴ Laodike's brother, Prusias I later became king of Bithynia, and his son, Prusias II followed, who was thus a nephew to Hierax by marriage; therefore the winged diadem connects the two royal houses.



Figure 12 Silver Tetradrachm of Prusias II of Bithynia. Sale: Triton VIII, Lot: 362. Closing Date: Jan 10, 2005.

Prusias II's winged diadem has traditionally been associated with the Macedonian royal family, from which his mother descended, and into which he married, who

²³² Eusebius Chron. 1.40.10

²³³ Justin 37.3

²³⁴ Babelon (1890) LXX n.3 argues that it is the sister of Hierax who married into the Cappadocian royal family

commonly used the winged helmet of Perseus on their portraiture (Figure 13).²³⁵ However, the winged helmet was far more elaborate than Prusias' winged diadem, which exactly matches that of Hierax. Considering the extent to which the winged helmet is used on Macedonian coinage, and considering the extent to which Hellenistic kings derived their rule from Macedonia, it seems very unlikely that they would have devolved from traditional Macedonian iconography if they wanted to emphasise this connexion.



Figure 13 Silver Tetradrachm of Philip V of Macedonia. Boerhinger (1973) cat. no 8 The differences between the winged helmet and winged diadem are obvious.

Before the religious significance of the winged diadem became apparent, I had initially wondered if the winged diadem was a Bithynian device, taken on by Hierax after he married. It is true that we do not have a great deal of Bithynian archaeological evidence to draw upon,²³⁶ but their coinage does exist, and no other Bithynian king prior to Prusias II seems to have employed the feature.²³⁷ The Bithynians, especially in regard to their Thracian heritage, did view Hermes as their patron god, and often portrayed him on the reverses of their coins wearing his winged helmet.²³⁸ As before, the winged helmet is far more elaborate than the diadem, and if Prusias, or indeed Hierax, wanted to associate himself with Hermes, or, by extension, Perseus, I would argue that they would have simply used a winged helmet.

²³⁵ Newell (1937) 45 details the family relationship. Hannestad (83, 96) takes the same view, but does not explore the family relationships.

²³⁶ Hannested (1975) 67 We also do not have a great deal of information on Hellenistic Bithynia in ancient sources. Polybius is our most detailed source, and yet he is incredibly biased against Prusias II. As far as modern scholarship is concerned, Magie's (1950, 45 ff) work gives a short narrative of the reign of Prusias II, as does Vitucci's *Il Regno Bithynia*. Both sources do mention Hierax's marriage to the Bithynian princess,. The closest attempt we have in scholarship connecting Hierax's and Prusias II's diadem is Babelon (1890 LXXII), but even there he attributes the winged diadem to Perseus.

²³⁷ Newell (1937) 45 ff.

²³⁸ Hannested (1996) 98 n78

Given the local religious significance of the winged diadem, the question turns to whether Prusias derived it from Hierax, or his own experience. Prusias II became king in around 179 BC, only 62 years after Hierax rose to power and only 47 years after Hierax's death, and the memory of Hierax would have been extremely recent, and indeed it is very possible that the two knew each other. Prusias II's usage of Hierax's personal device is highly consistent with his royal policies. Polybius²³⁹ has very little good to say about him, characterising him as weak willed and cowardly, and eager to ally himself with anyone possible, even when the alliances contradicted each other. For example, he married a Macedonian princess, but when war broke out between Macedon and Rome, he backed Rome, even going so far as to travel to Rome to present his congratulations.²⁴⁰ He also formed alliances with Pergamum early in his reign, only to invade later on when a new king (Attalus II) rose to power, counting on the backing of the Roman senate, who promptly ordered his defeat.²⁴¹ However, Lampsacus was part of the kingdom of Pergamum at this point, and so one could make the argument that Prusias, like his great-uncle, derived it from there. However, Prusias II was much more consistent in his use of the winged diadem throughout his reign, and so I do not think that it was the case that it had any religious significance for him. He also was highly inconsistent in his respect for religion; he donated a great deal of money to the temple of Apollo at Didyma, and to the temples of the Aetolians, but sacked a series of temples in his invasion of Pergamum.²⁴² He also does not seem to have had the same respect for family as Hierax had. Therefore it can be argued that Prusias erroneously saw the winged diadem as Hierax's personal device, and sought to use it for himself.

Because Prusias II sought to control Asia Minor through less than ethical means, one could argue that he had a lot in common with Hierax. Just as Hierax acted with the backing of his mother, Prusias acted with the backing of Rome, at least in his own mind. In general, it is fair to say that Prusias II was quite fond of forming alliances, and using the winged diadem would have associated him with not only Hierax personally, but the

²³⁹ Polybius 25ff.

²⁴⁰ Magie (1975) 316 cf. Livy XLIV 10, 12

²⁴¹ Magie (1975) 315-316 cf. Livy XLIV 10, 12

²⁴² *ibid.*

Seleucid Empire as a whole, which had just experienced a sort of golden age under Antiochus III. Hierax almost certainly would have been an inspiration to Prusias, if for no other reason than his relative success as a usurper, and was thus unique among the Seleucid usurpers for establishing a legacy.

Further echoes of the winged diadem appear in a series of gemstones depicting Medusa, that seem to have been carved at Rome by Greek engravers, as their signatures bear.²⁴³ We do not have any depictions of Medusa with a winged diadem up to this point, at least as far as I can tell, and certainly the profile view was a Hellenistic invention, later to be copied by the Romans.²⁴⁴ Medusa was of specific significance to Mithridates of Pontus, who was an avid collector of gemstones, and seems to have commissioned the so-called Apollophanes Medusa.²⁴⁵ What we do have with these several winged portraits of Medusa is a sad, downward glance, that Plantzos argues may depict the death of the Gorgon.²⁴⁶ In light of the Roman defeat of Mithridates, this would seem a fitting theme for the Roman court. We do not have available to us any gems that seem to have been commissioned by Mithridates depicting the monster with a winged diadem. Because Prusias II, who had close associations with Rome, made use of the winged diadem, it can

²⁴³ Plantzos (1996) 88

²⁴⁴ *ibid*

²⁴⁵ As Spier (1991) 93 argues “It is the Apollophanes Medusa...that resembles the coin and gem portraits of Mithridates VI, not only in the treatment of the wild hair, but also in the bulging brow with thick eyebrows, the fleshy face and chin, the full lips, and the prominent Adam’s apple. Those living in Asia Minor, where Mithridates had fought three bloody wars with Rome over twenty five years and where the gem was found, would surely have recognised the face of Mithridates in the head of Medusa.” Spier does concede that this is problematic because kings were not generally represented as Medusa, and that Pontic kings associated themselves with Perseus, but goes on to argue that this image could be “...a symbol celebrating Mithridates’ final defeat and death at the hands of Pompey, an ironic reversal where the self-proclaimed Perseus instead becomes the defeated Medusa.” Spier (1991) 93 Plantzos (1999) 88 dismisses the latter sentiment as “far-fetched”, and to this I would add that if Pompey had indeed commissioned this gem, it would have probably made it back to Rome. Regarding the former argument of Spier, Plantzos (1999) 88 argues that, assuming, perhaps reasonably, that Apollophanes carved both this Medusa and the portrait gems of Mithridates, that the gem engraver simply was drawing upon his previous experience with the gems of Mithridates when he created this Medusa. Although Plantzos’ view is certainly the more reasonable one, I still think there is something to be said for Spier, as he brings up interesting questions about the reception of this gem in antiquity. I disagree with Spier’s idea that this gem would have had a wide audience, whether among the Pontic Greeks or the Romans. He seems to assume that this cameo would have had the quality of political propaganda, whether for Greeks to admire or Romans to gloat over. If Mithridates himself commissioned the gem, he certainly would have seen the similarities between his portraits and this Medusa, and this perhaps indicates a well developed sense of humour in a ruler who is often seen as tyrannical and cruel. Green (1990) 558-62

²⁴⁶ Plantzos (1996) 88

be argued that perhaps the symbol had become conflated in Rome with Asia Minor, after all, it is worth remembering that Mithridates did annexe Bithynia, and thus the gems depicting the dead Medusa with a winged diadem are meant to emphasize Rome's victory.

As we can see, the winged diadem's meaning changed in accordance with its political and religious context. With Hierax it had a great deal of civic meaning, particularly in light of the employment of Pegasus on the reverses of the coins. With Prusias II it takes on a more familial meaning, reflective of the king's desire to associate himself with any kingdom he could. Roman usage of the device indicates that it had become conflated with Asia Minor as a whole, symbolic of Roman imperialism.

Achaeus 221-213

Historical Background

Achaeus was appointed satrap of Asia Minor and was an able military general, declaring himself king²⁴⁷ after he recovered lost Seleucid territory from Attalus of Pergamum. His connexions to the Seleucid royal family are not known in full, with every modern scholar exhibiting a different take on this; suffice to say he was strongly associated with it.²⁴⁸ However, his associations must have been very close indeed, as he was the only usurper other than Hierax who issued a gold coinage, given the state funds that would have been needed to allow a gold coinage. Military support was weak throughout his reign, with many of his officers deserting throughout the period of his reign; Polybius 5.57.3-8 tells us that even his mercenaries abandoned him. He was however, an opportunist, and was able to stay in power for about six years (220-213B.C.) because at that time Antiochus III was engaged in a war with the Ptolemies over Coele-Syria²⁴⁹. He may also have been motivated to usurp the throne because of the revolt of Molon, for two reasons; firstly, Antiochus III was far away fighting the war with Molon and secondly because of the nominal success of Molon's rebellion. He seems to have

²⁴⁷ Polybius 5.40.7

²⁴⁸ Polybius 4.51, 8.20.11 argues that Achaeus was the cousin of Seleucus III and Antiochus III. Grainger (1997) 8 describes him as a nephew of Laodike, wife of Antiochus II. Houghton (2002) 347 gives a complete list of scholarship on the matter. I am not concerned with the exact relationship of Achaeus to the Seleucid royal family, and am perfectly happy to simply argue that he was associated with it.

²⁴⁹ Polybius 5.66.3

controlled only Sardes and the surrounding areas, with Sardes being his only mint. The small area he conquered may also be another explanation for the longevity of his reign, as he did not have a large empire to manage. Eventually he was overthrown by Antiochus' forces and brutally tortured and killed, but only after Antiochus had fulfilled his other obligations.

Summary of Mints and Coins

As mentioned before, Achaeus only minted coins from Sardes. Of his portrait coins, the main focus of this discussion, we have one gold stater and a few silver tetradrachms available to us.²⁵⁰ Slightly more numerous are his bronze coins, of which Houghton lists seven types.²⁵¹

Coinage



Figure 14 Silver Tetradrachm of Achaeus Houghton (2002) cat. no. 953.1

As will be discussed with regard to Molon, the youth and inexperience of Antiochus III outraged his opponents²⁵², and nothing illustrates this quite so perfectly as the coins of Achaeus. Achaeus presents the most drastic change from typical Seleucid iconography, as he is the first “Seleucid” king to present himself with a beard, which would have had the effect of making him look significantly older and therefore more experienced (Figure 14). His features are worn and torn, perhaps a reflection of his

²⁵⁰ Houghton (2002) cat nos 952 and 953

²⁵¹ Houghton (2002) cat. nos. 955-999

²⁵² Polybius 5.40.7

experience as a hardened military general. In a more general sense, the beard would signify a departure from the youthful, beardless portraits of preceding Seleucids. The reverses of his coins also depart from Seleucid tradition, as, instead of Apollo, they present a fighting Athena, or the eagle of Zeus, clearly representative of his wish to be seen as an effective general²⁵³.

Houghton also compares the portraits of Achaeus with those of Philip V of Macedon, arguing that the two had a common enemy in Attalus I of Pergamon.²⁵⁴ Further to that, Achaeus also made use of the goddess Athena Alkis, who was worshipped mainly at Pella²⁵⁵, so it is fair to say that the comparison of portrait types is warranted in this case. All Seleucid kings derived their rule ultimately from the Macedonian royal family, and so it is easy to see why he would want to copy their imagery. Such a portrait would have expressed a solidarity with the Macedonian royal family, and perhaps was intended to cement any further alliances with them should their help be needed. Derivation of authority from the Macedonian royal family usually took the rather predictable form of imitation of Alexander, particularly in the case of Tryphon, but Achaeus seemed to want to derive his power from a more recent Macedonian king. The youthful portraits of Alexander did not embody the image of a war-torn, rugged military general, and so Achaeus had to look elsewhere for inspiration. Achaeus' portrait is unchanging, although it must be admitted that he did only rule for six years. However, it is important to keep in mind that he only controlled a single mint, namely, Sardis, and in this context he may well have had at least the capability of changing his image if he so desired²⁵⁶.

The punishment of Achaeus for his rebellion seems to have been particularly harsh, as Polybius 8.15.15-21 tells us that his extremities were cut off, he was beheaded and the head sewed up in a donkey's skin, and then his body was impaled, and this was clearly intended as a message for the peoples of Asia Minor. Polybius 5.53 also tells us

²⁵³ Houghton (2002) 348

²⁵⁴ Houghton (2002) 348

²⁵⁵ *ibid*

²⁵⁶ Houghton (2002) 348

of the crucifixion of Molon's dead body, but not in such specific terms. The explanation for this is that Molon's revolt was not as serious as Achaeus', nor did it have the historical precedent. Hierax's very successful rebellion had ended just six years before Achaeus' and it seems that Antiochus III wanted to send a clear warning that Asia Minor was not for the taking. The punishment of Achaeus has led Fleisher to argue that the famous Marsyas group sculpture was meant to represent it, with the beardless Apollo representing Antiochus III, and the bearded Marsyas representing Achaeus, and that the archaeological provenance is Sardis, the site of Achaeus' revolt.²⁵⁷ Hanfmann does point out that we do not know the provenance of this sculpture and that Marsyas does appear on Alexandrian coins, perhaps commemorating the suicide of the Spartan king Cleomenes III, therefore the sculpture could have been placed in Alexandria.²⁵⁸ We also have the problem that it is impossible to assign all bearded portraits sculptured to this time to Achaeus. While beards are certainly rare in Seleucid iconography of the time period, it is unsound to assign them all to Achaeus.

In any case, due to the grotesque violence depicted in this group, the subject does seem an odd one for a sculpture, and it does not seem likely that it would have been commissioned without a reason, as it is questionable whether the myth was widely known. It is also important to consider that we also have a tentatively assigned sculptured portrait of Antiochus III, evidence that he may have been a patron of the arts, at least more so than the other Seleucids. What we certainly do have is a motive for the commissioning of such a piece on the part of Antiochus III; as he exacted a much crueller punishment on Achaeus than he did on Molon, perhaps he intended this sculpture as a more lasting testament to his warning to the people of Asia Minor.

However, it is highly speculative to argue that Antiochus III actually commissioned this work; what we do have here is an issue of reception. Even if the sculpture was originally placed in Alexandria, doubtlessly any Seleucid diplomat visiting the area would have seen it and been reminded of Achaeus. The question then turns to

²⁵⁷ Hanfmann (1979) 205 cf Fleisher "Marsyas und Achaïos" JOAI 50 (1972-73) 105-122

²⁵⁸ *ibid*

whether the message conveyed by this sculpture would have been intended for the average person, as usurpations were always carried out by either the Seleucid royal family or a powerful member of the court. However, usurpers must have had at least some public support, particularly in Asia Minor, where promises of autonomy were not taken lightly. Thus the group may be read as a warning to city officials tempted to flee Seleucid authority.

With Achaeus we have also two gem portraits available to us for comparison, which is not surprising given that Achaeus was certainly one of the wealthiest of the usurpers, given his near royal status. Plantzos makes this identification based on the coins of this king, which depict the bust and head of the king, which is unique among Seleucid coinage, which usually depicts only the head.²⁵⁹ However, Seleucid intaglios often depict the bust of the king as well, and so strict comparison with the coins is difficult to establish. What does set these gems apart from other Seleucid ones is the curly, stylised beard, which is very rare in Seleucid portraiture. We do have a bearded coin portrait of Demetrius II from his second reign, but his beard is much longer and far more idealised than the one we have on these two portraits. We have extensive written evidence in Plutarch²⁶⁰ that Mithridates of Pontus issued his most faithful generals with rings bearing his portrait, as a token of loyalty, and we have no reason to believe that this practice started with him.

Babylonia

Our two Babylonian usurpers, Molon and Timarchus, had extremely short careers, and the initial explanation for this is that neither of them seem to have been closely related to the Seleucid royal family, and therefore would not have had the finances or the political clout to stage a long-lasting rebellion. However, it must be admitted that we know little of their early lives and their actual status within the royal family. Furthermore, the role of the satrap is a vague one, and little is known of the extent of the satrap's authority.

²⁵⁹ Plantzos (1999) 54

²⁶⁰ Plutarch *Life of Lucullus*

Babylonia was a unique region in the Seleucid empire due to its particular cultural history. It had spent much of its history under foreign occupation²⁶¹, and as a result was not a good source of mercenary soldiers, as was Asia Minor. Most important was the enormous strategic and economic value of Babylonia; no Seleucid king would have easily relinquished a wealthy area at the fringes of the Seleucid Empire. Kuhrt and Sherwin-White have argued extensively that Babylonia was not an area that was ignored by Seleucid kings, citing the vast corpus of cuneiform documents detailing Seleucid/Babylonian relations.²⁶² To this I would add that if Babylonia were so unimportant as has been previously suggested, Seleucid kings would not have sought to destroy its usurpers, nor, for that matter, would usurpers have sought to control the area.

We have seen that the usurpers of Asia Minor sought at least some popular support with the allowance of civic coinage, although the area was rich in mercenary soldiers as well, and they could easily have offered them more payment than the legitimate king. None of this was true for Babylonia, as it had spent much of its history under foreign occupation, but the native Babylonians had built a system of incorporating foreign rulers into a Babylonian cultural context, in the forms of epics, prophecies, and religious rituals, but the extent to which this was true for all Seleucid kings is not known.²⁶³ We have no documentary evidence to date detailing usurper/Babylonian relations, but a fair bit may be extrapolated from the extensive cuneiform documents concerning the Seleucids.

Currently we do not have any epics available about Seleucid/Babylonian relations, but we do have a document known to us as the Dynastic Prophecy, which details, "...the overthrow of the Assyrian Empire and the rise of the Neo-Babylonian kingdom. The historic point at which it ends can only vaguely be glimpsed; it falls at the end of Achaemenid rule, which is seen to be a good thing, and after a reign that should historically be Macedonian, in the context of the establishment of a new dynasty

²⁶¹ Kuhrt (1996) 42-43

²⁶² *ibid* 41 Sherwin-White (1987) *passim*

²⁶³ Kuhrt (1996) 42-43

[Seleucid] on the termination of a bad ruler.”²⁶⁴ Sherwin-White further argues that Antigonus was indeed a bad ruler, who imposed unfair taxes and sacked cities, policies which were abolished under Seleucus I, who gained enormous popularity in the process.²⁶⁵ Prophecies such as these regarding rulers were commonplace at Babylon, and a usurper could have easily used them to his own ends. A usurper might view this particular prophecy in very different terms to Sherwin-White, and would perhaps have argued that he was a good king destined to take over from a bad one. The usage of prophecies had its precedent with Alexander, who apparently used the prophecy of Ammon to justify his rule, although admittedly the details of this are not known.²⁶⁶ Still, it is not difficult to imagine the Successors and usurpers following Alexander’s lead.

Participation in Babylonian cultural and religious life could also have served a usurper well in his rise to power. Alexander’s rebuilding of Babylonian temples destroyed by Xerxes certainly did not harm his effort at gaining control of the area, because at the very least it would have convinced the Babylonians that his rule would be more tolerable than that of the Persians.²⁶⁷ The most famous Seleucid example of this is Antiochus I’s ritual brick making for the temples of Esagil and Ezida²⁶⁸, which would have demonstrated his commitment to the restoration and preservation of the Babylonian culture. In doing this he was effectively participating in Babylonian religious life, thus forming a trust between the two cultures. A usurper could well have exploited his participation in Babylonian religious ritual to gain power, if only to convince the local authorities that he made a better ruler than the legitimate king. Alternatively, usurpers could have used religious temples as a point of blackmail; i.e. threatening to destroy them if the Babylonians refused to submit to their rule.

Molon 221-220

Historical Background

²⁶⁴ Sherwin-White (1987) 14

²⁶⁵ *ibid* 15

²⁶⁶ Lane Fox (1999) 120

²⁶⁷ Lane Fox (1999) 39

²⁶⁸ Sherwin-White (1983) 26

Molon is our first usurper to come from outside the Seleucid royal family, and indeed is the usurper about whom we know the least. We know nothing of his early life, but he must have been reasonably well established as a general because he was appointed satrap of both Babylonia and Media in 223 B. C., about a year or so after Antiochus III had taken the throne²⁶⁹. Polybius is our only source on the reign of Molon, but he does not tell us that Molon declared himself king, a fact only revealed on the inscriptions of his coins. In 222 he began his rebellion, aided by his brother Alexander, and other neighbouring satraps.²⁷⁰ He managed to take several cities, including Susa, Ecbatana, and Seleucia on the Tigris, at which coins were minted.²⁷¹ The young Antiochus III defeated the usurper at Apollonia, and crucified his body, although Polybius does not give as much detail on this as he does for Achaeus.²⁷²

Summary of Coins and Mints

Molon's numismatic record is by far the smallest of our usurpers. Our only silver tetradrachm presents his only known portrait and was minted at Susa, and is the main focus of this discussion.²⁷³ Three bronze coins are known from Seleucia on the Tigris, as well as another bronze coin from Ecbatana, all of which depict Apollo.²⁷⁴

Coinage



Figure 15 Silver Tetradrachm of Molon Houghton (2002) cat. no. 950. This coins bears the inscription BASILEOS MOLON, the only indication that we have that Molon declared himself king.

²⁶⁹ Pol. 5.41.1; 5.41.6-7; 5.42

²⁷⁰ Pol. 5.43.5-6 Walbank 1957 provides little historical commentary on this subject. For a full discussion of the exact details of the campaigns, see Bar-Kochva (1976) 117-124

²⁷¹ Houghton (2002) 345

²⁷² Pol. 5.54.6-7

²⁷³ Houghton (2002) cat. no. 950

²⁷⁴ Houghton (2002) cat nos. 949 and 951

Polybius 5.41 tells us of the contempt that Antiochus' opponents had for him on account of his age, which may perhaps be seen on Molon's single surviving coin portrait, which depicts him with a double chin, wrinkles, and prominent sideburns, a feature very rare on Seleucid portraiture up to this point. Molon's hatred for Antiochus III on account of his age was far from a petty grudge and indeed reasonably motivated. We know nothing of Molon's early life, but he would have to have had significant merit to be awarded the satrapy of Media in the first place, and considerable military talents in order to sweep across the eastern Seleucid empire. Although we do not know Molon's age at the time of the usurpation, the Seleucid throne had changed hands four times in the forty years before Antiochus III took power, his predecessor having lasted only three years. Depending on the number of reigns he had lived through, Molon may well have seen himself as a constant amid the dynastic chaos, and therefore a more suitable king.

Molon's rough, worn, face also suggests military prowess, albeit far more subtly than Timarchus' helmet. However, the fighting Nikes employed on his bronze coinage had obvious military significance, and it is important to keep in mind that not even all Seleucid legitimate kings, let alone usurpers, controlled bronze coinage. Seleucid portraiture, in its role as political propaganda, was often more heavily emphasised on silver coinage, although bronze was far from ignored. Thus, Molon's placing of his imagery on an everyday coin is a sign of the extent to which he sought to impose his image on the peoples he conquered, and thus Molon's use of coinage comes quite close to the modern definition of propaganda.

But to what extent was Molon's military prowess based in reality? Clearly he needed some military experience in order to seize several cities, and he needed to be quite organised in order to impose a coinage in all of the cities he conquered. However, Polybius 5.43 tells us of the fear that Molon inspired, but he goes on to tell us that Molon resorted to bribes in order to rally troops from other satrapies to join his forces, which does not suggest that he would have been able to intimidate them militarily. Moreover, fear does not need to be based in reality; Molon's coins indicate his use of propaganda, and provided he built up a reputation for being a fearsome military general, he could intimidate the broader public into following his lead, at least for a short while. However, it is fairly obvious that Molon could not live up to the image of a hardened soldier.

According to Polybius 5.48, Molon “retreated” from the advancing armies of Antiochus, but Polybius does not commit as to whether this retreat was feigned or not. The result of this retreat was that Antiochus III’s army celebrated with a drunken party, and Molon used their incapacity to his advantage, defeating the troops. This ingenious tactic shows Molon as a wily opportunist, but it still leaves Molon’s actual military prowess in question. Moreover, Molon was defeated soon after at the hands of Antiochus III, who after all, was young and inexperienced, and this defeat does not speak volumes about his abilities.

We have no evidence, literary or otherwise, of usurper/Babylonian relations, at least at present, although Polybius’ account does leave some room for interpretation. We are initially told that Molon took over the city of Seleucia both by military force and abandonment by its governors (5.48.10). However, we are later told that Hermias, a corrupt member of the Seleucid court, wanted to fine the Seleucians 1000 talents, and had already executed many prominent citizens. Polybius cites the cruelty of Hermias as the reason for this, but Antiochus did impose a fine on the city, although a much more reasonable 150 talents. The fact that Antiochus III fined the Seleucians suggests to me that they, at least in part, went along with Molon willingly, because there would have been no point in fining a city that had simply been the victim of a military coup, if only because that would almost certainly have led to more rebellions. This fine would have had the effect of destroying Molon’s coinage, without bankrupting the city. As discussed before, Molon was adept at creating the image of a powerful soldier, and was not above resorting to bribes, but it is not impossible to imagine that he could also have used prophecies to his own ends and made promises of temple rebuilding. In fact, the issuing of a coinage could well have served as proof of Molon’s financial capabilities as far as the support of Babylonian cultural activities was concerned.

What are we to make of the fact that Molon only leaves us one portrait coin and only a handful of bronze coins? We have no literary evidence of any other taxes imposed by Antiochus III, and he was one of the more popular Seleucid kings, and so it does not seem that he imposed any more taxes, at least none significant. Given the varying denominations of Molon’s coins, it would seem that his coinage had been extensive, particularly in bronze. It must be conceded that due to the location of Molon’s revolt,

some of this destruction is almost certainly modern. Molon's reign was relatively early, and so it would seem that, if coinage had not been outright destroyed, it would have found itself being melted down in order to mint new coins. The local Babylonians had, at various times, their own coinage, and so it would not be unreasonable to argue that many of Molon's coins would have been recycled to manufacture these. Babylon was also a highly commercial area, and was, it will be remembered a sort of second capital of the Seleucid empire, and thus it would have been easier for Antiochus III to mandate and enforce the collection and destruction of Molon's coins. Babylonian coinage also would not have enjoyed a wide circulation, and would have been easier to collect and subsequently destroy than in Antioch. Babylon also remained more consistently in Seleucid hands than Asia Minor, and so whatever programme of destroying usurper coinage may have been in place in Babylonia would have been more easily completed.

In an absolute sense, Molon's portrait (Figure 15) is in poor condition, but as Houghton points out, the quality exceeds that of the Susan portrait coins of Antiochus III²⁷⁵. The sideburns and double chin show a far greater attention to detail than the rather nondescript portraits of the legitimate king, and from this it is clear that Molon sought to distinguish himself from the Seleucids. But what really distinguishes Molon is his oversized ear! It was not uncommon for Seleucid kings, particularly later ones, to overemphasise certain features in an almost caricature like fashion, the most famous of these being Antiochus Grypus who boasts an enormous hooked nose. In the first instance this would be for self advertisement, with the overemphasised feature being a sort of trademark, and in this Molon seems to have been a trendsetter. But the oversized ear may well have further implications, as some portraits of Alexander, particularly those featuring the horns of Ammon, also depict him with disproportionately large ears. One should not go so far as to say that Molon's ear is meant to be surrounded with the horns of Ammon, although the coin is quite worn. He also does not make use of other Alexander related imagery on his bronze coins. In the sense that he spent most of his life conquering lands that were not his by inheritance, one could make the reasonable

²⁷⁵ Houghton (2002) 344 Houghton does not discuss the extent to which overstriking Molon's coins could have contributed to the poor quality of Antiochus III's Susan coins, an analysis of which would shed even more light on the rarity of the usurper's coins. Overstriking was a common way of destroying usurper coinage, as was the case with Demetrius II, as it could be done more efficiently than melting down and reminting coinage.

argument that Alexander was a sort of proto-usurper, especially within the context of the concept of spear-won land²⁷⁶. Indeed, one wonders about the extent to which usurpers recalled this concept in order to justify their rule. With this in mind it is not difficult to see why Molon would draw upon Alexandrine imagery, however subtly, particularly in his capacity as a conqueror of the east. Associating himself with Alexander would also have been a good move ideologically, because Alexander's appeal would have been unquestionable, especially in light of his fair treatment of the Babylonians, whereas we can be less sure of Seleucid popularity in the region.

Molon seems to be unique among the usurpers in that he involved his brother Alexander, and presumably other members of his family in his rebellion, showing a degree of planning that we have little evidence of in other usurpers. We know almost no details of the lives of Molon's family, or their responsibilities as far as the rebellion was concerned, but Polybius does confirm their existence, and as a matter of fact, he tells us that they all committed suicide after Molon's usurpation was quelled. As mentioned before, only Molon's coins tell us that he crowned himself king, and, because we have no coins available to us of his brother Alexander, it is fair to say that he did not crown himself king, but merely conspired with Molon. As we have seen with Molon, although legitimate kings condemned the coinage of usurpers, it would have been nearly impossible to eradicate it completely, after all we still have these coins available to us today, and so with this in mind it does not seem likely that Alexander issued a coinage at all. This does, however, raise the issue of whether or not there were usurpers who did not mint coins, and I think that the answer to this is almost certainly yes. In addition, there were almost certainly short lived usurpers undocumented in the sources.

We also have available to us one gemstone that could possibly be attributed to Molon, as it does display an extraordinarily large ear, with the outer ear depicted in an almost hornlike fashion. (Plantzos Cat. 110) Admittedly it does not have the rough sideburns or generally rugged appearance as our one coin portrait of Molon, but the ear does make one wonder. Plantzos categorises this as a non-identifiable ruler portrait,

²⁷⁶ Mehl (1980-1) 173-212

arguing that it comes from the later Hellenistic era, “when portraiture became less specific, and in a way indifferent.”²⁷⁷ Without even any other comparative material of Molon it is difficult to assign the gem to him, but it does bear his trademark large ear²⁷⁸, and so I disagree with Plantzos’ characterisation of it. Rings such as these could well have served as an identification marker for Molon’s most prominent soldiers, and the motivations for usurpers to create such identity badges is obvious. Molon was also not averse to bribing, as we have seen in Polybius, and rings such as this one could well have formed such a bribe.

Timarchus January to May 161

Historical Background

The Seleucid empire does not seem to have suffered any serious usurpation attempts until the early part of the reign of Demetrius I, in which Timarchus took over Babylon, over which he had been satrap for a number of years, much the same location as that of Molon’s revolt some 50 years earlier. His actual reign was perhaps the shortest of all our usurpers, as cuneiform tablets date his reign between January and May of 161 B.C. i.e. five months, give or take a few weeks. This would indicate that he began minting coins not just early in his reign, but immediately. The details of his previous career are scanty and our sources are in many cases biased. Appian (Syrian Wars 8.45) describes Timarchus as having been made satrap at Babylon and then proceeds to casually mention that he was a *paidika* of Antiochus IV, which is usually translated rather euphemistically as “favourite”. The literal meaning of this word would, of course, be something like “little slave-boy”, and, unfortunately, the sexual connotations of this word are clear²⁷⁹, as Liddel and Scott refer to the Latin word *deliciae*, which refers to anything pleasure giving, although this word can be used in perhaps more innocent contexts. In any case Appian is clearly using it as an insult, although one cannot deny that it also could have been true. Moreover, Appian goes on to tell us, with regard to Timarchus’ demise at the hands of

²⁷⁷ Plantzos (1996) 58

²⁷⁸ It must be admitted that this argument would be completely derailed if a hoard of coins depicting Molon with a small ear were to be discovered. However, the connexions between our single surviving portrait coin and this gemstone would still stand.

²⁷⁹ Dover does not offer any commentary on Appian with regard to the homosexual connotations of this word. That having been said, Appian’s use of the term *paidika* seems to reflect his personal opinion of Timarchus, or, more likely, his source’s view of Timarchus, rather than any general view of homosexuality.

Demetrius I, that the Babylonians bestowed on Demetrius the title of Soter, as Timarchus had ruled the area badly²⁸⁰. Appian does not however, give us any details of how Timarchus' vileness manifested itself, although unfair taxation, pillaging of cities, and insensitivity to Babylonian tradition are reasonable guesses. However, one could easily imagine the Babylonians bestowing such a title on Demetrius and overplaying the wickedness of Timarchus in order to avoid the taxation and punishments that legitimate kings often imposed on areas that had given themselves over to usurpers, and perhaps this title is evidence that they went along with Timarchus willingly. As understandable as Appian's views may be, they do not tell us the entire story. It does not seem likely that Antiochus IV would have left Timarchus in charge of such a wealthy and strategically important area if he were as incompetent as Appian suggests. Secondly, Timarchus would have seen the reigns of at least three Seleucid kings at the time of his rebellion, and, like his predecessor Molon, may well have seen himself as a constant amid dynastic chaos. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, after his revolt he sought and received the recognition of Rome, which was becoming a greater power than the Seleucids, a move which showed more foresight than any of our other usurpers, although it meant very little in practical terms. It also does not seem likely that Rome would have approved of such a reign if Timarchus were as devoid of merit as Appian tells us.

Summary of mints and coins

Timarchus seems to have only conquered the mint of Seleucia on the Tigris.²⁸¹ Only four silver tetradrachms of this usurper are known, all of which depict him helmeted.²⁸² No gold or bronze coins remain, but this of course does not mean that he did not mint any. It is worth noting that we have available several coins of Timarchus that were overstruck by Demetrius I.²⁸³ A full study of these would be necessary to give a clearer idea of the size of Timarchus' coinages; however, it is the helmeted portrait coins of Timarchus that are of interest to this study.

Coinage

²⁸⁰ Appian Syrian Wars 8.47

²⁸¹ Houghton (1983) cat. no. 990

²⁸² Houghton (1979) 214 ff.

²⁸³ Houghton (1983) cat. no. 991



Figure 16 Silver Tetradrachm of Timarchus. Houghton (1993) cat no. 990

We have only four coins of Timarchus. These are in many ways the most impressive of our usurpers. This would appear to be the only “Seleucid” portrait to be presented wearing a helmet, which would have placed a strong emphasis on his military capabilities (Figure 16)²⁸⁴. Because the Seleucid kings were nearly constantly at war, military propaganda was kept to a minimum on coins, as this would have proved extremely unpopular.²⁸⁵ However, the helmet immediately calls to mind the extremely recognisable coinages of Bactria, which often present the helmeted rulers, whether in the form of the elephant helmets of Demetrius of Bactria or the otherwise unknown Antimachus, who wears a rather strange hat that Newell amusingly compares to a tam-o-shanter.²⁸⁶



Figure 17 Silver tetradrachm of Eucratides of Bactria.
<http://www.coinarchives.com/a/lotviewer.php?LotID=257430&AucID=378&Lot=2111>

²⁸⁴ We also do have the helmeted issue minted under Seleucus I, but it is not clear at all whether these are intended to represent Seleucus or Alexander. With Timarchus, it is clear that these coins are intended to represent Timarchus, hence the characterisation.

²⁸⁵ Fleischer (1996) 36 argues that Seleucids placed a decreasing emphasis on military matters as far as their coins were concerned, and places the start of this with Antiochus Grypus. I would argue that the Seleucids never placed much emphasis on their military capabilities. We do see subtle reflections of military experience on the coins of Seleucid kings who age significantly on their coins, but I would argue that this is meant to reflect more general life experience, rather than anything specifically military.

²⁸⁶ Newell (1937) 80-81

However, Timarchus' helmet most closely resembles that of his contemporary, Eucratides of Bactria (Figure 17), which is particularly significant when we consider that both kings also made use of the Dioscuri on the reverses of their coins. The Dioscuri seem to have been a personal device of Eucratides, as they do not seem to feature heavily on other Bactrian coinage, and they definitely do not appear on Seleucid coins. It is also worth noting that both portraits depict the subjects' heavily draped bust, which is unusual in Seleucid portraiture. Holt argues that since Eucratides starts out without the helmet, and gradually develops it over time, while Timarchus' portrait starts out fully helmeted, that Timarchus was clearly copying Eucratides's style, deeming him a "numismatic plagiarist."²⁸⁷ Such a judgement is not helpful, as it does not address why Timarchus sought to copy Eucratides' coins. There is a possibility that the dies may have been carved by the same engraver, but there are no visible signatures or markings to indicate this clearly. It is also difficult to say whether we know less about Timarchus or Eucratides, and so perhaps they may have had an agreement between them about not only coin types, but also military matters. Timarchus would have had a reasonable enough motive for forming an alliance with Bactria, as they were a successful breakaway kingdom from the Seleucids. This would also be in keeping with Timarchus' character considering his alliance with Rome. However, lack of corroborating evidence in written sources, along with piecemeal numismatic evidence prevents any real conclusion about the similarities in these coins.

Like Molon, Timarchus met his end very quickly and without, it seems, much difficulty on the part of Demetrius I. However much Molon wanted to emphasise his military prowess, or at least his military aspirations, on his coinage, the same is doubly true for Timarchus. Neither had much actual military capability, Timarchus, again, being much the worse, and so from this we may infer that military propaganda and actual ability seem to have been inversely proportional, at least as far as these two are concerned.

²⁸⁷ Holt, F. A History in Silver and Gold
<http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/199403/a.history.in.silver.and.gold.htm>

It is difficult to make any generalisations about the Seleucid usurpers, but perhaps we can say that the more unstable their reigns were, the more likely they were to emphasise their military capabilities, or, more to the point, what they wanted their military capabilities to be.

Andragoras of Parthia

Andragoras was a Seleucid satrap of Parthia whose rebellion against Seleucus II in 246 was quelled by the Parthians, resulting ultimately in the rise of the Parthian kingdom,²⁸⁸ and as such he is not often characterised as a Seleucid usurper. Morkholm²⁸⁹ discusses his reign briefly, which is why it has been included here, but few other scholars discuss him in relation to the Seleucids. Coins depict this usurper as bearded,²⁹⁰ which would have been intended to serve to contrast him with the legitimate king; however, the extent to which this would have been successful against the bearded portraits of Seleucus II will remain a mystery, as the king never fought against him. Morkholm argues that these coins are counterfeit²⁹¹, on the basis that many coins provenanced in the region are. This is an unsound argument as he presents no real reasons as to why these coins in particular should be fakes. There is also the issue that these coins are of exceptionally poor quality, and in this context it does not seem likely that there could be any reason for anyone to counterfeit such poor quality coins.

Antioch

In the early part of the Seleucid empire, no usurper seems to have attempted to take over in Antioch, at least with any degree of success.²⁹² I would argue that simple realism may have played a part; the Seleucid kings often resided in Antioch, and one did not want to attempt a coup without absolute certainty in one's ability to succeed.

²⁸⁸ Grainger (1991) 76 Justin 41.4.6

²⁸⁹ Morkholm (1991) 119-120

²⁹⁰ Head (1902) 825

²⁹¹ Morkholm (1991) 119-120

²⁹²With regard to this section, I am aware of the risk of becoming over dependent on one or only a few sources. Modern scholarship, whether historical or numismatic is generally quite poor for the later part of the Seleucid Empire, particularly after the reign of Antiochus IV. Newell's coin catalogues only publish through the end of the reign of Antiochus III, and Morkholm breaks off here as well. I am eagerly awaiting the publication of Houghton's catalogue of the later Seleucid Empire, but appreciate the difficulties in completing such a task. Our ancient sources on this period are also scanty and in some cases unreliable, and it is often the case of making the best of what is available.

Moreover, with wealthy territories to be found at the fringes of the Seleucid territories, and with the inspiration that the breakaway kingdoms provided, there was little point in trying to seize what was in many practical terms the capital city of the empire; in other words, usurpers were not usually prepared to do things that they could not get away with. With the increasing power of Rome, the gradual dissolution of the Seleucid empire, and the loss of financial resources, Antioch became an easier target for rebellion. Many kings faced serious unpopularity, and so usurpers were able to take advantage of this here more than anywhere else. With our Antioch usurpers, we see an increase in association with the Seleucid family, whether real or pretended, which shows that the name still carried a fair amount of political clout, although in practical terms they were not always effective or indeed popular.

Alexander Balas 150-145

Historical Background

Balas' connexions to the Seleucid royal family have been much disputed by our sources, both ancient and modern. Both Josephus (AJ 13.103) and the books of the Maccabees tell us that he was the son of Antiochus IV, although many argue that the Jewish sources are naturally biased in favour of him, due to his fair treatment of them. Polybius 33.15 implies that Balas was not a son of Antiochus IV, condemning Heraclides' support of Balas as play acting. Heraclides apparently made a great deal of the idea that Balas was a biological child of Antiochus IV, which Ogden takes to mean that he may have been "illegitimate."²⁹³ Appian (Syr 67) outright states that Balas lied that he was a member of the Seleucid family, but as Ogden argues, his constant description of Balas as *nothos*, "bastard", may refer to the fact that it became a sort of informal title.²⁹⁴ It is entirely possible, according to Ogden, that Balas, and for that matter his sister, were the children of Antiochus IV and a concubine, as none of our sources detail the mother of either of these children.²⁹⁵ I think that this scenario is plausible, but, as Ogden further argues, Demetrius, with whom Balas competed, would

²⁹³ Ogden (1999)144

²⁹⁴ *ibid*

²⁹⁵ Ogden (1999) 145-146

have had plenty of motivation for denying the legitimacy of Balas.²⁹⁶ To this I would add that Balas does not seem to have been a terribly effective king, and the characterisation of him in many of our sources seems to have been based on their personal opinions of him rather than on his actual legitimacy. It will be remembered that Demetrius I's death at the hands of Balas, or at least Balas' supporters, was avenged by none other than his son, Demetrius II, who would have been all too eager to dismiss the claims of Balas. With all these things in mind, I think that Balas was, in all likelihood, the son of Antiochus IV, and allegations of his legitimacy, although they may have had some grounding in reality, were merely that.

This is not to say that the allegations over his legitimacy did not affect the reign of Balas. He came to power with the support of the Seleucid court, but this may have been due to the immense unpopularity of Demetrius I, who had waged a number of unpopular, and unfeasible wars. As mentioned before, he did seek the support of Rome, but to what extent this helped him in practical terms is not clear. What is clear is that he derived a great deal of his power from the Ptolemies, who had long sought to govern the Seleucid kingdoms. Thus, Ptolemy VI married his daughter, Cleopatra Thea, to Balas, thus solidifying an alliance with the Seleucid kingdom. Josephus makes a great deal of this,²⁹⁷ arguing that Ptolemy would not have married his sister to Balas if he were of unknown stock. One could just as easily argue that Ptolemy was so concerned with causing trouble for the Seleucids that he did not care if he was marrying his sister to a commoner.²⁹⁸ However, it is important to keep in mind that Balas was not the only usurper to ascend the Seleucid throne with Ptolemaic help; the commoner Zabinas was sent to the Seleucid throne by the Ptolemies, and yet we have no evidence that he married anyone from either of the royal families. This would be a very important detail, and I do not think that any source would have omitted it. Thus I would argue that it is fair to say that Balas was of royal stock on account of his marriage to the Ptolemaic princess when we compare his situation to that of Zabinas. The same also appears to be true for Tryphon, who does not seem to have been married into the royal family.

²⁹⁶ *ibid*

²⁹⁷ *ibid*

²⁹⁸ Ogden (1999)145

Summary of mints and coins

Like many of the later Seleucids, the coinages and mints of Alexander Balas are poorly documented by modern scholars. He minted silver coins at all major Seleucid centres, namely Tarsus, Antioch, Ake-Ptolemais, Damascus, and Seleucia on the Tigris,²⁹⁹ although also coined bronze from smaller mints such as Apamea, Laodicea, and Cyrhhus.³⁰⁰ His overall output of coins seems to have been quite large when compared to other usurpers, but this is not surprising since he controlled the greatest territory of any Seleucid usurper. His output at Antioch was especially prolific; Houghton lists thirty issues from Antioch alone.³⁰¹ His silver portrait coins, minted throughout his reign, are the centre of this discussion.

Coinage

We have a few silver tetradrachms of Alexander Balas in which he appears with his wife, Cleopatra Thea, from the early part of his reign. This shows an obvious emphasis on family, but as we have seen, the Seleucids did not often refer to family on their coins, and these jugate portraits seem to be the first of their kind, at least as far as the Seleucids are concerned. They are of a clearly Ptolemaic style, the trend having originated with the double coin portraits of Ptolemy II and his wife. These coins show the extent to which Balas was dependent on foreign approval in order to solidify his reign, especially when we consider that Cleopatra Thea's head is placed in front of Balas' on at least some of these coins.³⁰² Whatever Balas' credentials, and however more meritorious he was than the king he overthrew, he clearly felt the need to justify his reign.



²⁹⁹ Houghton (1983) 11

³⁰⁰ Houghton (1983) 32ff.

³⁰¹ (Houghton (1983) cat. nos. 173-208

³⁰² See section on Women for further discussion of these coins

Figure 18 Silver Tetradrachm of Alexander Balas, Antioch Mint. Houghton (1983) cat. no 179

We also have an extensive series of very fine solo portraits of Balas (Figure 18). They do not, however, present much variance from the traditional Seleucid iconography, at least as far as the actual portrait is concerned. He is beardless, with a similar hairstyle to his predecessors, and does not use any personal devices; however, he does retain some individuality. This shows that Balas was secure in his rule over the Seleucids, and did not need to present a drastic change in portrait style. This is almost certainly due to his usurpation of Antioch, rather than one of the areas on the outskirts of the empire, and he must have been so proud of this great accomplishment that he did not need to depart from a strictly Seleucid style. With regard to Balas, since he was the first usurper of Antioch, I think that it is also fair to say that a drastic change in the Seleucid iconography may well have been poorly received, as it may well have called into question his connexions with the family. Moreover, the adherence to traditional Seleucid iconography may well have been intended to emphasis his connexion to the family in that his portrait bears no resemblance in ideology to previous usurpers. Another possibility is that he resembled his father. As we have seen, Balas made a great deal of effort to prove his allegiance and capabilities, and so portraying himself in a wildly different manner to that of his predecessors would have almost certainly have undermined his claims to the Seleucid throne.

However Seleucid Balas' solo portraits may have been, they still showed a connexion to the Ptolemaic throne on the reverses, which display the Ptolemaic eagle, which was used on the reverses of Ptolemaic coinage as constantly as the Seleucid Apollo. Interestingly enough, these were minted according to the Phoenician weight standard of the Ptolemies, not the Attic weight standard of the Seleucids. This shows the extent to which Balas was a mere puppet of the Ptolemies, and also the extent to which the Seleucids were losing control of their empire.³⁰³ How far the citizens of the Seleucid empire appreciated this is not clear, but Balas was clearly seen as a stabilising influence, at least in relative terms.

³⁰³ Newell (1937) 70

Balas does display a heavy jaw, which distinguishes him from the rather weak-chinned Seleucids before him, and I think that it has the effect of making him appear as a stronger ruler, but this device is very subtle; it does not, in my opinion have any parallels with the oversize ear of Molon or the ridiculously large nose of Grypus. He is still presented as a Seleucid, only slightly stronger and perhaps more competent. Eerily enough, however, Ptolemy VI, who facilitated Balas' rise to power, also presents himself as having a reasonably strong jaw-line, which he does not seem to have inherited from his predecessors. His nose has a similar shape to Balas', although Balas' portraits are far more varied in their treatment of this, particularly the jugate ones. Since Balas owed much of his power to the Ptolemaic king, it is hardly surprising that he sought to copy his image. I do not think, however, that the peoples of the Seleucid empire would have been aware of this similarity, as it is not clear how far the coins of Ptolemy VI circulated in the Seleucid kingdom, although the change in the Seleucid weight standard under Balas would have facilitated this. For the bulk of the citizens of the Seleucid empire, Balas would have appeared as a more or less typical Seleucid, although perhaps a bit stronger. Therefore I would argue that the significance of the similarities of the two portraits would have only been appreciated by the two kings themselves and their close associates.

We also have available to us a very few commemorative portraits of Antiochus IV from the later reign of Balas.³⁰⁴ The key issue here is that Balas did not issue these coins constantly throughout his reign; during the early years of his reign he directly associated himself with his wife, and associated himself with the Ptolemies more indirectly through the use of the Ptolemaic eagle on the reverse of his coins. It seems likely that this sudden commemorative issue indicates perhaps a growing number of accusations about the parentage of Balas, and he felt the need to justify himself by honouring his father on his coinage. This is unlike Hierax, who sought consistently to honour his ancestors through his coinage; therefore one could easily argue that Balas only issued a commemorative coinage when he really needed to solidify his rule. I think that it is, therefore, possible to infer that the issue of Balas' parentage did not come to the fore

³⁰⁴ Morkholm (1960) 25

in any meaningful way until the end of his reign, and that some of what our sources tell us is a retrojection of the problems of his later reign onto his accession.

Due to his unique personal circumstances, Balas is most unlike the other usurpers under consideration in this chapter, with the possible exception of Hierax. Although he was by no means the most effective king of the Seleucids, in relative terms, he was probably a better king than Demetrius, and did earn a great deal of personal popularity both among the Seleucid royal court and the Ptolemies, and so was, at least in modern, democratic terms, a legitimate king. Assuming that he was the son of Antiochus IV, he would have had every reason to think that he was the legitimate king; his father had reigned more successfully, at least at the beginning of his reign, than had Seleucus IV, the father of Demetrius. There was also the matter of Antiochus IV's divine claims, which may have served to further legitimise Balas' rule. Balas could easily have seen the line of Seleucus IV as short lived, with a poor probability of success, and very reasonably thought himself the better candidate for the throne. However, because he technically stole the throne from Demetrius while he was still alive, he does meet the definition of usurper. But Balas presents a further problem in that he, or indeed his forces, managed to kill Demetrius, a feat which no other usurper managed, and because of this I had initially questioned whether or not to include him in this study. Demetrius' death at the hands of Balas was by no means inevitable, and the fact that no other legitimate king was killed by the usurper is proof of this. Balas did effectively co-rule the Seleucid territories early in his reign, and so for at least the beginning of his rule, was exactly like all of the other usurpers in this study. What Balas did not manage to do was set up a hereditary dynasty originating in him, the way that, for example, the kings of Bactria had managed to do; he was still overthrown by the heir to Demetrius' throne, and thus I am still prepared to consider him a usurper. We also have some evidence that he left behind a sort of legacy, first of all his son Antiochus VI Dionysus, and by the fact the Alexander Zabinas also claimed Balas as his father.

Tryphon 142-140

Historical Background

Tryphon is the best known usurper of the lot, as he conquered the greatest territory, and seems to have minted the most coins, even though he only ruled for about two years, between 142-140 B. C. After a public uprising in 145 against the reigning king, Demetrius II, Tryphon proclaimed the child Antiochus VI Dionysus as king³⁰⁵, who just happened to be a son of Alexander Balas, having arranged to release him from the protection he received at the hands of an Arab chieftain. We do not know the exact details of Tryphon's origins, although it is clear that he was not of Seleucid royal stock. He did have a gift for intrigue and was an able military general, and had served under Alexander Balas. It is interesting however, that he did not rebel immediately, instead preferring to put forward a young king and to effectively act as a regent. Although Balas' origins were controversial, it is clear that he had at least some followers in Antioch, who were largely supportive of his son. It is also clear that the Seleucid name still carried so much political clout in Antioch that Tryphon did not see a full claim to the throne as a viable option, at least not at this early stage.

All the while, Demetrius II still controlled Phoenicia, and still continued to mint coins there, even though Tryphon controlled most of the politically important parts of the Seleucid Empire. Although it is clear that there must have been some fighting between Tryphon and Demetrius, we do not know the details of this. It is widely known that Demetrius sought and received the protection of the Parthian kingdom, perhaps seeking help in defeating Tryphon.³⁰⁶ This never came to anything, as Tryphon was soon defeated by another son of Demetrius I, Antiochus VII Sidetes.

Summary of mints and coins

Tryphon minted portrait coins of all metals at every mint he conquered, including the major mints of Antioch, Tarsus, Ake-Ptolemais and Damascus.³⁰⁷ He also seems to have minted throughout Phoenicia, sometimes supplanting local autonomous coinages.³⁰⁸ Coin iconography remained unchanged regardless of the metal in question. No gold coins are

³⁰⁵ Diod. 33.28

³⁰⁶ Jos. AJ 13.220-221

³⁰⁷ Houghton (1983) 11

³⁰⁸ Houghton (1983) cat. no. 702

known for Tryphon. He seems to have been prolific; Houghton lists ten silver issues for Antioch, all of which were minted within the short confines of his reign.³⁰⁹

Coinage

Tryphon's initial numismatic, and indeed political, policy was to mint coins depicting the young Antiochus VI, albeit in his name (Figure 19).³¹⁰ We have available a very fine series of coins depicting the young Antiochus VI, many of which bear a radiate crown. This feature is rare on Seleucid coinage, as it is a clear mark of deification. The radiate crown is most commonly seen on Ptolemaic coins, and is usually reserved for the dead ruler. The fact that Tryphon presented the young prince as a god in my opinion speaks volumes about the instability of his reign. However, this may also be seen as a form of propaganda; Demetrius II, at least during his first reign, was presented as an ordinary Seleucid, and so presenting the young Antiochus VI as a god would have perhaps been intended to convince the public that he was a better king. Considering the controversy over Balas' origins, associating him with Helios would have given the impression of greater legitimacy; in other words, association with a god would have carried more weight than with even the Seleucid family. In addition, a very young king may not have seemed like a viable option in such a turbulent political atmosphere, and thus the need would have been greater to emphasise his divine connexions. However, Tryphon's presentation of Antiochus VI as a god may also speak of a sort of overcompensation on Tryphon's part, as the boy mysteriously died around three years after Tryphon raised him to power, almost undoubtedly at the hand of the usurper himself.



³⁰⁹ (Houghton (1983) 16

³¹⁰ Head (1902) 767

Figure 19 Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus VI Dionysus. Image appears courtesy of <http://www.ancientsculpturegallery.com/seleucidcoins2.html>



Figure 20 Silver tetradrachm of Tryphon Newell (1941) 264

Tryphon leaves us with the most extensive numismatic record of any usurper, and is particularly notable in that he extensively minted bronze portrait coins. The issuing of bronze coins has a variety of interpretations. While it is true that an extensive bronze coinage would have reached a wider audience than silver, it is precarious to assume that Tryphon sought to use bronze coinage as propaganda as such. There could well have simply been an economic need for bronze coinage at the time of his reign. The fact that his portrait, as opposed to an autonomous design, appears on bronze coinage could be due to the die engravers' copying the iconography of silver coinage.

His coins present him in a fashion much unlike traditional Seleucids; his wavy hair and stylised features recall portraits of Alexander (Figure 20). The treatment of the hair is particularly notable, as it seems to have a life of its own, perhaps indicating a degree of deification, although we do not know if Tryphon was worshipped as a god during his reign, or after it, for that matter. It is very clear why he would want to associate himself with Alexander, which would certainly have made his coins more widely acceptable. This portrayal of himself also brings to mind the deified portraits of his regent, and speaks of a certain arrogance on his part. Much is made in modern scholarship about the Seleucid, and wider Hellenistic debt to Alexander, but it is almost never as obvious as this, especially on Seleucid portraiture, where this sort of deification is rare.



Figure 21 Intaglio of Mithridates Plantzos (1999) cat. no. 85

As far as the treatment of his portrait is concerned, Tryphon's is not unlike that of Mithridates (Figure 21).³¹¹ As Plantzos argues, Mithridates' portraits show a greater tendency toward idealisation, and Tryphon therefore marks the beginning of this trend. Tryphon's portraits are a bit rough and ready, still clinging to the realism of the Seleucid portraits before him, but still making use of divinising features such as Alexander's hairstyle, while Mithridates all but perfects the technique. To this I would add that Mithridates was ideologically similar to Tryphon in many ways, as he sought to reclaim territory that was not his. One cannot underestimate the significance of Tryphon's usurpation, as he was the first non-Seleucid to take over the throne; although his reign was indeed short-lived, its historical uniqueness would have been widely appreciated, or indeed feared in the Hellenistic world. It is also worth remembering that Mithridates' mother was a Seleucid princess, the daughter of Antiochus IV, and sister of Alexander Balas.³¹² Thus the connexions between the various Hellenistic royal families are important in understanding the legacy that Tryphon's image created. However, one should not go so far as to argue that Mithridates derived his portrait imagery from Tryphon; after all, Alexandrine portraiture had a much wider circulation in the Pontic area, and it is more likely that his actual portrait was derived from these.

Tryphon's reverses are also some of the most unusual of all the usurpers, as they present a helmet with a goat's horn which happens to have a thunderbolt on the cheek piece, which Davis and Kraay take to be a reference to Zeus at Apamea³¹³, where

³¹¹ Plantzos (1999) 56

³¹² The marriage of this princess is further proof of the legitimacy of Balas, as it shows that he was connected by marriage with not only the Ptolemies, but also the Pontic kings

³¹³ Davis and Kraay (1973)

Tryphon began his revolt. There do not seem to be available any other examples of this very strange looking helmet, and it is not certain at all how effective this mechanism would have been in terms of propaganda. Perhaps the image would have been more effective if the usurper were presented wearing it; however, this would have presented the problem that it could have obscured his face. There is also the issue of the unpopularity of Timarchus, who presented himself as helmeted. In its disembodied state, however, I personally find this device difficult to recognise as a helmet, particularly given its unusual design. While it may have been more recognisable in its day, it would still seem most likely that the greatest significance of the helmet would have been for Tryphon himself. This is further corroborated by Newell's argument that "There may also be intended a punning reference to his name, for in both Homer and Hesiod a helmet is sometimes called *tryphaleia*."³¹⁴

We also have available two gemstones of Tryphon³¹⁵, and, as with all usurpers, it would have served as identification for his supporters, and perhaps as bribes. We have every reason to believe that Tryphon, a relatively unknown person, had a great deal of difficulty in releasing Antiochus VI from protection, and perhaps gemstones such as these would have formed part of the bribes. His rule was also largely derived from a popular uprising, the organisers of which may well have received gems such as these as a reward. The survival of these gems may well be due to the fact that Tryphon is presented in a manner similar to Alexander, whose image was one of political neutrality.

Alexander Zabinas 128-122

Historical background

Alexander Zabinas was another non-family usurper and, like Balas, had the clear backing of the Ptolemies, and also a great deal of popular support among the Syrian Greeks. However, we do not know of any specific connexions between him and the Ptolemaic royal family. Demetrius II had staged a very unpopular, and indeed impractical war in order to secure Seleucid control over Egypt, only to be turned back by

³¹⁴ Newell (1937) 73

³¹⁵ Plantzos (1999) 55

the forces of Ptolemy Euergetes. Ptolemy Euergetes, with the approval of the Seleucid court, sent forward Alexander Zabinas, who is believed to have been the son of an Egyptian Greek merchant³¹⁶, and who was purported to have been a son of Antiochus VII by some accounts, and by others a son of Balas. Whatever his background, Zabinas was not clearly identified with the Seleucid royal family; however, the fact that he needed to associate himself with the royal family does show that at least in some ways, he was insecure about taking over. Early in his reign, he controlled Antioch and its surrounding areas, while Demetrius still held Ptolemais and parts of Coele-Syria. A decisive battle was fought between them in 126 at Damascus, forcing Demetrius to retreat to Ptolemais, only to be shut out by his wife, Cleopatra Thea, thus forcing Demetrius to further retreat to Tyre, only to be assassinated upon arrival, possibly under the direction of his wife. Although Zabinas did not manage to kill the legitimate king himself, he did outlive him. Although we do not know the extent to which Cleopatra Thea ruled in her own right, she did mint coins bearing her likeness, and so from this I would argue that she had inherited Demetrius' kingdom, or indeed, what was left of it. Thus I still consider Zabinas a usurper, as he and the house of Seleucus ruled at the same time, albeit not under the same king.

Zabinas seems to have enjoyed some popular support, at least in the early part of his reign, and if the sources are correct, seems to have been a master of propaganda. When the body of Antiochus VII Sidetes was returned to Antioch, he made a great public display of grief (Justin XXXIX 1-6), and it is important to keep in mind that, at least according to some accounts, he purported to be the son of that very popular king. However, this was not to be the end of the Seleucid dynasty, who seem to have been supported by the Ptolemies in their bid for the throne of Antioch, fighting a decisive battle against Zabinas in 122. Zabinas overestimated his support when he set about robbing temples, and, as a result of a popular uprising against him, poisoned himself.³¹⁷ Zabinas' disastrous end further supports my argument that usurpers in Babylon, and to

³¹⁶ Eusebius, *Chronica* I, 257

³¹⁷ Bevan (1902) 252

some extent Asia Minor, may have sought to solidify their popularity by respecting local religious ritual.

Summary of mints and coins

By this point the Seleucid empire had contracted to the point where Zabinas only controlled a few mints, namely Antioch, Tarsus, and Damascus, although it is important to note that he only controlled Tarsus between 126-3 and Damascus 125-122.³¹⁸ Houghton lists 20 types for Zabinas at Antioch, with a roughly equal mixture of bronze and silver coins.³¹⁹ Only two bronze issues seem to have been minted at Tarsus³²⁰, and only three bronze issues at Damascus.



Figure 22 Silver tetradrachm of Alexander Zabinas. Image appears courtesy of <http://www.ancientsculpturegallery.com/seleucidcoins.html>

Coinage

Zabinas' coins are some of the most unique among Seleucid rulers because of their faintly smirking expression³²¹, although this is more obvious on some coins than others (Figure 22). Bevan argues that this was due to Zabinas' self-satisfaction at having successfully usurped the kingdom, and this arrogance is no better illustrated than on his coins.³²² Such psychoanalysis should be avoided. It is just possible that this smirking expression was intended to be the usurper's trademark, and if this were the intention, the portraits certainly stand out within the context of Seleucid coin portraiture. That having been said, some of Antiochus VIII's Antiochene coins present him with what looks like a

³¹⁸ Houghton (1983) 11

³¹⁹ Houghton (1983) cat. nos. 296-315

³²⁰ Houghton (1983) cat nos. 495 ff and 844ff.

³²¹ Newell (1937) 45

³²² Bevan (1902) 252

slight smile. Therefore it is possible that the dies were engraved by the same person. Expression on Seleucid portraits is rare to the point of being nonexistent prior to the reign of Zabinas. In this context these coins may be seen in terms of a technical innovation.

Aside from the facial expression, Zabinas' portrait is unremarkable in its iconography. As with Balas, Zabinas may well have been keen to de-emphasise his lack of connexions with the Seleucid royal family by presenting himself as one of them. The extreme images of previous usurpers may well have led Zabinas, and for that matter Balas, to present themselves as legitimate kings. In this context it is perhaps fair to consider these two as pretenders.

Antiochus IX Cyzicenus 113-95

Historical Background

The dispute between Cyzicenus and his half-brother Grypus, is one of the more confusing usurpations, as one could argue for the legitimacy, or at least the merit, of both kings. According to convention, Grypus is usually considered the legitimate king, and this is the view that will be taken here. Grypus co-ruled with his mother, although it seems that, at least early in the reign, she ruled effectively in her own right. Grypus has, in our sources, been given the credit for the defeat of Zabinas, although, as before, the role of his mother in this is not fully known.³²³ However, although still quite young, Grypus would have been of military age, and able to at least assist in the defeat of Zabinas, if not command it entirely. We are also told that his mother, Cleopatra Thea, attempted to murder Grypus, and he instead made her drink the poison she had prepared for him³²⁴. Cleopatra Thea's motives for this are not known in detail, but Newell argues that she wanted to seize power for herself, and was not content to co-rule with her son.³²⁵ It would seem, however, that the move was political; after all, Cleopatra was not averse to killing her husbands, and for that matter, her children, or at least allowing it to happen, for political gain.³²⁶

³²³ Bevan (1902)252 n. 2

³²⁴ Appian. Syr. 69

³²⁵ Newell (1937) 74

³²⁶ Ogden (1999) 151

It will be remembered that Cleopatra Thea had placed her son, Cyzicenus in protective custody at Cyzicus, and in this context one could argue that she may well have had in mind to place him as king rather than his brother.³²⁷ The ostensible cause for the rebellion of Cyzicenus was that his half-brother had tried to poison him,³²⁸ but it seems that this was a family dispute orchestrated by Cleopatra Thea. One could argue, since Cleopatra Thea had placed Cyzicenus under protective custody, while attempting to murder Grypus, that Cyzicenus was the rightful heir, at least in terms of his mother's authority. However, since he had a greater role in the defeat of Zabinas, and since he had much greater experience with the workings of the Seleucid court in Antioch, I still consider Grypus the legitimate king, despite his mother's intentions.

Grypus did not enjoy personal popularity, and does not seem to have done much to earn it, if our scanty sources are to be believed. Two fragments of Posidonius tell us that he all but exhausted the Syrian treasury with a variety of royal feasts, and Pliny tells us that he spent a great deal of time writing poetry.³²⁹ One could argue that these are exaggerations, given the poor general state of the Seleucid empire, but we simply do not have enough information on these sources to decide definitively. The fact that Grypus' father was Demetrius II, an extremely unpopular king, could explain the ill-feeling the public may have had toward him, whether it was founded in reality or not. Cyzicenus, being the son of the more effective Antiochus VII Sidetes, who had defeated Tryphon, seems to have won over the people of Antioch on this account.³³⁰ Diodorus XXXIV.34 is not so favourably disposed to him, arguing that he was more interested in hard drinking and debauchery than he was in ruling the kingdom.

But what are we to make of the conflicting story that our sources give us about each of these brothers? Given the intense and lengthy civil war fought between the two half-brothers, it is no wonder that they each had their supporters and opponents. I do not think that the sources, however, can give us a good idea of who was more meritorious

³²⁷ Ogden (1999) 153 states that Cleopatra Thea may have intended to rule on behalf of Cyzicenus, but does not speculate as to her motives.

³²⁸ Appian Syrian Wars 69

³²⁹ Posidonius 12, 31 Pliny XX 264 cf. Bevan (1902) 235 and Green (1990) 543 n. 128

³³⁰ Bevan (1902) 253

than the other, as sources from this period were bound to be biased in favour of one side or the other. Because of the length of his reign, Grypus is arguably the more visible of the two, with his faults coming to light more easily than those of his more shadowy brother. Although unpopular, Grypus ruled far longer³³¹ and had a much more active role in the kingdom than his brother and should be regarded as the rightful king.

Summary of Mints and coins

Cyzicenus's coins seem to have been exclusively restricted to silver, and restricted to only a handful of mints; sometimes for only a few months at each mint. For example, Bellinger's *Excursus I* gives a chart documenting the coinages of the Fratricidal War,³³² which indicates that Cyzicenus only ruled Antioch for a few months in 111-112. It is very difficult to determine exactly how many coins Cyzicenus minted, due to the inevitable fact that many coins must have been melted down or overstruck. Houghton lists five silver coins for his first Antiochene reign³³³, one for his second reign³³⁴, six for his third reign³³⁵, and eight for his fourth and final reign.³³⁶ This discussion focuses on the changes in his iconography after his brother died, rather than on the coinages of any particular mint.

Coinage



Figure 23 Silver Tetradrachm of Antiochus IX. Houghton (1983) cat. no. 493.

The portraits of Cyzicenus follow the pattern set by Achaeus and Molon in that he portrayed himself in a manner exactly opposite to that of his brother (Figure 23). One

³³¹ Bellinger (1949) 87

³³² Bellinger (1949) 87

³³³ Houghton (1983) cat. nos. 329-334

³³⁴ Houghton (1983) cat. no. 335

³³⁵ Houghton (1983) cat. nos. 340-346

³³⁶ Houghton (1983) cat. nos. 352-360

could argue that the same is true for Grypus, as his nose seems to grow with each year of the civil wars, but this is more of an exaggeration of an existing image than the creation of a new one. Cyzicenus portrayed himself with a flattened nose, which he appears to have inherited from his mother, and, most importantly, a beard, which, as we have seen, was an obvious way to distinguish oneself from traditional Seleucid portrait techniques. This does seem an odd choice, given that Demetrius II, father of Grypus and an extraordinarily unpopular king, sported a long, Parthian beard during his second reign. Thus I do not think that there is any real “message” in Cyzicenus self-portrayal, as this would have seemed highly self-contradictory; rather, it shows just how desperate he was to look nothing like his half-brother. Having said that, Cyzicenus’ beard looks nothing like that of Demetrius II’s; it is short, curly, and, in some portraits, reduced to sideburns. It is reminiscent of the beards of Achaeus, and to a lesser extent, Molon, but I do not think that this was an intended resemblance.

Maintaining a separate image from his brother was vital for Cyzicenus because he conquered areas from his brother, sometimes only to have them taken back within a few months. For example, Cyzicenus ruled Antioch on three separate occasions, only to lose it within a few months of conquering it.³³⁷ On each occasion he minted coins, which demonstrates the importance he attached to furthering his own image and obfuscating that of his brother.

Cyzicenus outlived Grypus, although he did not kill him (there seems to have been some sort of truce between them) and it is interesting that, after Grypus’ death, Cyzicenus loses the beard, indicating that he no longer needed to compete for the throne. Thus it was in no way even a personal device, but served him only as long as he needed it.

The Final Seleucid Kings

The history of the last kings of the Seleucids is largely unknown to us, but the disputes among the descendants of Cyzicenus and Grypus do carry some resemblances to

³³⁷ Bellinger (1949) 87

their ancestors, as does their portraiture. It is no surprise at all that Seleucus VI, son of Grypus, bears his father's hooked nose. It may seem odd, therefore, that Antiochus X, son of Cyzicenus, who engaged in a conflict with Seleucus VI, does not share his father's beard, but it is important to keep in mind that he did completely overthrow Seleucus VI, and did not merely rule at the same time (Figure 25). Antiochus X briefly ruled in Antioch, and experienced an unsuccessful usurpation attempt on the part of Antiochus XI, another son of Grypus. Antiochus XI (Figure 26) minted some very rare coins, that bear an uncanny resemblance, due to their full beard, to Cyzicenus. Antiochus XI seemed to have wanted to take back rule derived from his father, so it is very ironic indeed that he should have chosen to base his iconography on that of his father's enemy.



Figure 24 Silver Tetradrachm of Seleucus VI

<http://www.coinarchives.com/a/lotviewer.php?LotID=219170&AucID=309&Lot=192>



Figure 25 Silver Tetradrachm of Antiochus X

Newell (1919) 429



Figure 26 Silver Tetradrachm of Antiochus XI, jugate with his twin brother Philip. The historical role of the twin is unclear. Solo portraits exist but are very rare.

<http://www.coinarchives.com/a/lotviewer.php?LotID=206956&AucID=283&Lot=290>

At this point in Seleucid history, family piety was seemingly not such a strong priority of Antiochus XI's, but in portraying himself as the diametric opposite of his enemy. We do not know a great deal about another son of Grypus, Demetrius III, who established himself in Damascus with the help of the Ptolemies; however, if the iconography on his coins provides any explanation, it would seem that these two brothers lived in relative peace, as their iconography is very similar (Figure 27). It is also important to note that these two brothers had a common enemy in Antiochus X, and their iconography is nearly the opposite of his. Upon the death of Antiochus X, Demetrius took over Antioch for a brief period, only to be relegated to his original centre of Damascus, by his (full) brother Philip, which predictably resulted in conflict between the two. Philip preferred the Grypus model for his portraits, setting him into direct opposition to his brother³³⁸.



Figure 27 Silver Tetradrachm of Demetrius III

<http://www.coinarchives.com/a/results.php?search=Demetrius+III&s=0&results=100>

This final period of Seleucid history can be infuriatingly confusing, but a few general observations may be made. The priorities of the sons of Grypus and Cyzicenus, as far as their portraits are concerned, seems to have been based on looking the opposite of whoever they happened to be opposing at any given time. This phenomenon has its roots in Cyzicenus, whose portrait became less extreme after the death of his rival. The iconography of the final Seleucid kings is derived either from Grypus or Cyzicenus, but without much thought to family alliances. Grypus, although not a usurper, influenced subsequent usurper coinage due to the extreme, caricature like nature of his portrait. Thus their legacies are not based on anything specific such as those of Hierax or conceivably Tryphon.

³³⁸ Newell 1937 75ff. gives an illustrated history of the final years of the Seleucids on which this section is based. Bellinger (1949) 71 ff. gives a fuller historical analysis of this convoluted period of history.

Conclusion

Given the individual character of each of the Seleucid usurpers, it is difficult to say anything conclusive about them as a whole, but a few general observations may be made. It would seem that the more confident the usurper in his abilities, whether by virtue of blood or merit, the less likely he was to emphasise his military capabilities, as we have seen with Hierax, Tryphon, Balas, and Zabinas. This was not always based in reality, as they were all eventually defeated, some more easily than others. However, at least during their reigns, they had their reasons to think that they would take over the kingdom, as their demise was not inevitable. It would seem that the less stable their control was, the greater the emphasis on military matters. This starts out subtly with Molon's use of Athena on his coins, increases with Achaeus' depiction of himself as a hardened military general, and culminates with Timarchus' portrayal of himself in full military regalia. In the cases of these three, they do not seem to have had much actual military merit, and their portrayal of themselves is a desperate attempt at influencing public opinion. Although their individual reigns were short, it is definitely not the case that these usurpers were without their influence, whether within the Seleucid royal family, as we have seen with the last Seleucid kings, or in the wider Hellenistic world, as we have seen in the cases of Hierax and Tryphon.

The Bactrian Secession: A study in successful rebellion

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, the leaders of the breakaway kingdoms are not considered usurpers due to the long-term success of their secessions. The case of Bactria will be discussed here to provide a counterexample to the Seleucid usurpers, and will attempt to explain the success of this rebellion versus the failure of the usurpers.

The very date of Bactria's secession from the Seleucids remains difficult to ascertain; Lerner argues that Diodotus I had fully defected by 245 BC, although how

early he began to organise his rebellion remains unclear.³³⁹ The extent to which this was a violent rebellion remains unclear, although it would seem to have been more of an evolution than a revolution for the simple reason that there was very little need for a military rebellion. By 245 the Seleucids were occupied with the third Syrian war with the Ptolemies, and soon afterwards, the dynastic contest between Seleucus II and Antiochus Hierax had fully erupted. Therefore Bactria was able to secede without a great deal of Seleucid intervention, and with virtually no response.³⁴⁰

The numismatic evidence also seems to support the idea of a gradual secession of Bactria. In 256 the satrap Diodotus began to issue silver coins bearing his portrait, with the so-called thundering Zeus replacing the Seleucid Apollo.³⁴¹ However inflammatory this may seem, the name of Antiochus II still appears on the legend, showing that the satrap was prepared to maintain at least the illusion of a positive relationship with his Seleucid overlords, perhaps with an eye to gaining personal autonomy. This was already practically the case; no Seleucid king had even visited the region since Antiochus I had left the area around 281.³⁴² Holt³⁴³ argues that the retention of the name of Antiochus II could also have had its practical implications, as this may have served to legitimise the currency, but this does not seem likely. In the first instance the imagery on the coins had changed so drastically that it is unlikely the coin would have been accepted on the basis of an inscription only, especially considering that the literacy rates at the time are very difficult to ascertain. The inclusion of the inscription was clearly intended to please prominent supporters of Seleucid control of Bactria, as well as the Seleucid king himself. In any case, the inscription was eventually dropped, and the kingdom of Bactria became autonomous both in fact and in law.

Bactria's success as a breakaway kingdom may be initially explained in terms of the distance of the region from the rest of the empire. In terms of diplomacy, however, the early Bactrian kings played according to Seleucid protocols, and may well have been

³³⁹ Lerner (1999) 29

³⁴⁰ *ibid*

³⁴¹ Kritt (2001) 7

³⁴² Holt (2005) 125

³⁴³ Holt (1999) 103

more successful in their “rebellion” because of this. This also suggests a degree of forward planning on the part of Diodotus, which seems to have been lacking on the part of many of the Seleucid usurpers, who seem to have preferred a more militaristic approach.

Chapter 5

Variation in Seleucid Portraiture: Politics, War, Usurpation, and Local Autonomy

Introduction

Seleucid portraiture is noteworthy for its extensive variation; two portraits of the same king often contain noticeably different features, while still remaining recognisable as the same king. Sometimes this is due to the medium in question, as many gem and sculptured portraits have been deemed unidentifiable because they do not resemble the most well-known coin portraits. However, studying the more obscure features of the numismatic portraiture widens the corpus of portraits assigned to kings, particularly as bronze coinage is increasingly studied.³⁴⁴ Within the medium of coinage, however, which will be the main focus of this chapter, variation can take one of two forms; geographical and chronological. Geographical variation may be defined as the tendency for coin portraits to vary according to region, the basic explanation for this being the sheer number of Seleucid mints. Chronological variation takes the form of the depiction of ageing on coins, natural or otherwise, and other changes in appearance. These two types of variation need not be mutually exclusive, as some kings age at some mints but not others. The relative lack of evidence prevents us from making a definite conclusion about other media. However, as more and more non-coin portraits become available, it is clear that variation in iconography affected other media as well, particularly in the cases of seals and gemstones. While sculpture from this period remains scarce, we may safely assume that it varied in iconography as well.

Geographical Variation

³⁴⁴ Bronze coinage has not always been studied extensively in numismatic scholarship, and has received virtually no attention in art historical sources. This is not surprising, since it often has very little aesthetic value, due in no small part to the fact that it is particularly prone to damage. However, bronze coinage more than compensates for its lack of aesthetic value with its historical value, particularly as it pertains to regional politics, shedding light on all manner of localised historical events and religious phenomena.

Geographical variation may initially be explained in terms of the huge number of Seleucid mints. Two die-engravers, even if equally skilled, and even if we assume that the king personally posed for each of them, would doubtlessly interpret the subject slightly differently. However, kings did not always, or even often, pose for their portraits. In a best case scenario, it is possible that the king would have posed at a central mint, such as Antioch, and for that portrait to be copied at other mints.³⁴⁵ Another possibility is that the king could have posed at several mints and for the portrait to be distributed more locally, which is perhaps why portrait styles are sometimes divided according to region.³⁴⁶ A more likely explanation is that coin portraits were based on a prototype, whether in coins or other media. It would seem likely that seals would be an ideal medium for the distribution of the king's portrait to mints; our evidence for this is limited, but can nonetheless be demonstrated in several cases.

However, analysing the sometimes minute differences between coin portraits of different mints is not the focus of this chapter. Stylistic differences are useful in identifying coins and their mints, but generally do not carry any further implications. Where there are noticeably different features that can be connected to some localised political event, the differences are certainly noteworthy, but differing styles are simply that. However, the failure to appreciate the differing styles between mints has led to portraits in other media being condemned as non-identifiable. This is particularly the case where bronze coinage is concerned; all too often, portraits in other media are identified based on portraits in silver.

This is not the only problem with identifying sculptured portraits. As Dillon puts it, "When the anonymous portraits are dealt with at all, it is usually in order to provide them with an identity. This approach typically involves dating the portrait to a particular decade or quarter century based on its style; a name is then proposed, based on perceived similarities between the portrait and descriptions in the literary sources of the

³⁴⁵ Houghton (20002, 358) argues this with regard to Antiochus III, who minted coins according to a consistent pattern of iconographic changes, whether according to his actual age, or his military campaigns. Other kings followed a less centralised programme of iconography.

³⁴⁶ Morkholm speaks of a western style of portraiture, while Newell divides the Seleucid mints into eastern and western.

physiognomy, character, and personality of a famous person who is known to have died around this date.”³⁴⁷ Dillon illustrates the problem with this approach using an example from Richter, who attributed a sculpture to Pausanias based on character traits in the literary sources, which, based on an inscribed duplicate sculpture, actually depicted Pindar.³⁴⁸ While Dillon’s points are valid, her overall tendency to accept that some portraits are anonymous is nonetheless problematic. As will be demonstrated throughout this chapter, the failure to identify portraits in other media all too often stems from a failure to study the differences between various mints, particularly where bronze is concerned.

The specific circumstances for localised variation will be one of the main focuses of this chapter. Geographical variation may be explained in some instances by localised political unrest. The Seleucid empire was under almost constant invasion from foreign powers, and the specifically affected areas would change not only the local portrait, but the reverses of coins as well. Localised usurpations from within the Seleucid kingdom had a profound affect on the nearby portraiture of the legitimate king, arguably much more so than any foreign power. We have already seen that usurpers manipulated their coin portraiture with an eye to advancing themselves politically; a common tactic was to portray oneself in some manner opposite to that of the legitimate king. Occasionally examples arise of the legitimate king changing his image in order to compete with the usurper. Such changes are clear evidence of exactly how formidable a usurper could be; when the legitimate king was forced to change his image it is clear that the usurper was, or was perceived to be, gaining the upper hand.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, civic autonomy could also affect numismatic portraiture, particularly in cities where there was a localised ruler cult. A city awarded autonomy could elect to rejuvenate the king, or add deifying features such as horns or a radiate crown. Wherever there arose ruler cults a cult statue was likely to follow, provided that the city was able to afford it. However, statues often served as

³⁴⁷ Dillon (2006) 5

³⁴⁸Richter (1965) 100-01

reciprocation for some act of kindness on the part of the king, and were not necessarily associated with a ruler cult as such.³⁴⁹ However, we do have examples of deified coin portraits in bronze that closely resemble deified sculptured portraits. The question then turns to which came first, the sculpture or the coins? Given the time, money, and organisation required to commission a statue, it is fair to say that in the vast majority of cases the coin portrait was minted first. Coinage would have been a faster and easier mechanism for the city to establish a ruler cult, as bronze coins would have been the medium for day to day transactions, handled by the majority of the population. Even a very prominently placed sculpture would not have been as accessible as coins. If, however, there were a situation in which the king specifically ordered the mint to manufacture bronze coins for soldiers' provisions, or even pay for lower ranking soldiers, it would then theoretically be possible for the coin portrait to be based on a sculpture after the mint was handed back to a local authority. Such instances would have been rare, and, as is so often the case, we do not have literary sources available to confirm this.

While the relationship between king and city needed to remain positive, the extent to which statues were associated with euergetism on the part of the king remains questionable. For the Seleucids, we certainly have epigraphic evidence for identifiable cases of this, such as the statue of Antiochus III at Pergamum.³⁵⁰ Further examples of this practice abound throughout the Hellenistic world.³⁵¹ However, within the context of the rise of the state organised ruler cult under Antiochus III, it would seem likely that kings would commission sculptured portraits of themselves³⁵². Additionally, applying common sense, it would be very difficult indeed to imagine that the Seleucid palace at Antioch was devoid of royal busts and statues; Antigonos Gonatas' monument to his predecessors immediately comes to mind³⁵³. Because the identification of sculptures is often made on the basis of silver coinage, it would seem likely that the majority of *identified* surviving sculptures were royally commissioned, rather than civic statues. In all likelihood, civic statues would have been based on local bronze coinage, which was

³⁴⁹ Smith (1988) 15

³⁵⁰ *Inschriften von Pergamon* 182

³⁵¹ Smith 1988: 15 ff.

³⁵² Smith 1988 24

³⁵³ Smith 1988: 25

more prone to variation than royal silver. While sculpture does have a poor survival rate, an increased emphasis on the study of bronze coinage will in the future identify or re-identify some of the less recognisable sculptured portraits.

Chronological Variation

Chronological variation can take the form of ageing or other changes to a king's appearance, the best example of this being Demetrius II's acquisition of a beard during his second reign. The often visible increase in age may initially be explained in terms of the successive, contemporary approach to portraiture on Seleucid coins. Since showing the current leader on coins became the typical Seleucid practice, starting with the reign of Seleucus II, the next logical step was to depict the current king at his current age. Given the constant political instability of the Seleucid empire, it would seem that no king was willing to take his longevity for granted; few long-reigning Seleucid kings missed the opportunity to record some form of ageing on their coins. In general, the depiction of ageing would send a clear message about the king's ability to outlast the considerable challenges he would face. This is particularly the case with coinages minted after a usurper was defeated, particularly at the mints that the usurper had conquered.

Following on from this, chronological and geographical variation need not be mutually exclusive. To put it simply, not all Seleucid kings who age did so at all mints. Mints more central to the individual's rule were naturally more likely to depict the ageing king than more remote ones, or ones less significant to the king in question. Although Antioch eventually became the effective capital of the Seleucid empire, this was sometimes far from the case, particularly with the early Seleucids. Thus numismatic evidence can speak volumes about the king's seat of power.

Whereas the major medium for geographical variation was bronze coinage, chronological variation is more likely to occur on silver coinage. As a royal institution, imagery on silver coinage could be changed in order to suit the age of the king, whereas bronze was often left to local authorities. The political message exemplified by an ageing

king would have appealed to the Macedonian soldiery by emphasising the experience and merits of the king. Local authorities were more likely to worship the king as a god, and so it is unsurprising that ageing monarchs do not often appear on bronze coinage. In practical terms, bronze was minted more sporadically than silver, and so the lack of ageing kings on bronze may simply be due to the fact that no coins were minted in the later years of the king.³⁵⁴ The substantial wear on many bronze coins can make their iconography difficult to assess. Ageing is also more likely to occur at mints more central to the respective king's reign than in the peripheral regions, whose silver may differ considerably from that minted at the more important Seleucid centres.

Deification

One particular manifestation of variation, which could fall into either category, was the phenomenon of deification. From a geographical perspective, localised religious cults had an important role to play in localised variation, particularly in the case of bronze coinage. The role of the ruler cult has already been discussed in the chapter on Autonomy, and so only a short recapitulation is needed here. A king could be portrayed with deifying features such as horns or a radiate crown at certain mints. Such variation was more likely to occur on royal bronze coinage, since this was often left in the hands of the *polis*. This is not to say that bronze coinage depicting a deified king was truly civic coinage; a city needed to have this granted by the king, in which case royal imagery may or may not have been used.

From the point of chronological variation, the ageing process could occasionally work in reverse. We have a few examples of kings becoming rejuvenated, which can be broadly interpreted in terms of deification. As with natural ageing, rejuvenation was usually limited to a few mints, almost certainly reflective of a local ruler cult. This is particularly the case with the few commemorative Seleucid coinage issues we have available to us. The majority of these were issued by Antiochus Hierax,

³⁵⁴ Houghton's 2002 catalogue lists far fewer bronze issues than silver; Aperghis gives statistics on the numbers of coins produced in bronze, silver, and gold.

but most of the early Seleucid kings honoured their deceased predecessors to a greater or lesser extent. As with ageing, rejuvenation could vary from mint to mint, depending on local circumstances. In addition to rejuvenation, divine attributes such as horns or radiate crowns were often added as a means to honour one's deceased predecessors. Examples of rejuvenation within the king's lifetime also arise, and the reasons for this are particularly interesting because the Seleucid ruler-cult did not usually come into existence until after a king's death, and such issues are extremely rare.

It cannot be emphasised enough that Seleucid kings were, at least in relative terms not worshipped as gods in their own right during the course of their lifetime, particularly in the early period. We have even less evidence that kings proactively set up their own ruler cults (with the exception of Antiochus III), and even in the event that such evidence exists, the extent of this ruler cult is a highly controversial topic. The numismatic evidence overwhelmingly supports this, not only because Seleucid portraiture rarely sought to flatter its subject, but also because divinising features are conspicuously absent from the vast majority of Seleucid coins, at least those minted in silver or gold. This is not always the case for bronze coinage, the manufacture of which was often left in the control of the individual *polis*, and was generally of little concern to the king, with the exceptions proving the rule. On occasional bronze coins, a king whose portrait record is otherwise un-deified will appear with garishly divinising features. We have extensive epigraphic evidence for local ruler cults under the domain of the individual city-state, and correspondingly, the numismatic evidence seems to bear this out as well. However, the extent to which specific inscriptions can be linked to specific coins leaves a great deal to be desired, but will doubtlessly increase as more evidence becomes available.

Rejuvenated portraits obviously do not reflect reality, but the issue becomes hazier with natural ageing. Smith (1988, 47) argues, "Antiochus V, aged about nine, looks about the same age as his father, Antiochus IV, aged about fifty: both look about twenty to twenty-five, with the former only slightly more youthful...Ptolemy I and Antiochus I, whatever their real age, preferred an older image, but no king, except perhaps Euthydemus I in his latest issue, ever looks over thirty-five to forty. Within the

range of about eighteen to thirty-five, the age of the royal images varies according to circumstances, preferences, needs, not according to reality.” In the first instance, arguing over whether the portrait age accurately reflects reality is subjective at best, pointless at worst. One could simply argue that Antiochus IV aged well and Antiochus I aged prematurely if there were a discrepancy between portrait age and real age. With regard to Antiochus IV specifically, his portraits are a particularly poor example of ageing on Seleucid portraiture because he was one of the few Seleucids deified during his lifetime.

Smith’s arguments concerning Antiochus I can fairly easily be dismissed on the grounds that Antiochus I was already forty years of age when he took the throne, and did not depict himself on coins until much later in his reign. In more subjective terms, one could argue that he aged prematurely. Furthermore, Antiochus I’s portrait record shows perhaps the most geographical variation of any of the early Seleucid kings, therefore rendering it impossible to make any real generalisations about his “image.”

With regard to Antiochus V, we may well have a serious discrepancy between portrait and reality; politically a child-king was disastrous and depicting him as older may well have made the situation seem more stable. However, a die-engraver used to portraying adults may not have fully understood the differences between child and adult anatomy, and so with this portrait we may well be faced with a portrait that is technically flawed rather than a deliberate attempt to deceive us about his age.³⁵⁵ Having said that, it may not even be possible to apply modern conceptions of child anatomy to the Seleucids. The fact that Antiochus III and Antiochus VIII, for example, experienced military victories while still in their teens suggests that military training began in early childhood, which almost certainly would have had untold effects on their personal appearance. These points aside, to argue that the royal image is deceptive because it only operated between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five is problematic on the grounds that, of course, most Seleucid kings *were* between eighteen and thirty-five, with few living much past fifty.

³⁵⁵ We do have Hellenistic sculptural depictions of children that are more or less accurate, the best example being the famous group entitled “Boy Strangling a Goose”.

Not all kings who age do so at all mints, a fact whose importance cannot be underestimated. Smith (1988, 47) argues that “Where we have evidence the royal image generally remains constant within a reign. Antiochus I and Antiochus III, for example, both ruled for over twenty years without getting visibly older.” Smith bases this argument on selected plates from Newell’s *Eastern Seleucid Mints*, which depict coins only from Seleucia, which was not the central mint for either of the kings in question, with Sardes (which is extremely far removed from Seleucia) being Antiochus I’s seat of power and Antioch of Antiochus III. Additionally, Houghton (2002 357-8) has identified five separate types for Antiochus III at Antioch, each ageing slightly more than the last; thus Smith’s assessment of Antiochus III’s ageing process is clearly lacking in detail. While admittedly Houghton’s exhaustive and updated study of Seleucid portraits was not available to Smith, he does ignore evidence already available in Newell, as well as historical factors particularly relating to Antiochus I.

It is also necessary to be realistic in one’s expectation of exactly how much a king should age in twenty years. While it is fair to say that the portraits of the twenty year old Antiochus III are not radically different from those he produced at the age of forty, it is also unrealistic to expect for the earliest portraits to depict a young boy and the older ones to depict an old man. In short, Smith implies that these coins should show a degree of ageing that would be completely unrealistic.

Conclusion

When considering the extensive chronological and geographical variation in Seleucid coinage, we are left with the question of which of the many versions of the kings’ portraits is correct. As Shipley puts it, “Coin portraits were not meant to be accurate renderings - given the lack of mechanically reproducible pictures, for example through engravings and photography, they could scarcely be so - but individual features could be included and presented as those of a particular king, a kind of signature.”³⁵⁶ In the first instance, it is unclear on what basis Shipley argues that coin portraits were not intended to be realistic. While some Seleucid monarchs become increasingly caricatured in their

³⁵⁶ Shipley 2000:69

portraits, for example, Antiochus VIII, there is no reason that exaggerated features cannot originate in reality; this is certainly the case with modern caricatures. In fact the nickname Grypus is only contained in literary sources, never on coins. It is interesting to note that other than Seleucus II, nicknamed Pogon on account of his beard, no other Seleucid seems to have received informal epithets like these. Where our literary sources give hints about the appearance of kings, it is safe to assume that our portraits have a basis in reality, however unrealistic some of them are. As mentioned above, Smith argues that “the age of the royal images varies according to circumstances, preferences, needs, not according to reality.”³⁵⁷ This need not be an either/or scenario, as Smith implies. While we cannot say for certain which portrait is the correct one, some are clearly more authoritative than others. Generally speaking, portraits produced at the king’s capital during times of relative peace are most likely to reflect reality. However, the royal image needs to be viewed on a case by case basis.

Variation, in all its forms, affected the coinage of most Seleucid kings at one time, or indeed one place or another. For the sake of ease, kings whose iconographic programmes show the greatest overlap have been grouped and discussed together. Seleucus II and Demetrius II have been paired because their coinages depict them as bearded. Antiochus I and IV have been paired together because of their overwhelming tendency towards a deified image. Antiochus III has been placed in a section of his own because of his highly centralised iconographic programme, which provided a counterexample to the more hectic iconography of some of the other kings. Antiochus VIII has also been placed in his own section because of the distinctive qualities of his coinage, namely, that it became increasingly caricatured depending both on the time of his reign and the place.

³⁵⁷ Smith (1988) 47

Chapter 6

Parthians, Apotheosis and political unrest: the beards of Seleucus II and Demetrius II

Seleucus II and Demetrius II are the only two legitimate Seleucid kings whose portraits feature full beards, although the usurpers Achaeus and Cyzicenus employ the feature as well. Lest the pairing of the two in their own section seem frivolous and superficial, it must be remembered that there is a great deal of crossover in the scholarly debate detailing these two Seleucid kings, allowing for much useful discussion and comparison. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that both of these kings experienced serious usurpations and massive political discontent, and one should not lose sight of the broader context in which their ageing and changing occur.

The use of a beard is very rare in Seleucid portraiture, and it always requires some explanation. We have already examined the motives of the usurpers Achaeus and Cyzicenus, but the issue is much more complicated with our two legitimate kings, Seleucus II and Demetrius II, since they ruled for a much longer time and had a much wider range of circumstances. Seleucus II is wildly inconsistent in his use of a beard, even though he acquired the informal epithet *pogon*.³⁵⁸ Portraits dating from the same year and sometimes only a short distance apart can vary considerably; one will be clean shaven, the other with sideburns, and still another with a full beard. By way of example, Seleucus II's portrait at Teos is clean shaven,³⁵⁹ but at Smyrna the portrait features sideburns.³⁶⁰ We have some nods to the ageing process; at Sardes he is alternatively depicted as bearded or clean shaven, although the exact sequence of dies has yet to be determined.³⁶¹ In short, Seleucus II has possibly the most varied portrait record of any

³⁵⁸ Polybius 2.71.4

³⁵⁹ Houghton (2002) cat. No. 644

³⁶⁰ Houghton cat. (2002) No. 647

³⁶¹ Houghton (2002) 241

Seleucid king.³⁶² With Demetrius II, however, the issue is much more clear-cut, as he is completely clean shaven for his first reign, but wears a massive beard during the second, with the single exception of the mint at Tyre. Scholarly debate on the respective facial hair of both kings overlaps considerably. Demetrius II spent several years in the captivity of the Parthian court, and it is widely accepted that he acquired his beard as a result of Parthian influence. We have some fragmentary evidence that the same was also true for Seleucus II, but the length of time for his supposed captivity is unclear. Assimilation to Zeus has also been suggested with regard to both kings. The relative merits of each of these kings will be discussed in more detail, but the stance taken here is that the drastic changes to the respective kings' portraits was far more the result of usurpation and other political instability.

Seleucus II

Historical Background

Seleucus II's reign was nothing if not eventful. It is therefore unsurprising that his portrait record is full of inconsistencies, some of which can be directly linked with significant historical events, which will be discussed below. As with all Seleucid kings, sometimes these variations are merely stylistic, but it is important to keep in mind that the overall chaotic nature of Seleucus II's reign was not conducive to a consistent pattern of coin portraiture. A brief summary of the significant events of Seleucus II's life is given here, with further discussion of the impact of historical events on his coinage given in subsequent sections. Seleucus II came to power in 246 after the death of his father at Ephesus.³⁶³ The first five years of his reign were occupied by the Ptolemaic invasions of the Seleucid territories, known as the Third Syrian War, which resulted in temporary but significant territorial losses in Asia Minor and Syria, and possibly Media and Mesopotamia.³⁶⁴ Grainger is quite correct to describe these losses, particularly further east, as "ephemeral",³⁶⁵ but numismatic evidence, or more correctly, the lack thereof

³⁶² Based on the sheer weight of numismatic evidence, it is baffling as to why Grainger (1997: 62) should claim that Seleucus II's coins "show a great lack of variety."

³⁶³ Trog *Prolog* 26, Eus *Chron* 1.40.6-7

³⁶⁴ Justin 27.1.1-7

³⁶⁵ Grainger (1997) 62

supports long term losses in Asia Minor and Cilicia.³⁶⁶ Whether in terms of the usurpation of Asia Minor, or in terms of the attempted invasion of Mesopotamia, one of the most devastating events of Seleucus' reign were the rebellions of his brother Antiochus Hierax, profoundly affecting Seleucus II's manipulation of his image. Perhaps motivated by the difficulties in the west, Andragoras, the satrap of Parthia also rebelled, although the exact date of his rebellion is unclear, only to be overrun by the nomadic Parni, under Arsaces, with the region independent by 240.³⁶⁷ Although Seleucus II attempted to quell this rebellion, and indeed claimed success, Parthia remained lost to the Seleucid kingdom.³⁶⁸ From a numismatic perspective, the turmoil in Parthia certainly affected iconography, but specific interpretation remains difficult. Another noteworthy event of Seleucus II's reign was the final secession of Bactria, now cut off from the Seleucids by Parthia; therefore no attempt seems to have been made to regain this area. Despite surviving these considerable conflicts, Seleucus II was killed in a riding accident in 226.³⁶⁹

Summary of mints and coinages

Houghton lists a total of 49 mints for Seleucus II; however, it is the eastern mints of this king that will be the major focus of this study due to their unusual types. His portrait record in bronze, particularly at the mints of Susa, Ecbatana, and Nisibis is a major focus to this discussion because these issues present him fully bearded. However, it must be noted that the usage of this beard is highly inconsistent, even within given mints. Houghton defines any fully bearded portrait type of Seleucus II as "remarkable" but does not take into account issues presenting prominent sideburns.³⁷⁰

Susa is of particular interest because there are many unusual portrait types on bronze available to us from this mint. The first of these present Seleucus II wearing a Macedonian kausia. However, it must be noted that this type is limited to only two bronze issues at Susa out of a total of 14. The three quarter posed bronze portraits of

³⁶⁶ Houghton (1997) 231

³⁶⁷ Justin 41.4.5

³⁶⁸ Justin 41.4.6 Strabo 9.8.8

³⁶⁹ Justin 27.3.12

³⁷⁰ Houghton (2002) 208

Seleucus II, also minted at Susa represent three issues out of 14 bronze issues from that mint. The horned portraits of Seleucus II, also from Susa, represent one out of 14 issues. Thus a tiny portion of the total bronze output from Susa is contained in this study.

Another bearded bronze is provenanced to the DEL mint³⁷¹, which is the only issue of its type, with 10 other issues depicting other subject matter³⁷².

Bearded silver issues include two at Nisibis out of a total of four³⁷³ and one at Susa out of a total of three³⁷⁴.

The Coinages of the Parthian Wars and the Rebellions of Hierax

Although a matter of some controversy, the fragmentary evidence of Posidonius³⁷⁵ describing the Parthian captivity of a certain Seleucus can reasonably be attributed to Seleucus II. I concur with Lerner³⁷⁶ that this captivity would have lasted long enough to allow for his brother, Antiochus Hierax, to invade Mesopotamia, but little longer. This rebellion of Hierax could not have lasted long, if for no other reason than that we have no numismatic evidence of it. As we have seen from his rebellion in Asia Minor, Hierax was quite keen on the minting of coins, and so the lack of coins from his campaign in the east must surely have risen from a lack of opportunity. We also do not have any evidence, for numismatic, of the succession crisis that would have ensued if Seleucus II's captivity had lasted for any length of time; a year is the absolute maximum acceptable, with a few months being far more likely; however, Seleucus II's escape from captivity was by no means inevitable, and Hierax was certainly an opportunist. As we have seen Hierax, unlike the other Seleucid usurpers, was not easily defeated. He seems to have been content to rule the areas of Asia Minor he was able to capture; he did not recklessly attempt to invade Antioch and control the entire Seleucid kingdom. In short, he would

³⁷¹ Houghton (2002) cat. no 711

³⁷² Houghton (2002) 259-261

³⁷³ Houghton (2002) cat. no. 749

³⁷⁴ Houghton (2002) cat. no 788

³⁷⁵ Edelstein and Kidd 1972 : 83 (F:64)

³⁷⁶ Lerner (1999) 37

not have invaded Mesopotamia unless he thought he would succeed, and Seleucus II's captivity would have provided a reasonable motivation.

We have available some coins of Seleucus II, particularly in bronze, minted at the eastern mints of Susa, Ecbatana, and Nisibis that depict him with a full beard, and which date from around the time of his Parthian campaign. It has been argued by Cunningham that “the wearing of a beard was not a Syrian but a Parthian custom, which he [Seleucus II] must have adopted during his captivity. This is rendered almost certain by the fact that Demetrius II, the only other Syrian king who wore a beard, was also a prisoner amongst the Parthians.”³⁷⁷ This view is problematic in the first instance because we do not have any numismatic evidence that the wearing of a beard indeed was a Parthian custom at this point in time. Seleucus II's quelling of Antiochus Hierax's Mesopotamian invasion dates from 227 BC, and we may safely assume that his Parthian captivity was a year or two before this. The first Parthian coins to depict a bearded king do not appear until 171 BC, starting with those of Mithridates I, nearly sixty years later.³⁷⁸ Prior to that, Parthian coinage had depicted the dynasty's founder, Arsaces I, conspicuously beardless, and wearing a Scytho-Persian headdress.³⁷⁹ We therefore have two possibilities: either the beard was not a Parthian custom until long after Seleucus II, in which case Cunningham's arguments can very easily be dismissed; or, the beard was a Parthian custom and they chose not to depict this on their coins until later. Even if the latter is true, there is still the problem of why Seleucus II would want to portray himself in the manner of his enemies. Parthians do not seem to have been used extensively, if at all, as mercenaries, thus ruling out the possibility that these coins were meant to appeal to any Parthian components in the Seleucid army.³⁸⁰ Keeping in mind that many of these bearded coins were minted in bronze and therefore would have formed an everyday, widely used coinage, his bearded portraits would have been particularly offensive to the Greek inhabitants of these far eastern cities, who may well have had to contend with significant battles between the Parthians and Seleucids. Portraying himself in a Parthian

³⁷⁷ Cunningham (1884) 113-114 n.12

³⁷⁸ Newell (1937: 88)

³⁷⁹ *ibid*

³⁸⁰ Griffiths (1935) *passim* and Bar-Kochva (1976) *passim* do not refer to any Parthian activity on the Seleucid side.

manner would also have sent an unclear message about the victor in this war, and it would be impossible to discern any reasonable motivation for this.

As if any more evidence were needed to argue against the idea that Seleucus II's beard was the result of Parthian influence, we have a few bronze coins from Susa depicting the bearded king wearing a Macedonian *kausia* (Figure 28).³⁸¹ Houghton argues that this was meant to appeal to the Macedonian soldiers in Seleucus II's army³⁸², and although there is no reason to disagree with this, the political message in these coins was potentially much more far-ranging, especially given that these were bronze coins and would be used by a much wider audience, both Greek and non-Greek. Indeed, if Seleucus II had intended only to reach the Macedonian elite through the use of this device, it is very surprising that we do not have any tetradrachms with this type, which would have been the basic monetary unit for a Seleucid officer. We have already established that beards were not necessarily a Parthian custom at this point; however, the elaborate headdress as depicted on the coins of the dynasty's founder, Arsaces I, almost certainly was a Parthian custom at this point. Therefore, it is entirely possible that Seleucus II sought to differentiate himself from his enemies using this Macedonian type. As we have seen with the usurpers, portraying oneself as the antithesis of one's adversary was a common motif in Seleucid coinage. For the more general, largely non-Greek populace at Susa, this device would have served to separate him from the Parthians. He would not have needed to distinguish himself as distinctly Macedonian, or at least non-Parthian to Greek officers, although perhaps the personal connexion would have been appreciated among them.

³⁸¹ Houghton (2002) cat nos. 797-8 But is the *kausia* Macedonian? Kingsley (1986: 72) argues strongly that it was, in fact, an Indian garment, adopted by Alexander's soldiers during the hardships of his eastern campaigns. The eastern provenance of this coin would perhaps support Kingsley's claims. This has since been refuted by Fredericksmeier (1994 141 ff), who cites no fewer than fourteen literary sources attesting the use of the *kausia* in pre-Alexander Macedonia, the most convincing of which is a fragment of Nearchus (FGRH 133 F 28), who wrote his history around 312, and was therefore contemporary with Alexander. The question then turns to why the *kausia* was not employed more frequently on Hellenistic coinage. The military associations of the *kausia* may have been a factor; only in exceptional circumstances did the Seleucids emphasise military imagery, the best example being the helmet of Timarchus. One practical problem is that a headdress of any kind could easily obscure the face, thus making it difficult for the king to manipulate his political image.

³⁸² Houghton (2002) 233



Figure 28 Bronze coin of Seleucus II from Susa with beard and kausia (Houghton 2002, 797)

The problem then turns to why Seleucus II chose to portray himself with the *kausia* at Susa and nowhere else. One possibility is that Susa may have suffered first-hand experience of battles with the Parthians that perhaps the other eastern cities did not. The Persian headdress of Arsaces I was nothing if not impressive, and it would not have been realistic for Seleucus to have competed with the flamboyant imagery of his enemies with his earlier, unadorned portraits.³⁸³ Our written sources for the Parthian campaigns of Seleucus II are fragmentary, and these rare coins are an example of how numismatic evidence can compensate for a lack of written material.³⁸⁴

However, the rare issues of bearded, *kausia* wearing portraits may have a simpler explanation. The nearly exact portrait recurs on a seal impression from Seleucia on the Tigris (Figure 29). This seal was once part of an extensive royal archive, which the majority of modern scholars believe was destroyed during the Parthian invasion of 141 B.C.³⁸⁵ Based on the striking similarity between this seal and the bronze coins of Susa, it can securely be identified as Seleucus II, and is not a non-identifiable ruler portrait as Plantzos suggests.³⁸⁶ The seal can also be safely assigned to Seleucus II because of the time period and provenance; it cannot be assigned to Demetrius II, as Plantzos correctly

³⁸³ By way of a parallel, Cleopatra Thea preferred a highly adorned image with an eye to drowning out the simplistic image of her son on their jugate coins.

³⁸⁴ The Parthians were not Seleucus II's only adorned enemy in the east, given Antiochus Hierax's failed Mesopotamian campaign. However, it is important to keep in mind that Hierax's winged diadem was of localised religious significance, and even if he had minted in the east, he would not, in all likelihood, have employed the device.

³⁸⁵ Plantzos 204

³⁸⁶ *ibid*

argues.³⁸⁷ The provenance of this item is initially problematic because we have no numismatic evidence from Seleucia on the Tigris that makes use of a beard, let alone a kausia. This is easily solved if we suppose that the Susa coins were based on a seal originating in Seleucia. A Seleucid foundation, Seleucia often served as the administrative centre for the eastern Seleucid satrapies, a sort of provincial capital. Houghton has suggested that mints may well have determined their iconographic programme based on written instructions.³⁸⁸ While we have no written evidence for this, the similarity between the coins and the seal would support this idea. A royal mandate for the minting of coinage would certainly have contained a royal seal such as this one, which, I would argue, served as a model for the coin portrait.



Figure 29 Seal impression depicting Seleucus II bearded with kausia (Plantzos 204)

Both Newell and Houghton argue that the reverses of the bronze coins of Seleucus II, in addition to his beard, refer to the Parthian campaign, particularly the coins of Ecbatana, which feature a bow in bowcase on the reverse.³⁸⁹ While such coins are certainly reflective of war in a general sense, it is not clear as to why these should refer to the war in Parthia specifically, as we have only limited contemporary Parthian material culture. However, Houghton does not explain why we have available un-bearded coins of Seleucia that also feature warlike imagery on the reverses³⁹⁰, even though he still

³⁸⁷ *ibid* However, as demonstrated in this chapter, Plantzos' assertion that the "type of the bearded king" was nonexistent until Demetrius II is factually incorrect. Seleucus II's beard is well attested in Newell's (1938) and appears in scholarship previous to Newell. Although admittedly obscure, the kausia coins are attested in Le Rider *Suse sous les seleucides et les parthes* (Paris 1965).

³⁸⁸ Houghton (2002) 358

³⁸⁹ Houghton (2002) 233 Newell (1938) 80

³⁹⁰ Houghton (2002) 274

attributes this to the war in Parthia. This inconsistency is problematic; however, it must be remembered that Antiochus Hierax's Mesopotamian invasion coincided with the Parthian campaign, and that any warlike imagery on contemporary coins could refer just as easily to Hierax as the Parthian war. Although Hierax did not mint coins in the east, almost certainly due to a lack of opportunity, his western portraits are nothing if not youthful and idealised. We have little written evidence on the details of his eastern campaign, but the coins of Seleucus may shed some light on this. It is entirely possible that Seleucus II used the beard on the coins of Ecbatana, Susa, and Nisibis to differentiate himself from his youthful brother, since these cities may have faced a more direct threat from Hierax. The lack of a beard on the coins of Seleucia can easily be explained by the possibility that Hierax never attacked there, or at least was not as serious a threat there as he was in the three previously mentioned cities. However, this does not negate the idea that the warlike images on the reverses of the Seleucian coins could be explained in terms of the Parthian campaign, but they can also be interpreted in terms of another conflict, of perhaps still more localised significance.

Further damaging the idea that Seleucus II's beard always refers to the Parthian campaign, and further supporting the argument that the beard refers to a reaction against Hierax, are the bearded portraits of Houghton's Uncertain Mint 37, located on the coast of Cilicia.³⁹¹ The first series of coins to be produced there, which predate the rebellion of Hierax, feature a long sideburn which, I would argue, either refers to his nickname or is a local variant. Hierax seized the mint for a few months in 227, only to have it reclaimed by Seleucus II. It is after this that Seleucus II is depicted with the long, pointed beard more commonly associated with his eastern coins, which can be interpreted in terms of counter-propaganda against Hierax. Seleucus II could not risk having his image confused with Hierax's, or it would have been unclear who was in control, and so an extreme change in iconography was needed to solidify his rule. It is therefore not surprising that Seleucus II never appears bearded at the main Seleucid mint of Antioch³⁹², because that

³⁹¹ Houghton (2002) 250

³⁹² As Houghton (2002) 250 argues

city never came under the direct threat of Hierax himself, whereas the conflict with Hierax can be plausibly linked to the other mints featuring a bearded Seleucus II.



Figure 30 Seleucus II from Uncertain Mint 37 (Houghton, 2002, 685.2a)

More puzzling are the late bearded portraits from the DEL mint, associated with Antioch, some of which feature Pegasus on the reverse (Figure 30).³⁹³ We have coins of Hierax from Lampsacus featuring Pegasus on the reverse, but with him it is clearly meant to respect the local city-badge, which is obviously not the case for the DEL mint, which may have been located within Antioch. Houghton dates these coins to the Parthian campaign, which is perfectly acceptable³⁹⁴, but the use of Pegasus is highly inconsistent with the warlike imagery of other bearded coins of Seleucus II. We have evidence of an uprising at Antioch during the Mesopotamian invasion of Hierax³⁹⁵, and so in this context this portrait of Seleucus is perfectly explicable, but why he does not appear bearded at the main mint of Antioch remains unclear. Perhaps the uprising only extended to a small area within Antioch, but our evidence is only fragmentary. If this is an over-interpretation of this iconographic programme, given the unusual reverse type, and given that the DEL mint employed an unusual approach to the usage of flans³⁹⁶, it is acceptable to argue these issues may simply be anomalous.

Apotheosis

The beard of Seleucus II has also been interpreted in terms of assimilation to Zeus.³⁹⁷ While Babelon is correct to question the connexion between the beard and Parthia, as has been demonstrated thus far, deification is not the solution. Additionally,

³⁹³ Houghton (2002) 260 cat. No. 711

³⁹⁴ *ibid*

³⁹⁵ Agatharchides FgrH 196 F19

³⁹⁶ Houghton (2002) cat no 711-12

³⁹⁷ Babelon (1890) LXV

deification appears on a very unusual series of bronze coins from Seleucia on the Tigris, which feature a horned three-quarter bust of Seleucus II.³⁹⁸ This recalls the usage of horns on the coins of Seleucus I, which, according to Appian *Syr. 57* reflects Seleucus I's taming of a wild bull.³⁹⁹ Following Babelon, at a stretch one could attribute this feature to Zeus, as the bull was a form he assumed, but because we do not have any contemporary images of a horned Zeus, it is best to consider the horns as a specifically Seleucid institution, and as a personal device of Seleucus I. This raises questions as to whether this coin is meant to represent Seleucus I or II.⁴⁰⁰ Given that we have very little evidence of the depiction of former Seleucid kings on the coinage of Seleucus II, it is fair to argue that this coin is meant to depict him rather than the dynasty's founder. Additionally, these coins have been dated to the year 245, when Seleucus drove the Ptolemies out of Mesopotamia⁴⁰¹, inspiring the Seleucians to mint deified portraits in gratitude toward their city's liberator. As a Seleucid foundation, this victory would have signified the return of a city to its rightful king; thus the need to recall traditional Seleucid imagery and apply it to the current king. Were this coin provenanced in Asia Minor, we might reasonably expect some form of autonomy granted to the city; however, this could not be the case for a Seleucid foundation.



Figure 31 Bronze coin of Seleucus II from Seleucia (Houghton 2002 767)

The three-quarter portrait on these coins is more puzzling, as profile was the single most common view (Figure 31).⁴⁰² There is every possibility that this is based on

³⁹⁸ Houghton (2002) cat no 767-768 Newell (1938) cat. No. 202-3

³⁹⁹ See chapter on Antiochus I and IV

⁴⁰⁰ Newell (1938) 78 n. 116

⁴⁰¹ Houghton (2002) cat. 767

⁴⁰² In the first instance, this has its practical implications because a frontal portrait would certainly have suffered more wear and tear. The second issue is one of objectivity: as Carson (1956, 47) argues "There is

a seal, which, as we have seen, could form the basis for bronze coinage, and could differ drastically from common coin types. Because of the advent of portraying the living ruler as deified, perhaps the die-engraver sought even more innovation in the approach to the coin's design. That having been said, one effect of the three-quarter pose is that it creates a more confrontational portrait, perhaps recalling Seleucus' defiant victory against the Ptolemies. This is highly consistent with the reverse design, which features the mounted Seleucus spearing an enemy⁴⁰³, presumably Ptolemaic. Coupled with the deifying features, this coin series presents a very clear message of power, victory, and militarism.

Turning back to the deifying imagery, it is worth questioning the attributions of horned sculptures to Seleucus I⁴⁰⁴, rather than to Seleucus II or indeed Seleucus VI, who also used the device.⁴⁰⁵ Given its provenance in Asia Minor, and given that horned coin portraits of Seleucus I were minted extensively in Sardes, it is certainly fair to attribute Smith's cat. No. 94 to Seleucus I. The so-called Lateran Diodoch, albeit a Roman copy, is posed looking slightly to the right⁴⁰⁶, perhaps recalling the three quarter pose of Seleucus II at Seleucia. There is no doubt that such statues would have been commissioned at Seleucia, especially given its wealth and importance to the Seleucid kingdom, not to mention the possibility of a ruler cult under Seleucus II. While it is impossible to definitely attribute this sculpture to Seleucus II, it is nevertheless important to keep in mind that seemingly personal devices such as the horns could be repeated, and often in specific contexts.

Ageing

Seleucus II was the first Seleucid king to employ a strictly contemporary coinage; we have no coins datable to his reign depicting deified images of his ancestors.⁴⁰⁷ Given

an essential and deeply felt difference between the profile portrait, which seeks to establish no direct relationship, conveyed emotionally from eye to eye, between the observer and the figure portrayed, and the facing portrait in which that emotional contact is immediately perceived. And on the whole the objective appeal of the profile has far outweighed the subjectively felt compulsion of the facing head.”

⁴⁰³ Houghton (2002) 767

⁴⁰⁴ e.g. Smith (188) cat. No. 94

⁴⁰⁵ Smith (1988) 45 n. 129

⁴⁰⁶ Smith (1988) 66 cat. No 9

⁴⁰⁷ Houghton (2002) 232

the troubled nature of his reign as has been described so far, it is not surprising that Seleucus would have needed to use the mints for personal propaganda; he could not afford to leave open any doubt as to his control over the empire. At Antioch there began some experimentation with ageing, as his late portraits there depict him with a bulging eye, and the beginnings of a double chin⁴⁰⁸. Since these date from his return from the Parthian campaign⁴⁰⁹, it is unsurprising that Seleucus would want to cultivate an older image, emphasising his ability to outlast his enemies. The type is repeated occasionally at Houghton's Uncertain Mint 37 in Cilicia; following on from this Houghton suggests that such ageing may simply be the result of the personal style of one particular die-engraver.⁴¹⁰ The two need not be mutually exclusive; ageing at two separate mints may be a sign of an early attempt at a centralised programme of iconography, as there seems to have been under Antiochus III. In the later years of his reign, Seleucus II planned to recover Asia Minor from the Attalids⁴¹¹, and so in this context, travel to Cilicia, and influence at the mint is not out of the question. In fact, Seleucus II did attempt to standardise numismatic imagery; by and large the reverses feature a standing Apollo;⁴¹² however, political circumstances prevented him from having a consistent image.

Demetrius II

Historical background of the first reign

Demetrius II's two reigns at Antioch were marked with instability; they saw the Parthian overthrow of Babylonia, and the subsequent disintegration of the Seleucid empire into only Syria and Cilicia. His father sent him into exile in Asia Minor during the war with Alexander Balas; by the age of eleven (148) he was involved in the raising of a mercenary force in Crete, under the direction of the commander Lasthenes.⁴¹³ The subsequent invasion of Syria and Palestine was successful; Alexander Balas fled and Demetrius II was pronounced king, and enjoyed the full support of Ptolemy VI, who offered to him in marriage Cleopatra Thea, the former wife of Alexander Balas, whose

⁴⁰⁸ Houghton (2002) cat. No. 690

⁴⁰⁹ *ibid*

⁴¹⁰ Houghton (2002) 255

⁴¹¹ Justin 27.3.12

⁴¹² Houghton (2002) 232

⁴¹³ Jos. *AJ* 13.86 *Mac.* 10.67

dowry consisted of Coele Syria.⁴¹⁴ Ptolemy also persuaded the city of Antiocheia to accept Demetrius II as king, although this support was short lived. Alexander Balas raised a new force against Demetrius II, but was swiftly executed; however, this victory proved also to be temporary. Apparently Demetrius II had promised to return Coele Syria to the Ptolemies, but, upon the death of the Ptolemy VI, expelled the garrisons from this area.

Demetrius II is often cited as an unpopular king⁴¹⁵, but with little discussion as to why this is the case. In the first instance, his age could have done him no favours. The expulsion of Ptolemaic garrisons also had the potential to cause discontent among those in support of Ptolemaic rule. In an attempt to disarm the citizens of Antiocheia, which resulted in an uprising. Demetrius II reacted with violence, and part of the city was destroyed.⁴¹⁶ Alexander Balas was not without his supporters; the usurper Tryphon, a former soldier under Balas, successfully claimed Apamea and Antiocheia.⁴¹⁷ In 140, attempting to assemble a force in the east against Tryphon, Demetrius II was captured by the Parthian forces who were invading the area at this time, and spent the next ten years in their captivity.

Summary of mints and coins

During his first reign, Demetrius II minted coins at all the major Seleucid mints, including Tarsus, Antioch, Ake-Ptolemais, Damascus, and Seleucia on the Tigris.⁴¹⁸ Demetrius II's first reign contains no types worthy of specific discussion aside from the single bronze issue of Seleucia which depicts him wearing a helmet. As will be discussed below, this is an isolated issue from the corpus of his first reign. Demetrius II's coinage from his second reign also do not have a great deal of variation. Tyre is notable because its silver coins do not display the bearded king. It is perhaps worth mentioning that the second reign of Demetrius II saw the loss of the mint of Seleucia on the Tigris, and many

⁴¹⁴ I Mac 11.9-10 Jos AJ 13.109-11

⁴¹⁵ Grainger (1997) 42

⁴¹⁶ I Mac 11.38, 44-50 Jos. AJ 13.129-130

⁴¹⁷ Livy Epit. 52

⁴¹⁸ Houghton (1983) 11

other eastern mints including Nisibis.⁴¹⁹ Otherwise, this discussion of the coinages of Demetrius II only concerns general scholarly debate over the changes in his imagery.

Coinage of the first reign

With a few exceptions, Demetrius II's coinage from his first reign is largely unremarkable in its iconography, in that it depicts the beardless, youthful portrait of the young king (Figure 32). The fact that he was able to establish himself well enough to institute a coinage was an accomplishment in itself; however, given that his youth almost certainly counted against him, it is surprising that he did not cultivate an older image. Nor was his portrait depicted alongside that of a relative, as was the case with Antiochus the Boy and his mother, and with Cleopatra Thea and the young Antiochus VIII. This certainly would have served to legitimise him; however, Demetrius II's father had died before his accession, so perhaps a jugate coinage was not a viable option. There is, however, the practical concern that he may well have been too young at the time of his accession to actually grow a beard. Demetrius II did use coinage as a political statement, in the reinstatement of the Seleucid Apollo on the reverses of his coins, whereas Balas had widely used the Ptolemaic eagle; however, he does not seem to have used his own image for self-advertisement.



Figure 32 Silver tetradrachm of Demetrius II of Antioch, first reign. Houghton (1983) 576

When Tryphon began his rebellion, putting forward a son of Balas, the child-king was depicted with a radiate crown, a telltale sign of deification (Figure 33). Demetrius II does not seem to have responded to this, which is unusual: when threatened by a usurper it seems to have been customary for the king to change his image in response, with Seleucus II being the best example. While it would be incorrect to assume that Demetrius II's military and political failures were due to his failure to produce a

⁴¹⁹ Houghton (1983) 11

competitive image on his coinage, this conservatism raises questions. Demetrius II does not seem to have been a competent king, perhaps due to his age and lack of experience, and it would seem that his failings as a king are reflected in his failure to cultivate an effective political image. In short, his weaknesses as a king are reflected in his coinage.



Figure 33 Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus VI (Houghton 1979, cat no. 234)

We do have a few isolated bronze issues of Demetrius II that seem to have made at least an attempt at manipulating his image. The first of these is a bronze issue from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris depicting the king helmeted (Figure 34).⁴²⁰ Jenkins argues that these helmeted coins possibly reflect the war with Parthia⁴²¹, reflective of the king's desire to show solidarity with his troops. Given that these coins were minted in bronze, and would have therefore been an everyday currency, this is a distinct possibility. Justin xxxvi.1 hints at a possible alliance between Demetrius II and Bactria, and in this context the helmet would establish a common iconographical ground with the Bactrian kingdom.⁴²² Given that Bactria had long been cut off from the Seleucid kingdom, and given that Justin is not always a particularly reliable source, this argument is difficult to accept. One also would have expected a more successful campaign against Parthia had such an alliance been in place, as Parthia would have been effectively surrounded.

⁴²⁰ Jenkins (1951) 17 There has been a more recent find of a single bronze helmeted portrait coin of Demetrius II at Tell-Arbid. It will be interesting to see where else such coins may yet be found, and may well affect the arguments made here.

⁴²¹ Jenkins (1951) 18

⁴²² Jenkins (1951) 18



Figure 34 Helmeted portrait bronze coin of Demetrius II from Tell-Arbid. Note the prominent Seleucid anchor on the reverse. This photograph has been selected due to its quality, but displays a similar type to the Seleucia coins depicting the same subject.
<http://www.siwaiwa.pl/TellArbid/sektory/sektorA.html>

However, when we take into account the political and iconographical context of these coins, the helmet proves to be a particularly poor choice of imagery. Less than twenty years earlier, Timarchus, whose reign in Babylonia was particularly despised, had employed the device on his coinage. Given that it was Demetrius II's father who had defeated the usurper, these helmeted coins would also seem to show a complete disregard for filial piety. The helmet was also associated with coins of Alexander Balas at Seleucia in connexion with his usurpation.⁴²³ In this context, the use of the helmet is nothing short of incomprehensible, as there was no possible reason for a king to depict himself in the manner of his enemy. One possible explanation for this is that the helmet had become a sort of Seleucian device, perhaps reflective of the city's relative isolation and de facto autonomy; however, there is still the problem that Timarchus, whose signature was the helmet, had been extremely unpopular there. Therefore it would seem that these coins are yet another reflection of Demetrius II's inability to cultivate an effective personal image.

This is not to suggest that Demetrius II's iconographic programme was a complete failure. From Seleucia we also have a bronze series depicting the young king wearing the elephant head helmet of Alexander. As MacDowell puts it, "Demetrius appears to have had visions of restoring the Seleucid Empire to the limits it had attained in the early reigns." If this is too far-fetched, an association with Alexander would have served as a good solution to the problem of Demetrius II's youth, as Alexander's campaigns had been

⁴²³ Jenkins (1951) 18

completed when he was very young. Additionally, Alexander was deified at this point, and this particular portrait would have served to compete with that of the deified usurper Antiochus VI. Demetrius II would have been wise to mint this portrait on a wider scale, as it would have been effective counterpropaganda against the considerable odds he faced.

The Second Reign

Historical Background

Having escaped from Parthian captivity, and with his rival Antiochus VII having been killed in the Parthian campaigns, Demetrius II resumed his role as king. He began this reign with an attempted campaign against Egypt, whereby the Ptolemaic king put forward the usurper Alexander Zabinas, who gained considerable popularity.⁴²⁴ When he was defeated by Zabinas at Damascus, he sought refuge in Ake-Ptolemais, then under the control of his wife, who refused him. He then sailed to Tyre where he was murdered by the city's governor.⁴²⁵

Coinage

With the single exception of Tyre, Demetrius II's coins from his second reign feature a full beard, which the majority of scholars assume to have been influenced by his Parthian captivity(Figure 35).⁴²⁶ Since at this point it is clear that beards were a significant aspect of Parthian iconography, this supposition may at first seem reasonable. However, at this point in Seleucid history, the Parthians, having overrun Babylon and Media, had become a much more formidable enemy to the Seleucids,⁴²⁷ with a political image of their own that had become well established, and so any intentional depiction of the Seleucid king in the Parthian manner would have been a very poor political move. His marriage to a Parthian princess, coupled with his lengthy captivity would certainly have left doubts as to his personal loyalties. In fairness, Demetrius II's second reign was not a particularly successful one, and his popularity had not increased from his first reign.⁴²⁸ In any case the similarity between Demetrius II's bearded portraits and Parthian coinage are co-

⁴²⁴ Justin 39.1

⁴²⁵ Justin 29.1 See chapter on autonomy for more detail

⁴²⁶ Lerner (1999) 37; Newell (1937) 73 Rogers (1927) 5

⁴²⁷ Justin 41.6.6-8

⁴²⁸ i.e. his defeat at the hands of Alexander Zabinas and the subsequent chaos Justin 39.1.1

incidental. The usage of a beard at this point may also be reflective of his general inability to form an effective political image as discussed extensively with regard to the first reign. In fairness, it is clear that Demetrius needed to change his image if he expected to even attempt to rule his old kingdom. His first reign had been nothing short of a disaster, and his youth and inexperience had been a root cause of his unpopularity, and so an older image became a necessity. Demetrius was in his early thirties when his second reign began, and so depicting himself as an old man was unrealistic. He had used the helmet and Alexander imagery in his first reign, and so by the time of his second reign the beard was the only real option he had to distance himself from his first reign.



Figure 35 Demetrius II: Second reign (Houghton 1983 cat. no. 286)

Assimilation to Zeus has also been suggested as an explanation for the bearded portraits of Demetrius II.⁴²⁹ Although ultimately an incorrect interpretation, this is in many ways more acceptable than the traditional view that the beard is Parthian; on a purely iconographical basis the beard on these coins bears more resemblance to that of the Zeus coins of Antiochus IV than to Parthian imagery (Figure 36). Popular perception may well have connected the two; however, this may simply have been due to similarities in die-engraving techniques. However, it is difficult to argue that the beard alone is meant to reflect deification, as some of the later coins from the second reign feature horns⁴³⁰; if the beard alone were enough to deify the king, the horns would not have been necessary. These horned coins only appear at Antioch, Ake Ptolemais, Tarsus and Mallus, which would suggest the addition of a ruler cult at each of these cities (Figure 37). Houghton points out that the usage of horns only begins after a change from a straight hairstyle to a wavy one, a change which he argues results from a difference in die-

⁴²⁹ Babelon (1890) LXV L'Orange (1982) 42

⁴³⁰ Houghton (1983) 18

engraver.⁴³¹ This issue can be pushed further, however, as a wavy, energetic hairstyle was a feature of Alexander, signifying divinity. Coupled with the horns, deification is certain at these mints. The horns were a common feature in the coinage of the dynasty's founder, and the usage of the device may be meant to recall this. This deified image would have served the purpose of differentiating him from the usurper Alexander Zabinas, against whom he fought an unsuccessful campaign. It would also have served to establish him as the more successful ruler as opposed to the unadorned Zabinas.



Figure 36 A Study in contrasts: the coin on the left depicts the Zeus coins of Antiochus IV (Newell 1937 14), whereas the coin on the right depicts Mithridates I (Newell 1937 88) , Demetrius II's captor.



Figure 37 Before and After: Apotheosis on the coins of Demetrius II. Both from Antioch, the coin on the right depicts the deified horned king. Note also the change in hairstyle.

L'Orange goes as far as to argue that Demetrius II did not have a beard in real life, "Though actually beardless and with short hair he now has Zeus' flowing beard and abundant wreath of locks. In this transfiguration we only recognise the real man only by

⁴³¹ Houghton (1979) 116

his delicately differentiated profile, with the high curved bridge of the nose.”⁴³² I cannot accept L’Orange’s arguments on the grounds that we have no written evidence of Demetrius II’s assimilation to Zeus. Secondly, barring the beard, the portraits of Demetrius II from his second reign are mutually recognisable with those from the first. There is also the more general problem of the difficulty in proving that any given image of a king is false. In this case, however, sigylographic imagery would appear to prove that the bearded coins present us with a truer image of Demetrius II even than the earliest beardless coins. We have available a jugate seal of Demetrius II and Cleopatra Thea from Seleucia on the Tigris which depicts the king with a medium length beard (Figure 38).⁴³³ McDowell states, “The possible significance of the presence of the beard in relation to the exact date of the impression cannot be discussed.” While it is difficult to definitely date this seal, in relative terms it must date to the first reign of Demetrius II. In the first instance, Seleucia on the Tigris had been lost to the Seleucids by Demetrius II’s reign, militating against the idea that it could be given a later date. Secondly, Demetrius II had married a Parthian princess during his captivity, after which Cleopatra Thea married Antiochus VII. While we do not have any official documentation of a divorce, Cleopatra Thea’s refusal of protection at Ake-Ptolemais would seem very clearly to indicate that the two were estranged, if not divorced. Thus it would not seem likely at all that a jugate portrait would have been made after the first reign. Thus it would seem that Demetrius II’s early portrait coins do not, in general, reflect reality. We have one exceptional issue from Nisibis from the last years of his early reign depicting him with a slight beard,⁴³⁴ and due to his presence in the area with the accompanying Parthian wars, it is not unlikely that he posed for this particular portrait. All things considered, it is best to conclude that Demetrius II’s beardless portrait became increasingly out of date as his reign continued.

⁴³² L’Orange (1982) 42

⁴³³ McDowell (1935) 69

⁴³⁴ Moore (1987)127



Figure 38 Jugate seal of Demetrius II and Cleopatra Thea from Seleucia (McDowell 1935 32)



Figure 39 Bronze coin of Demetrius II from his second reign at Tyre (Houghton 1983 767)

As mentioned before, Tyre was the only city that consistently depicted Demetrius II as beardless during the course of his second reign (Figure 39). Tarsus depicted him beardless for a short while, but, as Houghton correctly argues, “The rare tetradrachms of Demetrius at Tarsus were evidently struck at the very beginning of his second reign in Syria – drawing, perhaps on the portraiture of his first reign before it was known how his features had changed during his years of Parthian captivity.”⁴³⁵ In the first instance, this may be explained in terms of Tyre being an important financial centre, and this conservatism rose out of a need for a consistent coinage in order to facilitate trade.⁴³⁶ Another issue is of course, autonomy; Tyre was granted its autonomy after the second reign of Demetrius II, and so its apparent independence in its choice of numismatic imagery may also be due to the fact that it was already autonomous in practical terms. As the chaos of Demetrius II’s second reign worsened, perhaps it is fair to say that he had effectively lost control of Tyre; certainly the fact that he was murdered there by the city’s governor does not suggest that the city was particularly faithful to him.

⁴³⁵ Houghton (1979) 115

⁴³⁶ Rogers passim

Chapter 7

Antiochus III and Antiochus VIII: Studies in the Ageing of the Royal Image

The coinages of Antiochus III and Antiochus VIII show a more or less consistent pattern of ageing, particularly at their major mints. The Antiochene coins of Antiochus III show a pattern of a realistic likeness of the ageing process, with the occasional nod to his deification. With a few notable exceptions, the other Seleucid mints followed suit, creating a highly consistent portrait record throughout the Seleucid empire. While it is a general rule that geographical and chronological variation are not mutually exclusive, with Antiochus III the variation is almost entirely chronological. Antiochus VIII ruled Antioch on no less than four separate occasions, the breaks indicating the loss of this city due to the civil war with his half-brother. The first three reigns present the very gradual ageing of the famously aquiline ruler, with the fourth and final reign minting the caricatured portraits that have come to typify his coinage. The three reigns at Damascus produced vague, nondescript portraits early on, some even lacking in his eponymous hooked nose, with the final reign minting caricatured coins analogous to those at Antioch. Other mints, notably Ake-Ptolemais, present portrait styles peculiar to the mint.

Antiochus III

In terms of recent and not-so-recent scholarship, it would be fair to argue that Antiochus III has received the most attention. The sheer length of his reign is one reason for this; he ruled for more than 50 years, and thus any general history of the Seleucids will inevitably be dominated by him.⁴³⁷ His dealings with Rome are another clear factor in his overrepresentation in scholarship; the Seleucids and the Hellenistic period in general have often been condemned as unworthy of study by comparison with Rome, thus creating the need to justify the consideration of any Seleucid king. In terms of his aggressive foreign policy, Antiochus III bears far more resemblance to Alexander than the vast majority of the Seleucids, who were mainly occupied with the retention of their territories rather than their expansion. This similarity with Alexander also serves to effectively justify the study of Antiochus III. A related point is that his reign arguably

⁴³⁷ Houghton (2002) 350-485 solely covers the reign of Antiochus III; Sherwin-White (1994) Chapter 7 *passim*. For a full, but by no means complete list of works on Antiochus III, see Ma (2002) 393 ff.

marked a high point in Seleucid history, lacking in the continual chaos so often associated with the Seleucids.⁴³⁸ Indeed, remarkably little scholarship deals with the Seleucids after Antiochus III⁴³⁹, with the exception of works on Antiochus IV, particularly pertaining to the Maccabean revolt.⁴⁴⁰

It cannot be stressed enough I have no intention of allowing Antiochus III to dominate this study, as it is my firm opinion that he was one king among many, and not representative of the Seleucids as a whole. Whatever view one takes of the reign of Antiochus III, from a numismatic perspective he is fairly unusual in that his portraiture follows a more or less clear pattern of ageing, with relatively little of the considerable geographical variation that we see with other Seleucids. With this in mind, one of the main functions of this chapter is to use the coinage of Antiochus III to contextualise the coinage of the other Seleucid kings.

Historical background

Because of its long duration, a general summary of the reign of Antiochus III will not be given here. If this were not reason enough, the portraiture of Antiochus III does not seem to have reflected historical events to any great degree, at least when compared to other kings. Even though he survived two usurpers, Antiochus III's coinage did not drastically change as a result of this, with Susa being the only possible exception⁴⁴¹. The deifying imagery of some of Antiochus III's coinage may reflect his establishment of a centralised ruler cult, but even this connexion is vague, as will be demonstrated.

Summary of mints and coins

⁴³⁸ Sherwin-White (1994) argues that the Seleucid kingdom was a much stronger unit than has been assumed by previous scholars, on the basis that the Seleucid kings managed to maintain the boundaries of their empire, whether in whole or in part, for many decades. The prevailing view, as expressed by Walbank, Tarn, Will, and others is that the Seleucid empire had structural weaknesses from the start, leading to almost inevitable decline and fall. I prefer a modified view; namely, that the Seleucids managed to retain their empire, but at an enormous cost to themselves, whether in terms of finances or manpower.

⁴³⁹ Sherwin-White (1994), Houghton (2002), Morkholm (1991), Newell (1938) and (1941) only cover through the reign of Antiochus III

⁴⁴⁰ Morkholm (1963) Bikerman (1937)

⁴⁴¹ See sections on Achaïos and Molon

Antiochus III was by far the most prolific Seleucid in terms of his coinages. It cannot be stressed enough that only a tiny portion of his numismatic output will be discussed here. Houghton lists over 80 mints for Antiochus III⁴⁴² with over 300 issues and with countless variants within those issues⁴⁴³. Therefore only a general discussion of the changing portrait of Antiochus III at Antioch and other mints as stipulated by Houghton will be given. A few eastern bronze coins from Susa are also of particular interest because of their unusual iconography; namely the three-quarter facing portrait and the horned portraits of Susa. It must be noted that even within the mint of Susa these bronze issues are only a portion of the mint's output; there are seven issues with the horned profile portrait⁴⁴⁴ and only one issue with the three-quarter pose.⁴⁴⁵ Seven other bronze issues depicting other subject matter emanate from this mint, as well as abundant royal silver and gold, all depicting the beardless, youthful, profile portrait of the king.⁴⁴⁶

Iconography

Antiochus III's portraiture manifests a consistent pattern of ageing, but the study of this nonetheless presents us with some difficulties. One of the inherent difficulties with the study of the ageing of the royal image is that while it is easy to see the difference between the young man pictured in the earliest type and the elderly man pictured in the final issues, the issues in between present a fair few ambiguities. Houghton argues that the portrait types of Antiochene silver tetradrachms of Antiochus III may roughly be divided into seven categories, each with its progressive nod towards the ageing process, albeit with some apparent idealising on his types C1 and C2, to be discussed in further detail in the section on the ruler cult of Antiochus III.⁴⁴⁷ One of the difficulties with this scheme, as Houghton admits, is the tendency for individual mints to apply their own style to this pattern, often to the point where it can be difficult to place these anomalous coins into a specific type, particularly with types in the centre of this scheme.⁴⁴⁸ For example, mints in Asia Minor tended to place a tuft of hair overlapping the diadem, while the mint

⁴⁴² Houghton (2002) 363-365

⁴⁴³ Houghton (2002) 367ff.

⁴⁴⁴ Houghton (2002) cat. nos. 1216-1221; 1223

⁴⁴⁵ Houghton (2002) cat. no. 1122

⁴⁴⁶ Houghton (2002) 450-453

⁴⁴⁷ Houghton (2002) 357-8.

⁴⁴⁸ *ibid*

of Susa often depicted him horned.⁴⁴⁹ Generally speaking, we do not have the extreme differences between mints for Antiochus III as we do for other Seleucid kings, the best example being Seleucus II; however, it is difficult to apply absolutely any general progression in his portrait record for all mints at all times. Moreover, Houghton's descriptions are not always particularly helpful, particularly when he describes type Cii as a "godlike image of florid style"⁴⁵⁰ or when he describes a Ci type from Seleucia as a "paragon of manly beauty."⁴⁵¹ Such sentiments are subjective; even Houghton's tendency to characterise overlapping hair as horns would appear to speak of a personal preference for the coinage of Antiochus III rather than any real assessment of his portraiture. What we do have with the coinage of Antiochus III is a very good example of stylistic variation, that is, geographical variation that cannot be attributed to any single cause.

Further to Houghton's types, it is important to note that the development of a scheme of ageing is largely dependent on availability of coins. Newell noted the ageing of Antiochus III, and identified three separate series of coins at Antioch, each bearing, respectively, a "youthful portrait," a "middle-aged portrait," and an "older portrait."⁴⁵² Newell was not specific in how the ageing manifested itself, and thus leaves itself open to subjectivity. Houghton's scheme is far more refined, as he identifies a total of seven portraits, but like Newell his descriptions are not always concrete. His types are identified as follows:

- Ai. Young portrait with large eye, hair in bangs⁴⁵³ over forehead, and long sideburn.
- Aii. Young portrait similar to preceding, but without the sideburn
- B. Mature portrait with smaller eye and break in bangs indicating the hairline was beginning to recede
- Ci. Idealizing portrait with fleshier features and thick tousled hair, though with definite thinning at temple.
- Cii. Idealizing, godlike image of florid style, based on the preceding but with large, staring eye, hornlike lock over the diadem, and baroque motion of the hair and (usually) diadem ends

⁴⁴⁹ *ibid.* Houghton and others, as discussed in the Alexander chapter, characterise this overlapping lock of hair as "hornlike," a view which I have argued has no basis.

⁴⁵⁰ Houghton 358

⁴⁵¹ Houghton (2002) 360

⁴⁵² Newell (1918) 6-10

⁴⁵³ Colloquial Americanism for "fringe"

D. Similar to preceding, but with more realistic likeness of Antiochus III in middle age, and horn not consistently present.

E. Elderly portrait with haggard features, receding hairline, less animated hair, and no horn.⁴⁵⁴

Houghton's more refined scheme illustrates clearly that the apparent age of the portrait does not always match the date that the coin was minted, a methodology useful in identifying the dates of coin issues. However, subjective elements in the descriptions of each type are not helpful; for example, it is not clear as to why we should view Type D as more "realistic" than Type Cii. There is also the issue that some of the descriptions overlap considerably, particularly between types Ci and Cii. As far as the coins themselves are concerned, these descriptions do not always seem to me to be entirely accurate, and distinctions between the types are not as apparent as Houghton suggests, particularly for the middle issues. While it must be admitted that the middle issues are always problematic in the study of the ageing of the royal image, and while it would be pedantic to dwell upon the assignment of types to Houghton's scheme, this scheme still presents problems with subjectivity. Should new evidence come to light, this scheme could easily become outdated, as has been demonstrated with regard to Newell.

Boehringer argues that specific portrait prototypes originated with highly skilled die-engravers, and were subsequently copied by die-engravers of lesser skill, sometimes at different mints, and thus changes in iconography are explicable in terms of a deterioration of ability⁴⁵⁵. In the first instance this is a problematic characterisation of the coinage of Antiochus III due to its subjectivity; Boehringer does not elaborate on how this deterioration in style manifests itself.⁴⁵⁶ Houghton argues against this idea on the grounds that Antiochus III had a centralised portraiture policy, as evidenced by the scheme discussed above.⁴⁵⁷ These two views can easily be fused together, albeit with some modifications, if we consider sigylographic evidence. We have available one intaglio of Antiochus III, signed by Apollonius, which bears a very strong resemblance

⁴⁵⁴ Houghton (2002) 357-8

⁴⁵⁵ Boehringer (1973) *passim*

⁴⁵⁶ Boehringer (1973) *passim*

⁴⁵⁷ *ibid*

to the early portrait coinage of the king, although not his later coinage.⁴⁵⁸ This has led to some speculation that Apollonius may have engraved both the coins and gems from this period, but we do not have any concrete evidence of this, although it is more plausible in this case than in most.⁴⁵⁹ For our purposes here, this gem would fit in nicely with Boehringer's idea that coins were based on a single prototype. Since this gem is signed, it would seem likely that it was commissioned by the king himself from a respected court engraver (who may well have engraved coins), and stamped copies could easily have been distributed wherever coinage needed to be minted. Houghton reasons that the subtle variations in portraiture derived from perhaps written instructions sent to mints⁴⁶⁰; I see no reason to disagree with this with the small addendum that a royal mandate such as the one Houghton describes would certainly have carried a royal seal. Such seal impressions would have varied in quality and in repair and it would stand to reason that die-engravers would have needed to improvise in the event of damage, thus explaining the subtle variations between the portraits of Antiochus III. It is interesting to note that portraits from either end of the Seleucid empire bear the most deviance from those of Antioch i.e. the horned portraits from Susa and the western coins with the hair overlapping the diadem, thus indicating perhaps the tendency for seals to wear down over great distances.

Antiochus III's Ruler Cult

One of the significant innovations of Antiochus III was his establishment of a centralised ruler cult sometime between 202 and 193⁴⁶¹; before this ruler cults had been the business of individual *poleis*. It would seem, however, that the ruler cult of Antiochus III was of civic origin when we consider the bronze coinage of Susa. Antiochus III's reign at Susa was interrupted by the rebellion of Molon in 222, although he regained the city in 220. Bronze coinage of the first reign of the rightful king features a youthful portrait that is relatively unremarkable,⁴⁶² but the bronze coinage of the second

⁴⁵⁸ Plantzos (1999) 5

⁴⁵⁹ *ibid* Plantzos argues that gem portraits generally do not correspond with those on numismatic portraiture. While this may be true with silver coinage, one pitfall with Plantzos' study is that it does not make extensive use of bronze coinage, which offers a greater resemblance to non-coin portraiture.

⁴⁶⁰ Houghton (2002) 358

⁴⁶¹ Houghton (2002) 361 n. 35-36

⁴⁶² Houghton (2002) cat. No. 1207

reign consistently features a conspicuously horned portrait⁴⁶³, with the occasional three-quarter pose, recalling the similar coinage of Seleucus II⁴⁶⁴. With regard to the first bronze coin, the reverse is noteworthy in that it features Nike crowning the name of Antiochus, which, I would argue, is clearly meant to recall the Susan coinage of Molon, which features Nike crowning the usurper's name.⁴⁶⁵ The message of Antiochus III's reverse is obvious, but it does not strike me as a particularly creative or individualistic method for establishing oneself as ruler; Antiochus III simply appropriates Molon's innovation as his own.⁴⁶⁶ That having been said, this similar general approach to the reverses would have perhaps served to guarantee the issue's acceptability, ensuring economic stability for the area. In any case, the horned portrait may have been sufficient to establish Antiochus III's dominance over Molon.



Figure 40 Horned portrait of Antiochus III from Susa. This coin is virtually indistinguishable from those of his father at the same mint, but for the inscription BASILEOS ANTIOCHOU. (Houghton (202) cat. no. 1221.

Slightly more aggressive in tone are the $\frac{3}{4}$ posed portraits of Antiochus III (Figure 40). These recall similar portraits of Seleucus II, the confrontational nature of which has already been discussed. Even still, this type is not particularly innovative due to its stark resemblance to that of his father, but this similarity would have ensured the coinage's economic viability. In the same light, filial piety may well have influenced this coin type, with the son appropriating the image of his father. Seleucus II's achievements as a warrior were considerable, and Antiochus III may well have sought to honour him with this special issue. Unusual coins such as these also serve to raise questions about the successive nature of Seleucid portraiture. While it is generally true that the Seleucid portrait model was a successive one, issues such as these would appear to demonstrate

⁴⁶³ Houghton (2002) cat. No. 1216

⁴⁶⁴ Houghton (2002) cat. No. 1220

⁴⁶⁵ Houghton (2002) cat. No 950

⁴⁶⁶ While this is the first instance in Seleucid coinage, the image of Athena crowning the ruler's name was a common motif on the coinages of Lysimachus and of the kings of Pergamon (Newell 1941 141) which have been provenanced in this area (Newell, 1941, 141). Thus this reverse type would have served any local king well in ensuring the economic viability of his coinage

that the Seleucids were prepared to allow historical issues, particularly in light of the aforementioned economic benefits to a conservative coinage. The reverse of these coins is interesting, as it features Artemis holding an arrow, with her bow resting on the ground. The aggression implied in this huntress imagery would have been particularly effective in an area that had just been recovered from a usurper, sending a clear message to any who dared to attempt to seize the throne.

Houghton argues that the horns on the early bronze coins of Antiochus III's second reign at Susa are the earliest signs of his official ruler cult⁴⁶⁷. Because they are on bronze, however, and because bronze imagery tended to be left to the city, I would argue that these are simply reflective of local religious feeling rather than anything more centralised. Further to this, Susa had a long tradition of depicting the horned king in reaction to political instability, cf. Seleucus II. From the perspective of contemporary events, while it must be admitted that the failure of Molon to capture the citadel of Susa⁴⁶⁸ was due in no small part to the city's military, the city would not even have attempted to defend itself without considerable loyalty to the legitimate king, in which context a civic ruler cult is easy to envision. At the risk of being overly hypothetical, if Antiochus III had never established a central ruler cult I doubt very much that Houghton would have cast these coins in this light, especially given that he does not apply this logic to Seleucus II, of whom no official ruler cult is known. It is important to keep in mind that the ruler cult of Antiochus III is the first *documented*⁴⁶⁹ ruler cult dating from a Seleucid king's lifetime. Although this is admittedly hypothetical, earlier Seleucid kings could have easily set up similar cults for themselves.

⁴⁶⁷ Houghton (2002) 449

⁴⁶⁸ Polybius 5.48.13-15

⁴⁶⁹ This cult is attested in a stone inscription in the Louvre, and has been given the long but accurate title *Royal Enactment Concerning the State Cult for Laodike* by Ma (2002) 354.



Figure 41 Silver Tetradrachm of Antiochus III, Houghton (2002) 452 cat. no. 1214. Houghton categorises the hair overlapping the diadem as a horn; I argue that this cannot be the case.

Houghton argues that silver issues from Antiochus III's second reign at Susa and elsewhere (Type B) feature a small horn, curving backwards from his ear (Figure 41).⁴⁷⁰ I strongly disagree with this characterisation, and would argue that it is simply a prominent lock of hair, perhaps designed as a display of the die-engraver's talent. Furthermore, all other instances of horns prior to Houghton's alleged horns curve upwards and outwards, with the bronze coinages of Antiochus III at the very same mint furnishing the best example.⁴⁷¹ This change in iconography would require some explanation, which Houghton does not furnish. Newell did not characterise this lock of hair as a horn⁴⁷², and indeed Houghton cites no other scholar in support of this identification, nor does he offer any explanation as to why these portraits should be classified as horned. This so-called horn was certainly an innovation in terms of the die-engraver's command of detail and perspective, but to classify it as a subtle horn is not persuasive. Houghton argues that the use of the "horn" spread to other mints, namely, Seleucia, Antioch, and Nisibis, perhaps based on written instructions by the king, but is unable to explain why it does not appear elsewhere.⁴⁷³ Since these were major urban centres, and since Antiochus III's armies almost certainly would have spent money in these cities, perhaps the die-engravers were copying the innovations of their Susian counterparts, with the design moving with the army. This "horn" does not appear at other mints, which is not surprising, since the Seleucid armies were located mostly in the east

⁴⁷⁰ Houghton (2002) 452 cat. no. 1214

⁴⁷¹ But why is there a definite, outward pointing, horn on the bronze coins of Susa, but not the silver ones? Houghton's solution to this problem is that there indeed is a horn on the silver coinage, but that said horn is just more subtle (2002, 451). This differing iconography would suggest to me that silver and bronze coins were controlled by a different individual within the mint.

⁴⁷² Newell (1941) 141 ff.

⁴⁷³ Houghton (2002) 360

at this time, and the design would not have had a chance to influence the coins of Phoenicia or Asia Minor. Based on this inconsistency alone, we cannot speak of these coins as evidence for a central ruler cult, but it is important to keep in mind that these coins cannot safely be classified as horned.

A related issue is that the later portraits of Antiochus III do not feature this lock of hair at all, even within the same mint, Antioch furnishing the best example. Exactly why Antiochus III would appear deified at an earlier point but not a later one does not seem possible to explain. This apparent de-deification, if Houghton's reading is correct, not only has no historical precedent, but would send a confusing message about the ruler's divinity. Therefore it is best to regard the "horn," or in fact "lock of hair" as an example of stylistic variation combined with chronological variation. In other words, it is a feature that has no specific explanation but which changes over time. This is useful in the classification of portraits, whether in terms of their date or mint, but has no more specific historical value.

Houghton further argues that the "unnaturally large"⁴⁷⁴ eye of middle (Type Cii) Antiochene coins of Antiochus III is "a sign of divinity in Hellenistic portraiture"⁴⁷⁵, and that furthermore "So emphatic and conspicuous a shift in portraiture must have served an official purpose."⁴⁷⁶ Houghton suggests that this portrait may reflect the official edict of the ruler cult⁴⁷⁷, or Antiochus III's assumption of the title *Megas*. As far as the depiction of the eye is concerned, Houghton cites no evidence, literary or otherwise, for the enlarged eye as a sign of deification. I suspect this motif may well be related to the "melting glance" of Alexander, whatever that may mean. Houghton does not compare the size of the eye on this portrait with that on others of Antiochus III, nor for any other king, and so it is difficult to determine whether it is as unnaturally large as he suggests. As before, Houghton does not explain why this disproportionate eye disappears on later issues. What Houghton classifies as various deifying features on the middle issues of

⁴⁷⁴ Houghton (2002) 361

⁴⁷⁵ *ibid*

⁴⁷⁶ *ibid*

⁴⁷⁷ *ibid*. Sherwin-White (1989) 209-210 Ma (2001) 64 n. 47

Antiochus III would appear to be the trademark of a specific die-engraver/gem cutter rather than any reflection of a centralised policy of deification. One possibility is that changes in future issues are therefore best explained in terms of a change in die-engraver. As Seleucus II had already begun to experiment with the depiction of ageing, it is also probable that Antiochus III's ageing image was a deliberate continuation of his father's approach.



Figure 42 Bronze coin from Antioch depicting laureate Antiochus III. Houghton (2002) 361

In addition to the deified bronze coins of Antiochus III at Susa, we have a series of bronze coins from Antioch featuring Antiochus III with the laureate wreath of Apollo (Figure 42).⁴⁷⁸ Houghton classifies this image as Antiochus III as Apollo, which I would argue is a completely correct characterisation for two reasons, the first being that the reverse of said coins depicts the Seleucid emblem of Apollo on omphalos, the second being that the coinage is bronze rather than silver. These issues would seem to be reflective of a ruler cult within Antioch. This may seem rather odd, given that Antioch was the capital of the Seleucid empire, but we have analogous deified imagery of Antiochus VIII at Antioch, to be discussed below. It is important to keep in mind that Antioch was the home of two mints, the other being Houghton's DEL mint, which does not depict Antiochus III as Apollo.⁴⁷⁹ From this it is clear that even within a city localised ruler cults could arise, which raises questions as to exactly how overarching Antiochus III's ruler cult could have been. In any case, we are fortunate enough to have available a seal impression from Uruk depicting Antiochus III with a laurel wreath in the manner of Apollo.⁴⁸⁰ Rostovtseff gives a non-committal characterisation of this seal, stating that it could be either Apollo with the features of Antiochus III or Antiochus III with the features of Apollo. Based on the Antiochene coins, the latter would seem more likely, but this creates the problem of the provenance of the seal. However, given that

⁴⁷⁸ Houghton (2002) 400 cat. no. 1048

⁴⁷⁹ Houghton (2002) 404 cat. no. 1064

⁴⁸⁰ Rostovtseff (1932) 26 cat 1

seal impressions were extremely mobile, it is not unlikely that the seal stone originated in Antioch, with the impression arriving on a document sent to Uruk.

What then, are we to make of the ruler cult of Antiochus III? Our written sources are perfectly acceptable⁴⁸¹, but there would not appear to be any significant numismatic evidence for it, as obviously deified images such as those on bronze are too inconsistent to allow for generalisations. Subtle deification, a view advanced by Houghton, also cannot be taken as evidence for the centralised ruler cult, as these features are too vague to allow for any general conclusions. Ma argues that "...the central ruler cult, by its uniformity and mobilization of empire-wide resources, as a way for the ruling power to offer, retrospectively, a unifying model for pre-existing local cults, and hence a means to subsume, symbolically, local manifestations within a broader, supra-politad form: the very nature of imperial activity."⁴⁸² Based on our considerable bronze coin evidence for the local ruler cult, and our lack of evidence for the ruler cult on silver coinage, it is fair to say that Ma's view of the overarching ruler cult is fundamentally incorrect. Bronze coinage offers several manifestations of divinity, whereas silver at the very same mints does not. Ma does not cite any evidence for the so-called "empire-wide resources" put into the central ruler cult, but one would suspect that coinage would have been a major medium for the ruler cult if it were as all-pervasive as Ma suggests. While there is no doubt that the state cult existed, it does not seem to have affected coinage.

Consistency in coinage

Thus far, this section had detailed only the most exceptional coins of Antiochus III, and therefore presents a very misleading view of his portrait record. Antiochus III's

⁴⁸¹ Ma (1999) 354-6 There is a great deal of controversy over the exact date of the foundation of the ruler cult, as detailed by Ma, but little is known about its practical application. Ma's document 37 details the foundation of the state cult for Laodike, wife of Antiochus III in 193, which includes the decree that priestesses of Laodike should wear crowns featuring portraits of the queen. Kuhrt and Sherwin-White (1993 209-210) argue that the cult of Antiochus III was established at the same time, but the decree itself provides little evidence for this. Various cities had established cults to Laodike prior to this, (Gauthier 1989, 77) perhaps shedding light on the evolution of the central cult of Antiochus III. Given that Antiochus III had localised ruler cults early in his reign, as is evidence by the horned bronze coins of Susa, and given that he had far more political influence than his wife, an early date for his own ruler cult is perhaps advisable.

⁴⁸² Ma (1999) 234 sic

portrait record is one of the more consistent of the Seleucid kings, which can only suggest a central policy on the matter. This would tie into Antiochus III's reign in many ways. He was the first Seleucid king to fully establish the throne at Antioch, which became his major mint, responsible for the vast majority of coinage output for his reign. His foreign policy seems to have been centred on regaining the territories of the dynasty's founder, and ultimately Alexander. He seems also to have taken a much more aggressive approach to the politics of Asia Minor than his predecessors, aiming to create a united empire under his sole control. The centralised ruler cult was also the first of its kind, although the implications on coinage are unclear at best. In short, Antiochus III was a great centraliser, with his coinage largely reflecting this, whether in silver or bronze.

On the whole, Antiochus III does not seem to have used coinage as a means of political propaganda. Though he survived two usurpers, and nearly endless wars, the coinage does not seem to have reflected these to any great extent. The one exception to this rule would be the prevalence of elephants on the reverses of his silver and bronze coins, which would seem to have alluded to military activity. However, they became such a common motif that it is impossible to assign them to any particular conflict. Given that it dismantled Antiochus III's elephant corps, the treaty of Apamea indicates that elephants featured heavily in combat during his reign, and so their imagery may simply have reflected the reality of his military campaigns. The question then turns to why Antiochus III did not change his image in the face of his adversaries. Lack of need provides a partial explanation, as both usurpers cultivated older images, obviating the need for Antiochus III to change his. The fact that they were so easily defeated, particularly Molon, does not indicate that either usurper was a serious threat to the king. Also not to be ignored is that we have only a few examples of the coinage of Achaeus and Molon, demonstrating that Antiochus III was able to eradicate the coinage of these usurpers in an efficient manner.

Antiochus III's consistent pattern of portraiture would also have had its military functions. Since the army was almost constantly on the move, a consistent coinage was needed in order for it to be universally acceptable, and so it would have made sense for

Antiochus III to have had a central policy on the matter, a theory which Houghton advances. Another possibility is that, with the constant moving of the army, one city had a greater chance of exposure to the coinage of another, since coins from other areas had a wider distribution in a time of war. This could well have allowed one city to effectively copy the coinage of another, thus creating a more homogenous pattern of iconography throughout the empire. This does raise the question of whether the consistency of imagery on the coinage of Antiochus III was accidental or part of a deliberate policy. Given the high quality of his Antiochene portraits, it is difficult to imagine that the king did not have some role in how he was depicted. Inevitably, the spread of similar images was outside the control of the king, but ensuring a high quality image at Antioch would have spawned imitators throughout the empire.



Figure 43 Louvre bust of Antiochus III

The majority of modern scholars identify a portrait head in the Louvre with Antiochus III (Figure 43).⁴⁸³ While attributions such as these are often impossible to make due to the extensive variation in Seleucid portraiture, based on the consistency of Antiochus III's coin portraits, and the fact that he was the longest ruling Seleucid king, this particular attribution seems likely. His centralised ruler cult would have created the need for a cult statue, and this portrait head may well have served such a purpose. Although the descendents of Antiochus III fought among themselves considerably for the control of the Seleucid throne, it would seem likely that they would have retained some respect for the ancestor after whom so many of them were named. Thus, it would seem that if any king's portrait were to survive the many Seleucid family squabbles, Antiochus III's would seem the most likely candidate.

⁴⁸³ Green (1990 348 n. 27-29) gives a full list

Antiochus VIII “Grypus” r. 126-96

Historical overview

Proclaimed king at the age of 15, Antiochus VIII ruled alongside his mother for three years, during which time he defeated the Ptolemaic usurper Alexander Zabinas.⁴⁸⁴ In the interests of keeping him distinct from his brother, Antiochus IX, and in the interest of distinguishing him from the other Antiochoi, the name Grypus will be used throughout; in fact this seems to have become scholarly convention.⁴⁸⁵ According to Appian *Syr.* 69, his mother attempted to poison him, with the wily Grypus forcing his mother to drink the poison herself.⁴⁸⁶ For the next ten years or so, Grypus ruled Antioch peacefully until around 113/4, when his brother Cyzicenus usurped the throne at Antioch, Damascus, and several other cities⁴⁸⁷. Grypus seems to have recaptured Antioch for a few months in 112, only to lose it again⁴⁸⁸. This loss was short lived, but was only to be followed by a recapture of Antioch for about 18 months in 111-110⁴⁸⁹. In 109, he regained Antioch until his death in 96, with the civil war never having been won, as Cyzicenus still controlled Tripolis, Ake Ptolemais, and Damascus⁴⁹⁰. In short, Grypus reigned at Antioch on four separate occasions, all marked by civil war.

Summary of mints and coins

The main focus of this study will be the mints of Antioch and Damascus because Grypus ruled these for about the same amount of time each. His ageing pattern is similar for each and useful comparisons may be made. There is also the problem that this period of Seleucid history is largely ignored by scholars; however, Damascus and Antioch are relatively well-represented. The majority of these coins are royal silver ones, with the

⁴⁸⁴ Justin 39.2.5

⁴⁸⁵ Some Seleucid kings are better known for their nicknames than for their numbers, such as Antiochus VII Sidetes, although all had epithets. Antiochus III, although he received the appellation Megas, is not largely referred to as such.

⁴⁸⁶ While this story is certainly plausible, it ends rather neatly. It is also important to note that Grypus received a reputation as a poisoner, making an attempt on his brother's life in 114, at least according to Appian *Syr.* 69. Based on this, I would question the involvement of Cleopatra Thea in this incident, and would wonder whether Grypus was acting alone, rather than simply reacting to his mother's assassination attempt.

⁴⁸⁷ Bellinger (1949) 87

⁴⁸⁸ *ibid*

⁴⁸⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁹⁰ *ibid*

occasional nod to bronze. However, it is important to note that by this time not only had the Seleucid empire contracted to Syria and parts of Phoenicia, but that most of the business of the minting of bronze had been left to the cities.

Iconography



Figure 44 Silver Tetradrachm Antiochus VIII Antioch (Newell (1937 74)

The coin pictured above (Figure 44) dates from the final reign of Antiochus VIII, better known as Grypus, from the Seleucid mint of Antioch. It is easy to see from this coin how Grypus earned his nickname-*grupos* the adjective translates as “hooknosed” but it is also the genitive of *grups*, meaning, “griffin”⁴⁹¹. The extreme, almost caricatured nature of these coins has attracted a great deal of attention; general works on the time period often select one such coin to illustrate Grypus’ reign; Green’s book⁴⁹² is a good example, as is Newell’s 1937 work⁴⁹³. However, it would be a mistake to treat these issues, made from 108-96 B.C., as representative of Grypus’ entire portrait record, which lasted 29 years and covered seven mints. Because he ruled the cities for a similar amount of time, I will focus initially on the mints of Antioch and Damascus. Grypus’ portraits at Antioch change over time. While he does not start out as extreme as the coin pictured here, his distinguishing feature always remains intact. Some of the early Damascene issues of Grypus are less recognisable as the famously aquiline king, with far more inconsistency in portraiture throughout his reigns. The purpose of this section will be to demonstrate the ageing, or, perhaps more correctly, the metamorphosis of the royal image and analyse the similarities and differences in his approach to portraiture at his two main

⁴⁹¹ Justin XXXIX 2, 2-3 attests the name Grypus as do many others. Eusebius I refers to him as Aspendius, as does Josephus *Bel. Jud.* 1,2,7, recalling his time spent at Aspendus, and mirroring his brother’s nickname Cyzicenus. Either name is possible, although neither appears on coins. Still, Grypus, if it refers to his most famous physical feature, does not seem to be a particularly polite nickname, and based on this “Aspendius” may have been the more likely epithet.

⁴⁹² Green (190) 463

⁴⁹³ Newell (1937) 74

mints. A short discussion of Grypus' other mints will follow, although his control over these was patchy and therefore cannot present clear evidence in the study of his coinage.

The earliest portraits of Grypus date from 121-125, and depict him alongside his mother, who made it very clear that she was the one in charge (Figure 45). Because of the hostility to her, Cleopatra Thea needed her son to appear on her coinage in order to establish her legitimacy, but the coins, if nothing else, are evidence that she only accepted this fact grudgingly. It is interesting to note that contemporary bronze coins from Antioch depict the radiate Antiochus VIII, clearly indicating the civic preference for the young king.⁴⁹⁴ Because of this clear favour for Grypus, in all instances, Cleopatra Thea places her head in front of Grypus, in a clear effort to establish her dominance. As if to add insult to injury, she presents herself with coiffed hair, and an elaborate headdress, while her conspicuously unadorned son peers out from behind her.



Figure 45 Silver Tetradrachm of Cleopatra Thea and Antiochus VIII from Antioch (Newell 1937 73)

The above coin from Antioch presents a highly individualised view of both mother and son. At this early stage in Grypus' career, he had no motivation to portray himself in the extreme fashion of his later Antiochene coins, and based on this I think it is

⁴⁹⁴ This is a particularly interesting issue for a variety of reasons. Rostovtseff (1932, *passim*) tends to identify radiate seal portraits with Antiochus IV, not mentioning that Antiochus IV is not the only radiate Seleucid. Admittedly, due to the time period and archaeological provenance, Rostovtseff is correct, but it is important to note that it is impossible to identify a portrait based solely on a specific device. These coins also raise questions about the nature of the Seleucid ruler cult. Ma, as discussed above, implies that the establishment of the state cult of Antiochus III signified the death or serious curtailment of the civic ruler cult. This would not appear to be the case if these coins offer any indication of civic life after Antiochus III. Historically speaking, this is hardly surprising, as the numismatic reforms of Antiochus IV, discussed in the Autonomy chapter, left the power of bronze coinage largely to the mints. Ma's image of Antiochus III as an all-conquering imperialist is thus very problematic; Antiochus III may well have been the most autocratic of the Seleucids, but little attention is given to the actual impact of his reign on the later Seleucids, which would appear to have been highly limited.

fair to say that this is basically a lifelike portrait. To further illustrate this Demetrius I, Grypus' grandfather, clearly displays the beginnings of a hooked nose (Figure 46). Further to that, Grypus' son, Seleucus VI seems to have been very much his father's son (Figure 47). In addition, Grypus' usurping half-brother Cyzicenus, clearly inherited the mother's straight nose. It is fortunate that we have the portraits of Cleopatra Thea against which to compare the coins of Grypus; otherwise it would be difficult to make any real assessment of his sometimes caricatured portrait. Thus coins from the mint at Antioch provide us with clear evidence of verisimilitude in the depiction of the Seleucid royal family and their physical features.



Figure 46 Silver tetradrachm of Demetrius I (Newell 1937 70)



Figure 47 Silver tetradrachm of Seleucus VI, son of Grypus (Newell 1937 75)

This is less the case at Damascus; this coin does present Grypus with a hooked nose, but in much less detail than coins produced at Antioch. At this point Antioch was clearly the capital of the Seleucid empire and therefore Cleopatra Thea and Grypus would have wanted to show in great detail who was in control of the Seleucid capital (and a related point is that more talented die engravers would have been working in a major city such as Antioch).



Figure 48 Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus VIII and Cleopatra Thea at Damascus (Houghton 1983 888)

Damascus, on the other hand, was not of great importance to the Seleucids; at this point, it was a comparatively minor city. Therefore, less emphasis needed to be placed on the workmanship of these coins (Figure 48). The coin from Ake-Ptolemais however, could not be more different from those at Antioch, with a Grypus virtually devoid of distinguishing features, an even more nondescript portrait than the ones from Damascus (Figure 49). Careful attention is paid to the details of the mother's hairstyle and headdress, while the son's features are downplayed considerably. This may be explained in terms of the fact that this was the seat of his mother's rise to the Seleucid throne, and the lack of attention to Grypus is clearly meant as a dismissal.



Figure 49 Silver tetradrachm from Ake-Ptolemais depicting Cleopatra Thea and Antiochus VIII image courtesy of www.wildwinds.com

Next we move on to Grypus' first sole reign at Antioch, from 121-114, which was his least eventful reign. Incidentally, we have fragmentary evidence that Grypus hosted the games at Daphne and that he pursued other personal pleasures⁴⁹⁵, which earned him a

⁴⁹⁵ Poseidonius FGrH 87 F 21 a, b

reputation, although not entirely deserved, for being a lazy and incompetent king⁴⁹⁶. These coins do not present a serious departure from his earliest portraits at Antioch, but there is some ageing and variation, due to the near decade span of this first reign. It is clear from this coin that he has put on some weight, perhaps reflective of his reputation as being a bit of a glutton! What we have here is a basically lifelike depiction of the ageing process, with some variation between die engravers (Figure 50).



Figure 50 Silver Antiochene portrait of Grypus.

This Antiochene coins present stylistic features worthy of further discussion, namely the overlapping of hair over the diadem. This coin presents a rather prominent curl of hair over the diadem just above the ear, which doubtlessly some would characterise as a horn. However, several curls cascade over the top of the diadem; others still fold over it at the bottom. This shows a considerable development of technique over time, virtually invalidating any idea that the overlapping hair of Antiochus III was intended to represent horns. If the middle Antiochene portraits of Antiochus III were meant to depict horns, future die-engravers would not have developed the use of perspective to the extent of that on the coins of Antiochus VIII.

Grypus' first reign at Damascus, while equal in length to that at Antioch, presents less reflection of Grypus' age. Most of his coins there do present him with a hooked nose, although it is perhaps a less accurate depiction than the portraits from Antioch. On Figure 51 he retains his hooked nose, while on Figure 52 he seems to lose it completely. As mentioned before, Damascus was not a hugely important city at this point in Grypus' reign, and the coinage seems to be evidence of this. It is entirely possible that he either

⁴⁹⁶ Poseidonius, frags. 17, 31

never visited Damascus during this first reign, or that he only visited rarely, leaving die-engravers to rely on older portraits.



Figure 51 Silver Tetradrachm of Antiochus VIII from Damascus Newell (1939) cat. no 111



Figure 52 Damascus Tetradrachm of Antiochus VIII Newell (1939) cat. no. 112

The treatment of the hair on Figure 52 is noteworthy as it presents a curiously hornlike lock of hair just above the ear. However, it is also important to look at the rendering of the hair as whole; virtually every lock of hair is rendered in the same chunky, curved manner, with the lock above the ear simply being the most prominent. An attempt has been made at overlapping the hair over the bottom of the diadem, albeit with less detail and refinement as the coins of Antioch.

Studied in isolation, these early coins, whether from Antioch or Damascus, are not highly politicised, but it is important to keep in mind that the disappearance of Grypus' mother would have made a massive impression on anyone seeing them for the first time after they were issued. Thus these coins would have emphasised that Grypus

was now the sole ruler at Antioch and was not simply ruling alongside his mother. As far as the murder of his mother is concerned, doubtlessly this was seen as an act of filial impiety, at least among some circles within the general public. It must be remembered that there seems to have been a ruler cult of Grypus within Antioch during his co-rule with his mother, and so it would not be beyond the pale to imagine that the murder of Cleopatra Thea would have had at least some supporters. Furthermore, Grypus had proved himself to be a competent soldier in his role in the demise of the usurper Alexander Zabinas, whom the Seleucids had battled for the best part of three years. Cleopatra Thea, however, could not say the same for herself. Grypus' first reign at Antioch brought a long period of relative peace. The coins would have been associated with this period of peace, and perhaps would have sent a message of political stability, albeit subtle.

This peace, however, was not to last, when Grypus' half brother seized Antioch in 114-113. This sparked a civil war that lasted until 109, with Grypus ruling Antioch on four separate occasions and Damascus three. Our literary sources on this period are scanty, with numismatic evidence being the only way we can tell who was in control where, and when.

Grypus' second reign at Antioch, after fighting off his half-brother's initial usurpation, lasted for only a few months during the summer of 112 and we do not have any portrait coins of him available for this reign. His third reign, from 111-110 does give us some coins, although not nearly as many as his first. The ideological value of these coins cannot be underestimated, least of all, because of the brevity of this reign. It would have been much easier for Grypus to recycle portraits from his first reign, and the effort he put towards changing his image shows that he placed a great deal of value on the function of coins as personal propaganda. These coins, illustrated by Figure 53, present him with a slightly longer nose than before. This would serve to distinguish him from his brother, albeit not in such an extreme fashion as the late Antiochene coins.



Figure 53 Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus VIII at Antioch (Newell 1937 74)

The Damascene issues of his second reign there, from 109-108 present what can only be described as a decline in the quality of coin portraiture. His nose becomes gradually more pronounced, culminating in the unrealistic, caricatured nose in his final coins from there, as presented in Figure 54. But why this drastic change? During his second reign, Grypus had to compete with coinage issued by his half-brother, who had held Damascus and had minted many coins there, many of which would have remained in circulation. Having recaptured Damascus, Grypus wanted to present an image of himself that could in no way be confused with his brother's image. In other words, he had to imprint his identity as Damascus' legitimate ruler, an identity distinct from Cyzicenus'.



Figure 54 Damascene tetradrachm of Antiochus VIII Newell (1939) cat. no. 114

Unfortunately for Grypus, he seems never to have minted coins at Damascus again, almost certainly due to a lack of resources. He did manage to recapture Antioch permanently in 109, and it is at this point that he began to mint the coins most often associated with his reign. While we have no written evidence of a peace settlement, the war between him and his brother seems to have drawn to a close. After six years of civil war, Grypus had the unenviable task of convincing his subjects that he was now in

permanent control of Antioch. The extreme nature of these late coins with their dewlapped nose and upward curving chin, that give a sort of moonlike appearance, can be interpreted in terms of his need to reassert his rule at Antioch and his identity as the legitimate and long-ruling king. These portraits are stylised, not subject to the natural ageing that we have seen from Grypus' first two reigns. One could not argue that these coins are meant to be a lifelike rendering of Grypus' physical features, unlike earlier portraits. As with the final coins of Damascus, he could no longer leave the city in any doubt that he was the sole ruler; the portraits on these coins are instantly identifiable and could not possibly be mistaken for anyone else. From Figure 55 we see that great care was taken to place these portraits on smaller denominations, sending a message of Grypus' solid control at Antioch to a wider audience. The extreme nature of these portraits serves to underline Grypus' overwhelming insecurity with regard to his brother, who, after all, managed to outlive him. These coins show the extent to which Cyzicenus remained a threat, forcing Grypus to adopt a highly specific political image.



Figure 55 Silver drachm of Antiochus VII of Antioch, final reign Newell (1937) 32

In conclusion, the early, peaceful reigns of Grypus allowed him to portray himself in a basically realistic manner because his coins did not need to function as personal propaganda, at least in relative terms. As the political situation became increasingly unstable, his caricatured, unrealistic portrait became a sort of trademark to emphasise that he was in control, and that no one else could compete with his image.

Grypus only ruled Ake Ptolemais for about ten years before it was permanently seized by his half-brother. Its coinage is noteworthy only for the curiously curled hair, which seems to take on a life of its own. Based on this evidence, it is possible to re-identify Plantzos' cat. no. 153 with Grypus, which Plantzos identifies as a portrait on the

Alexander model. Its sharply curved nose resembles the late coins of Antioch, but the hair is more reminiscent of coins of Ake-Ptolemais. Plantzos cat. no. 75 also can be identified with Grypus, but it more closely resembles the late Antiochene coins, with its upward chin and extremely curved nose. Its function as an identifier for a high-ranking soldier would have been particularly relevant to this reign, as Grypus' rule was precarious. The workmanship on this ring is poor, showing little regard for proportion, with the upper lip particularly poorly modelled. Although one would be hard pressed to argue that coins from this reign were meant to be realistic, the portrait on this gem seems to have been carved haphazardly, lacking even any generalised aim in rendering. Where the coins feature a nose that curves to meet the chin, the gem does not even exhibit this degree of forethought. In short, this would appear to be a situation in which die-engravers had no relationship to gem engravers.

Grypus exercised little control over other mints⁴⁹⁷, with Tarsus being the main exception. The Seleucid empire had begun its rapid descent, and Grypus' lack of coins can be seen as evidence for this⁴⁹⁸. While it is highly subjective to argue that the portraiture of Grypus declined in quality, it must be noted that the portrait style becomes far more caricatured over time, with less attention to detail. This decline indicates that the mints may well have been working under pressure to produce the coins needed to fund the endless civil wars so typical of Grypus' reign. In and of itself, the decline in coinage does not anticipate the decline and fall of the Seleucid empire, but could perhaps be cast as a symptom of the political context in which the coins were produced.

Conclusion

Antiochus III presents a pattern of the ageing of the royal image that is basically realistic. At the start of his reign he is presented as a young man, and gradually ages throughout, culminating in the older portraits of his final years. This pattern is more or less the case at all his mints, indicating a preference for consistency in the royal image. Antiochus VIII's pattern of change is also consistent, but hardly realistic, as he becomes

⁴⁹⁷ Bellinger (1949) 87

⁴⁹⁸ See section on Autonomy for Grypus' grants to Ascalon

increasingly caricatured with each successive reign. Neither king exhibits geographical variation, even when political circumstances might lead one to expect this.

Chapter 8

Antiochus I, Antiochus IV and Demetrius I : Studies in the deification of the royal image

Introduction: the coinages of Seleucus I

Prior to the rise of the Hellenistic kingdoms, the overwhelming majority of images on Greek coins had been gods, and even civic symbols often had at least some relationship with the divine⁴⁹⁹. Such “portraits” that we have available before the Hellenistic age are stylised depictions of gods⁵⁰⁰. Within this context it is unsurprising that the coins of the dynasty’s founder depict mostly divine imagery, such as Athena and Nike.⁵⁰¹ Although these types had considerable military significance⁵⁰², they also ensured an economically viable coinage, vital for the foundations of a new empire. Additionally, the vast majority of coins minted under Seleucus I depicted the deified Alexander, for whom ruler cults had been established throughout his former empire⁵⁰³. In fact, it is important to keep in mind that the portrait of Seleucus does not appear on

⁴⁹⁹ Morkholm (1991) 25

⁵⁰⁰ *ibid*

⁵⁰¹ Houghton (2002) 5

⁵⁰² Price (Alexander) 29-30 argues that since Nike holds a naval trophy that these coins must refer to Salamis, thus emphasising Greek naval victories. Kleiner (1981) 20-23 argues that this reverse refers to Alexander’s naval victory at Tyre. This second view is more plausible because of the proximity of time. The extent to which the Athenian victory at Salamis would have still been considered a significant historical event to the contemporary Greco-Macedonian soldiery is not clear. As discussed in the Alexander chapter, there is a great tendency among some scholars to overemphasise the importance of Alexander to the later Hellenistic kings, given the extent to which Alexander is studied today. While Salamis is widely studied by modern students of Classics, the same cannot be said for the Hellenistic age with any degree of certainty.

⁵⁰³ Tarn (Greeks) 131 and Newell (1939) 112 argue that Seleucus adopted the Alexander type to commemorate his victories in Iran and India. Hadley (1974) 53 argues that Seleucus adopted the Alexander type because he had personally sought to deify Alexander. I would argue that the cult of Alexander must have been of a much wider appeal than simply to Seleucus himself, since it would be very difficult to establish a coinage otherwise. The anchor is an example of an image of personal significance to Seleucus himself, but it is only a “subsidiary element” on coins of some mints (Houghton 2002: 6).

coins until after his death, and even there it is deified. In short, early Seleucid coinage depicted mostly divine imagery⁵⁰⁴, and so the deification of subsequent rulers must be seen in this context.

Seleucus I is occasionally depicted with horns on posthumous portraits, namely at the mints of Sardes, Dura, and a subsidiary mint in Bactria⁵⁰⁵. Pergamum, however, does not depict the deceased king as horned⁵⁰⁶. There are several sources detailing the family myth of Seleucus' horns, among them Appian *Syr.* 57 and Libanius 11.93. Smith, on the incorrect assumption that all coin portraits of Seleucus I are horned, (1988) 40 cites *Suda s.v. Seleucus*, an aetiological account, which he translates "They say that when Seleucus was with Alexander once when he was sacrificing a bull which tried to escape, only Seleucus by seizing its horns was able to control it. And because of this horns were put on the head of his statue." Given the Seleucid family's penchant for its own mythology, with the story of the Seleucid anchor being the best example, this story can be put into the context of dynastic history. One potential problem with this interpretation is that the horns do not appear on all portraits at all mints, the exception being Pergamum. However, Pergamum was independent of the Seleucids at this point and so its coinage existed outside the Seleucid dynastic context.

Smith gives an alternative reading of the horns, arguing that they are in fact derived from Dionysus, who is presented as a horned man in Euripides: *Bacchae* 610-20. Smith (1988 41 n.79) also cites Hellenistic and Roman representations of the horned Dionysus. This is not problematic in itself, however, given that we have little or no other Dionysian imagery on Seleucid coinage, I find Smith's arguments difficult to accept⁵⁰⁷. Nor do any of the cities which feature the horned portraits of Seleucus I have any

⁵⁰⁴The purpose of this introduction is to contextualise the Seleucid ruler cult as it pertains to the relevant portraiture, and therefore does not seek to analyse the usages of images of gods. For a full discussion (with substantial bibliography) of all depictions of gods and their uses on early Seleucid coinage see Houghton (2002: 6). The main exception to the usage of divine imagery is of course the warlike imagery of horses and elephants.

⁵⁰⁵ Houghton (2002) 114

⁵⁰⁶ *ibid*

⁵⁰⁷ We do have extensive Dionysian imagery for Ptolemy Auletes in the form of a wreath, a more typical feature of the god

particular affinity for the god. It is also important to keep in mind that their use is regional and may carry some sort of local religious significance. Generalisations about a particular aspect of iconography are dangerous, as they often can be connected with specific religious or political phenomena. Smith's arguments also imply that horns were used far more often than they actually were, and ignores the contexts in which they were produced.

Moreover the history of the individual mints needs to be considered in order to gain a clear picture of the contexts for the usage of horns. The Ai Khanoum mint, or indeed its subsidiary exhibits a strikingly similar pattern of iconography to the mint of Sardes and its close relative Smyrna. Both mints begin with the horned portrait of Seleucus I (in silver), followed by the elderly portrait of Antiochus I, and finishing with the rejuvenated portrait of Antiochus I, which is discussed below in terms of deification. As will be discussed below, these two cities were major royal centres for Antiochus I, as is evidenced by the fact that he seems to have spent considerable amounts of time at both places respectively. Dura, the only other Seleucid mint to depict the horned Seleucus I, only produced bronze coins, which would normally indicate a civic ruler cult, and these coins are therefore unrelated to the silver denominations.⁵⁰⁸ Thus it would seem that at least where silver is concerned, only mints under the direct control of Antiochus I minted the horned Seleucus portraits, perhaps indicating that the horns had a significance to Antiochus I himself, whether in the context of the family mythology or otherwise. Because these coins were minted so early in the Seleucid era, perhaps establishing the divine origins of the new royal family was necessary to legitimise their rule, thus explaining the need for divine imagery, which disappears from silver coinage after Seleucus I, only to re-emerge with Antiochus IV.

Nevertheless, the divinity of Seleucus I set the stage for the deification of future kings. Granted, the manifestation of this on silver coins is rare, and always served a particular royal need. Deification was much more far-ranging on bronze, affecting

⁵⁰⁸ Seleucus I was the founder of Dura and a civic cult for him is recorded there (Rostovtseff 1935, 59)

virtually every Seleucid king at one mint or another. This is best discussed in terms of civic autonomy, particularly with respect to civic responses to localised conflict.

Antiochus I

Historical Background

The son of Seleucus I, Antiochus I initially ruled as a satrap in Babylonia and Iran, and is indeed well-represented in Babylonian sources for his work there, particularly on religious matters⁵⁰⁹. At the death of his father in 281 he became king, leaving the rule of the eastern provinces to his son, Seleucus. Perhaps motivated by perception of Seleucid instability, Ptolemy II invaded Asia Minor in what was to become the First Syrian War. This ended with a treaty which ceded Asia Minor to the Seleucid king, but left Cilicia to the Ptolemies.⁵¹⁰ Further trouble arose from the Galatians in 277⁵¹¹, who were defeated in 275 at the so-called Battle of the Elephants⁵¹². For this the Greek cities of Asia Minor bestowed upon Antiochus I the title Soter, and established cults in his honour.⁵¹³ Much of Antiochus I's reign was relatively peaceful, with only minor conflicts⁵¹⁴. Written sources would seem to indicate that he spent much of his time establishing a positive relationship with the cities of the Seleucid empire,⁵¹⁵ and numismatic evidence often supports this given the large number of deified coins.

Summary of Mints and Coins

Houghton lists 35 mints for Antiochus I⁵¹⁶, however, it is mainly the mints of Ai Khanoum and Smyrna that are of interest to this argument due to their consistent pattern of rejuvenation. These coins are royal gold and silver only. Bronze coinage at Ai

⁵⁰⁹ He refounded the city of Merv as Antiocheia (Pliny 6.47) (Grayson 11) A cylinder at Borsippa gives details of his restoration of the temple of Esaglia, which is extensively discussed in. Kuhrt (1991 71-96) and Sherwin-White (1983: 256-70)

⁵¹⁰ Austin (1991) no. 141

⁵¹¹ Mitchell (1993) 15-16

⁵¹² Worrle (1975) 59-87

⁵¹³ *CIG* 4458

⁵¹⁴ Houghton (2002) 113

⁵¹⁵ *op. cit.* n. 11-15

⁵¹⁶ Houghton (2002) 117-119

Khanoum in particular bore a wide variety of types, none of them royal portraits.⁵¹⁷ It is perhaps worth noting that the mint of Antioch was not the central mint of the Seleucid empire as was later to become the case, since its coins do not follow any patterns of iconography to suggest any direct involvement on the part of the king.

Iconography

Antiochus I was the first Seleucid to place his own portrait on coinage, the first mint being at Ai Khanoum, the initial royal centre of his empire. The earliest portraits are also his most easily recognisable, as they portray him as a shockingly elderly man, despite the fact that he was only in his late forties when they were first minted. Although highly subjective, there is a great deal of scholarly consensus that the ageing presented in this portrait is unrealistic and excessive.⁵¹⁸ However, given that Antiochus I was present in Bactria at the time these were minted, we may reasonably assume that these were nevertheless realistic portraits. But why would Antiochus I choose to present himself in such an unflattering manner, albeit realistic? Previous to this issue, all coin portraiture had either depicted the gods, in which case it is perhaps not proper to speak of portraiture at all, or deceased, deified kings, namely Alexander and Seleucus I. Alexander's portraits were idealised to reflect deification, and importantly, we have no extant portraits from his lifetime. One would be hard-pressed to classify Seleucus I's portraits as idealised, but with their horns they are nonetheless deified. In addition to being the first portraits of the living ruler, the harshly realistic Ai Khanoum portraits, with their deep wrinkles and thinning hair present a massive departure from previous deified portraiture, thus emphasising the king's humanity. As the un-deified ruler, Antiochus I could not portray himself in an idealised fashion, as it would have raised questions as his divinity. The living ruler does not seem to have been worshipped as a god at this point in Seleucid history, at least not at his own instigation; perhaps a deified image would have been controversial. A useful parallel to this early Seleucid coinage would be the harshly

⁵¹⁷ Houghton (2002) cat. nos. 440-460

⁵¹⁸ Houghton (2002) 115 Smith (1988) 15

realistic and unflattering portraits of Ptolemy I who was the first Hellenistic king to break with the tradition of the idealised Alexander.

B. R. Brown attempts to explain the harshly realistic portraits of Antiochus I in terms of a shift from the “dramatic style” of the portraits of Seleucus I.⁵¹⁹ In the first instance it is not clear what Brown means by this so-called dramatic style; although she refers to it throughout, she cites no other scholars who use the term, so it does not seem to refer to any scholarly convention. With regard to the Sardes and Pergamene portraits of Seleucus I, she argues “...the two posthumous Seleukos heads, as new numismatic creations in the full dramatic style, mark the terminus of that style in coin portraits.”⁵²⁰ She goes on to contrast the portraits of the respective kings, “From the first die on, the portrait [of Antiochus I] was a plain, forthright presentation in bold, simplified form. Gone are the chiaroscuro and the drama. Where the forms of Seleukos’ head are soft, those of Antiochos’ head are hard; where they are dissolved in light and shade, those of Antiochos’ are tactile and clear; where they are multi-formed and rich; those of Antiochos are reduced and spare; where they are outlined in an intricate system of active curves, Antiochos’ are contained and tend to the rectilinear. The homely features of Antiochos I are plainly stated. The eye is widely distended, but even that becomes not a focus of drama, but an element in a kind of foursquare geometry.”⁵²¹ To illustrate her point, Brown selects a coin of Antiochus I from Seleucia⁵²², but states clearly that the Seleucus I portraits against which she contrasts those of Antiochus I are from Sardes and Pergamon. On this basis alone, Brown’s arguments are difficult to accept; if one wanted to argue for a change in style, it would be best to draw upon coins from the same mint, given the potential extent of geographical variation. While I do accept that there are changes in iconography between the dynasty’s first two kings, it is best explained in

⁵¹⁹ Brown (1995, 34) Brown’s transliterations are retained.

⁵²⁰ *ibid*

⁵²¹ Brown (1995) 34-35 It must be admitted that I find Brown’s terminology confusing, particularly with regard to what is meant by “foursquare geometry.” Her discussions of the uses of light and shade are highly vague, with little to no discussion of exactly how the modelling of the face manifests itself. However, the extent to which uses of light and shade can be discussed in relation to coins is difficult, as coins are particularly subject to wear, and thus not always able to provide insight onto the techniques used to create them. For example, unless wrinkles were carved deeply into the die, they would be especially prone to damage, and even there the flan itself would need to be particularly thick.

⁵²² *ibid*

terms of the fact that with Seleucus I we have a deified portrait whereas with Antiochus I we have the portrait of the living ruler. Even assuming that the portraits of Seleucus I are accurate and true to life, there is also the issue that we have no portrait record of Antiochus I's mother, Apama, and so it is very possible that he simply resembled her more than his father, thus accounting for differences in appearance⁵²³.



Figure 56 Early portrait of Antiochus I at Ai Khanoum. Houghton (2002) cat. no. 437



Figure 57 Late portrait of Antiochus I at Ai Khanoum. Note the rejuvenation. Newell (1937) 696

At Ai Khanoum Antiochus I's portrait dramatically decreases in age (Figures 56 and 57 respectively). Whether in gold or silver denominations, this was always the case, suggesting a deliberate policy on the matter. While one cannot rule out vanity as the cause for this, one would have expected more consistency throughout the empire if this was the case. Newell interpreted this cautiously, arguing that, "All that can be said is that there seems to have been a tendency, manifested among some of the die-cutters, to idealise his features."⁵²⁴ Houghton argues that this rejuvenation is a hint at divinity, but does not elaborate on this any further.⁵²⁵ That this rejuvenation at Ai Khanoum is deliberate is clear because other eastern mints, namely Ecbatana, present a consistently elderly portrait. On this basis alone it would be difficult to infer that we have the

⁵²³ Grainger (1990) 139 Grainger further suggests that the unattractive appearance of Antiochus I may be due to the fact that he had "bad teeth," but this is both subjective and unclear.

⁵²⁴ Newell (1937) 243 Newell identified the mint as Bactra, which has recently been re-identified as Ai Khanoum, due to the similarity of the mintmark to the stamps on bricks at Ai Khanoum (Kritt 1996 27-30).

⁵²⁵ Houghton (2002) 115

beginnings of a localised ruler cult at Ai Khanoum. However, the pattern re-emerges at Smyrna (Figures 58 and 59, respectively), where Antiochus I is initially presented as an elderly man, but later rejuvenated. Although his initial royal residence was in Bactria, Antiochus I moved to Sardes, whose mint's links to Smyrna are certain, but for which there is no scholarly consensus.⁵²⁶ Smyrna was famous for its loyalty to the Seleucids, and also for its uninterrupted ruler cult from Seleucus I until the rebellion of Antiochus Hierax.⁵²⁷ Within the context of the consistent rejuvenation of the king, it would seem that there may well have been a ruler cult in areas where the king had resided, with the rejuvenation as evidence for a desire to honour the king. We do not have any definite written sources of a ruler cult at either Sardes or Ai Khanoum, but this inference nevertheless stands.



Figure 58 Older portrait of Antiochus I at Smyrna. Newell (1941) 1456



Figure 59 Idealised portrait of Antiochus I at Smyrna. Newell (1941) 1494. Note the rejuvenation.

⁵²⁶ Stylistic similarities between the elderly portraits of Smyrna and those of Sardes are apparent, as they both feature close lying hair (Houghton 2002 cat. nos. 310 and 324). Houghton (2002 121) has identified a series of coins with control links to both Smyrna and Sardes, and argues that they could equally be linked to either city. The exact relationship between the two cities remains uncertain.

⁵²⁷ Houghton (2002) 120

It would therefore seem that this ruler cult tended to move with the king, establishing itself either in the “capital”⁵²⁸ or in very close proximity. Consistency at mints so far apart and yet so closely associated with the king would suggest some sort of royal involvement, especially considering that these are portraits minted in silver. This consistency in portraiture, particularly in the contexts of the rejuvenation and the ruler cult of Smyrna makes one wonder if this is not the beginning of some sort of makeshift state cult, perhaps anticipating that of Antiochus III. After all, a state ruler cult would need to evolve from pre-existing structures. That having been said, we have no evidence that this ruler cult, however closely *associated* with the king, was *forced* on the cities by the king. Sardes, the official second capital of Antiochus I, presents him as consistently elderly. Moreover, it would stand to reason that cities with everyday dealings with the king would also have been more likely to deify him if he proved to be a competent ruler, which would explain possible civic ruler cults at the respective capitals. Other cities of the empire would not have had such a close connexion with the king, and therefore would have been less likely to form cults. Indeed, the other cities of the empire tended to portray him as consistently elderly.

The fact that localised ruler cults manifested themselves in the silver coinages of Antiochus I does require explanation, as numismatic evidence for the ruler cult is usually in the form of bronze coinage. It is important to keep in mind that Antiochus I was only the second Seleucid king, and the structures of what was to become the Seleucid empire, which were never particularly strong, had not yet been established. Control over the royal image, even in silver coinage, would have remained in the hands of the cities in the absence of a heavily centralised government. The empire was also at its largest extent, reducing the possibility for the ruler to become heavily involved in the creation of a centralised image. That having been said, because of the lack of centralised government, Antiochus I may have had more opportunity to interact with his subjects, as opposed to the later kings who ruled from Antioch, thus creating the desire for ruler cults in the areas he ruled most closely.

⁵²⁸ It is difficult to speak of anything like a modern concept of capital for the Seleucids, particularly this early in their history.

Although it was the cities who deified Antiochus I, this divinity would doubtlessly have benefited the king himself. Divinising epithets such as Soter, Euergetes, and Theos served to justify the king's rule, even when bestowed by an outside source. While it would be incorrect to imply that a hereditary monarch strictly needed to justify his rule, the tendency for rebellion in the Seleucid empire created a political reality in which the king needed to retain popularity among his subjects, particularly in the early days of the Seleucids. An explicitly self-divinising image would perhaps have been too rash, but the civic deification on the coins of Antiochus I would certainly have aided his reputation.

Antiochus IV

Historical Background

Antiochus IV is one of the most widely discussed of the Seleucid kings, particularly in relation to the Maccabean revolt. Antiochus IV was originally a regent for the young son of Seleucus IV, known as “Antiochus the Boy”, and is blamed for the death of this young prince in late 175⁵²⁹, although nothing can be proved with any certainty. His reign began with an invasion of Egypt; although the purposes of this are unclear, numismatic evidence would support annexation as his final goal. He is also well-known for instituting a wide-ranging shift in coin production, allowing cities to mint their own bronze on a wide scale, discussed extensively in the chapter on Autonomy. Antiochus IV has a reputation in both ancient and modern scholarship for eccentricity, and is one of the more controversial Seleucids because of this. He stood for local office in Antioch⁵³⁰, and ceded the tax revenues of two Cilician cities to his concubine, Antiochis⁵³¹, mother of the usurper Alexander Balas. His use of the title Epiphanes has sparked the most controversy among scholars today, as it is unclear whether or not he deliberately intended to associate himself with Zeus⁵³². On coins, whether in silver or bronze, he is one of the most widely and explicitly deified of the Seleucid kings.

Summary of coins and mints

⁵²⁹ Diod 30.7.2

⁵³⁰ Polybius 26.1.1

⁵³¹ 2 Mac 4.20

⁵³² Mørkholm (1963) 34-53

Antiochus IV minted at all of the major Seleucid mints, including Tarsus, Antioch, Ake, Ptolemais, and Seleucia on the Tigris, as well as throughout Phoenicia⁵³³. Silver tetradrachm portrait coins are the centre of this discussion, and are mainly limited to the mints of Antioch and Ake-Ptolemais, the two main royal centres for Antiochus IV. In the main, bronze portrait coins under Antiochus IV began to diminish because of his policy of turning the mints over to the cities; however, there are exceptions to this.

Iconography

In a similar fashion to Antiochus I, Antiochus IV's portraits decrease in age, on this occasion at the mints of Antioch and Ake-Ptolemais. This was first noted by Babelon⁵³⁴, later to be discussed by Brett, who states, "The contrast between the heads of Antiochus is most noticeable at Ake-Ptolemais, where he is first portrayed as slightly bald, with full face and heavy jowls, whereas later his forehead is covered with clusters of curly locks, and the youthfulness of his face is accentuated. The same metamorphosis is observable on the coinage of Antioch (Figure 60)."⁵³⁵ The fact that this rejuvenation took place at two mints would suggest that this was a deliberate policy set forth by the king himself, rather than the idiosyncrasy of a single mint.



Figure 60 Silver Tetradrachm of Antiochus IV at Antioch (early reign), Houghton (1983) cat. no 776. Image courtesy of www.wildwinds.com

This rejuvenation can be taken as a sign of divinity, but it is clear that the king intended to be deified early because his early silver coins of Antioch feature stars decorating ends of his diadem. As Mørkholm argues, "the stars may reflect...the wish of the king to be regarded as a god on earth, separated from the rest of mankind by his

⁵³³ Houghton (1983) 11

⁵³⁴ Babelon (1890) XCIII

⁵³⁵ Brett (1945) 19

divine and celestial nature.”⁵³⁶ The use of stars was an innovation, and seems to be unique to Antiochus IV, but they are a subtle device, as the portrait itself remains realistic and unadorned. Still, it is clear that there was some attempt at divinising features from the start of the king’s reign. The question then turns to why this may have been the case, as it hardly seems likely that Antiochus IV wanted to show himself as deified for his own sake. Given the murky beginning of his reign, deifying imagery may have served to establish him as a legitimate king, perhaps justifying the suspicious death of his predecessor. This has a parallel in the use of the crown of Helios by Antiochus VI, whose youth demanded that his rule be justified. Like Antiochus I, Antiochus IV had the task of effectively establishing a new royal family, with deification being a major justification for his rule. There was also the more general problem of Seleucid rule, as the areas had been economically depleted by the Roman indemnity. Child-kings also created instability, which called for a stronger leader, thus explaining Antiochus IV’s need for a deified image.



Figure 61 Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus IV from Antioch second Series, Mørkholm (1963) 39 Mørkholm argues that these early portraits of Antioch are slightly idealised, with fine features, and a “delicately curved nose,” but that they should ultimately be regarded as realistic because they contain a receding hairline.⁵³⁷ He identifies a second series of portraits of Antioch, in which Antiochus IV’s nose has become considerably straighter, and in which he has acquired more hair (Figure 61). As he argues, “There can be no doubt that in Series II the portrait of the living person has disappeared. In its place we find a pathetic representation of a god or hero, separated from mankind in timeless youthfulness.”⁵³⁸ Mørkholm argues strongly for the existence of the “heavenward

⁵³⁶ Mørkholm (1963) 18

⁵³⁷ Mørkholm (1963) 57

⁵³⁸ Mørkholm (1963) 58

glance” of Alexander in the final series of portraits of Antiochus IV, minted after his famous Zeus and Apollo coins.⁵³⁹ While it is clear that this apparent programme of rejuvenation is a reflection of the king’s desire to present himself as divine, it is best to cast this in concrete terms, whether in terms of the new uniformity in features, thickening of the hair, or the stars on the diadem ends. As discussed previously, the upward glance of Alexander is an extremely subjective topic, impossible to apply with any certainty.



Figure 62 Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus IV at Ake Ptolemais (early reign), Morkholm (1963) 11

A similar pattern of rejuvenation occurs at Ake-Ptolemais. The earliest portraits depict him with wrinkles around the mouth and ear, with a more pronounced receding hairline even than at Antioch (Figure 62). As Mørkholm argues, “We are looking at a person in his forties, but still of unimpaired strength and energy. There can be no doubt that this die gives us the most trustworthy portrait of the man Antiochus.”⁵⁴⁰ I disagree with Mørkholm’s method in this instance, as it is unsound to argue that the most unflattering portrait is necessarily the most realistic. Furthermore, there does not seem to be any specific connexion between Antiochus IV and Ake-Ptolemais; indeed it was very much a secondary mint to Antioch;⁵⁴¹ if this had been a personal capital for the king, one could make the case that this portrait was the most true to life, but Antioch remained the central mint.⁵⁴²

⁵³⁹ Morkholm (1963) 61

⁵⁴⁰ Morkholm (1963) 62

⁵⁴¹ Morkholm (1966) 112

⁵⁴² *ibid*



Figure 63 Silver Tetradrachm of Antiochus IV at Ake-Ptolemais (later portrait), Houghton (1983) cat. no. 785 Image courtesy of <http://www.wildwinds.com>

That having been said, the harsh realism of the early portraits of Ake-Ptolemais serves to highlight the rejuvenation of later portraits. Mørkholm's second series depicts the king with more hair and fewer wrinkles, culminating in the flowing haired portraits of the final issues (Figure 63). As before, Mørkholm pushes the idea of divinity too far when he argues that the hairstyle is meant to recall the anastole of Alexander.⁵⁴³ As with the upward glance, this is an imprecise term. We also do not have any evidence of Antiochus IV assimilating himself to Alexander, or of any particular affinity of Antiochus IV to Alexander. It is interesting that he was originally named Mithridates, only changing his name to Antiochus later; this choice of name suggests a greater affinity to his father than to Alexander.

The rejuvenating portraits only seem to occur at the mints of Ake-Ptolemais and Antioch, but this would seem to be explicable in terms of these cities being the major mints of Antiochus IV. More specific connexions to these mints are not known. Unlike Antiochus I, we do not have any written evidence that the king moved his capital to these cities. That having been said, given Ake-Ptolemais' proximity to the Ptolemaic kingdom, and given that we have scanty details of a Seleucid invasion of Egypt, perhaps Ake-Ptolemais served as a sort of military base, minting coins for the Egyptian expedition. The city seems to have retained a fair amount of recognition of the king, given the tendency to deify him, and so it may have been given special status on account of its role in the war. Other mints do not seem to have produced large quantities of coinage for Antiochus IV, but it is important to keep in mind that scholarship on Seleucids after

⁵⁴³ Mørkholm (1963) 62

Antiochus III can be extremely limited in scope. That having been said, Antiochus IV did turn over the production of bronze coinage to the mints, and this policy may well have been reflected in silver. Lastly, the sheer quantity of coins produced under Antiochus III may have meant that the minting of new coins was not necessary. In the same light, Antiochus IV seems to have had a high regard for his father, given his choice of name, and the retention of his coins may have been intended as filial piety.



Figure 64 Bronze coin of Antiochus IV, fully idealised and deified. SNG Spaer cat. no. 1008

Antiochus IV was the first Seleucid to be presented on coins with a radiate crown, obviously referring to Helios (Figure 64).⁵⁴⁴ This led Green to argue that Antiochus IV attempted to identify himself with Helios to justify his rule after the mysterious death of Antiochus the Boy.⁵⁴⁵ As he puts it, “The symbolism of the sun as first among all heavenly bodies, the all-powerful universal eye of the world...is obvious.”⁵⁴⁶ Considering that the radiate crown only appears on very rare bronze hemidrachms and obols of Antioch⁵⁴⁷, it is clear that Green drastically overestimates the ruler’s affinity with that god. Moreover, the majority of radiate bronzes of Antiochus IV were municipal coinages, and the deification can be seen in this context as a mark of gratitude on the part of the cities.

The innovation of the radiate crown may also have its Egyptian origins; Svoronos argued that it was meant to refer to the radiate crowns of Ptolemy IV and V.⁵⁴⁸ This would be completely in character with the increase in Egyptianising imagery such as Isis and Serapis on the Syrian bronze issues of Antiochus IV, minted in anticipation of his

⁵⁴⁴ Mørkholm (1963) 20

⁵⁴⁵ Green (1990) 438

⁵⁴⁶ *ibid*

⁵⁴⁷ Mørkholm (1963) 20

⁵⁴⁸ Svoronos (1904) vol. III pl. xxvi 1-2; 4-9

Egyptian invasion.⁵⁴⁹ As Morkholm argued, “..the choice of these unusual types can best be explained as a propaganda measure, to make the populace of Syria acquainted with the king’s policy toward Egypt and perhaps prepare them for war.”⁵⁵⁰ Antiochus IV’s aims and objectives in invading Egypt are not clear to us, but it would seem that the introduction of Egyptian types on Syrian coins would perhaps indicate that he intended to annexe Egypt, and establishing a hybrid coinage was meant to ease the transition from a Seleucid economy to a pan-Hellenistic economy.

Within the context of Phoenician coinage the radiate crown has a third possible explanation. Phoenician cities granted autonomy by Antiochus IV may well have deified the ruler in gratitude, but it is important to keep in mind that Phoenicia alternated considerably between Ptolemaic and Seleucid control, with Seleucid rule only having been established from the reign of Antiochus III. Given the amount of trade between Egypt and Phoenicia, the usage of the radiate crown would have had economic uses, as an image common to both empires may well have facilitated trade between them.

As is the case with many bronze coin types, sigyllographic parallels with the radiate portraits are abundant.⁵⁵¹ The radiate seal impressions are perhaps reflective of the increased need for royal correspondence on the part of Antiochus IV, as it was under his reign that the control of bronze coinage was turned over to the mints. The question then turns to why Antiochus IV did not use this image on his silver coins, the mandates for which would surely have contained seals. While one may debate as to whether an explicitly divinised image on silver would have created ideological opposition, the radiate portrait would have been a massive departure from the traditional portrait, creating an unstable currency. Given the celestial imagery on silver coins of Antioch and Ake-Ptolemas, it may be fair to say that Antiochus IV wanted to associate himself with Helios on silver portraits, but nevertheless needed to make the coinage’s economic viability a top priority.

⁵⁴⁹ Morkholm (1963) 21-22

⁵⁵⁰ *ibid*

⁵⁵¹ Rostovtseff (1932) 28 cat. no. 6-10



Figure 65 Zeus portrait of Antiochus IV, (Newell, 1919, 59)

More controversial are the Zeus “portraits” issued by Antiochus IV in the midst of his Antiochene portraits (Figure 65). Cerfaux and Tondrian argue that these Zeus portraits contain the features of Antiochus IV, reflective of the king’s wish to be assimilated to that god.⁵⁵² Morkholm admits that this is an easy comparison to make, as the features of the Antiochus’ portraits are idealised, but suggest that this is due to similarities in die engravers rather than anything deliberate.⁵⁵³ Furthermore, he argues that the portraits of Apollo issued by Antiochus IV bear significant resemblance to the king, but that Antiochus IV is never associated with him⁵⁵⁴. Furthermore we cannot even assume that the central ruler cult of his father may have been continued by Antiochus IV, since his coins display a wide variety of religious epithets⁵⁵⁵. This would suggest that the epithets were given by the cities, and not chosen by the king himself, which would in turn indicate that the civic ruler cult was alive and well. This would make a great deal of sense in the context of Antiochus IV’s de-centralising of the Seleucid mints. Furthermore we have the issue of the title Epiphanes⁵⁵⁶, which, although attested from his lifetime, does not appear on his coins until after his death. The meaning of this term is also imprecise, and has been taken to mean “The god manifest,” but need not have this meaning without the addition of the word “Theos,” and based on this Morkholm argues that it should simply be translated as “Illustrious.”⁵⁵⁷ Indeed if Antiochus IV had wanted a permanent association with Zeus, and had wanted to enforce a state cult, one would have expected a far more consistent use of epithets.

⁵⁵² Cerfaux (1957) 241

⁵⁵³ Morkholm (1963) 58

⁵⁵⁴ Morkholm (1963) 60

⁵⁵⁵ Morkholm (1963) 68-9

⁵⁵⁶ Pol 26.1.1a

⁵⁵⁷ Morkholm (1966) 133

Furthermore, the Zeus portraits disappear from the coinage to be replaced by the idealised portrait of the king discussed above. If Antiochus IV had wanted a strong association with Zeus, he would have retained this type. These issues were very short lived, almost certainly for economic reasons; at this point the current portrait of the king had become a mainstay, and any change from this had the potential to de-stabilise the economy. Moreover it would not make sense for Antiochus IV to effectively de-deify himself, as this would surely raise questions about his competence as king, and so in this context it is best to define these coins as experimental, at least in the iconographical sense, perhaps reflective of the king's personal preference for Zeus. This has its parallels in the study of the coinages of Antiochus III, whose large eyes in the middle issues Houghton has incorrectly deemed to be deifying.

Demetrius I Soter

The silver coinages of Demetrius I Soter are not remarkable⁵⁵⁸ except for an isolated issue of Ecbatana, which features a star in the manner of Antiochus IV.⁵⁵⁹ Houghton does not attempt to explain the use of the star⁵⁶⁰, but I would argue that it can be explained fairly easily in terms of the king's liberation of the east from the usurper Timarchus, for which he received the honorific title "Soter." Ecbatana may well have sought to avoid indemnity from the legitimate king and sought to propitiate him through deifying him. However, it may well have been the case that the city had a localised ruler cult; it is important to keep in mind that the title Soter became a standard throughout the Seleucid empire, and was not restricted to a single mint⁵⁶¹. Additionally, Timarchus' rule at Ecbatana may have been particularly oppressive, and the city may have wished to express particular gratitude, although little is known of the short reign of the usurper. Ecbatana was far removed from the heartland of the Seleucid empire, and as such would have experienced *de facto* autonomy, thus creating the need to deify the Seleucid ruler in its own way. Ecbatana also may have sought the protection of Demetrius I, whose interests would have centred on Antioch, and its deification of the ruler may also be taken

⁵⁵⁸ Houghton (1989) 16 describes slight ageing of the portrait

⁵⁵⁹ Houghton (1993) 46

⁵⁶⁰ Houghton (1993) 51

⁵⁶¹ *ibid*

as a sign of the city's need to solidify its allegiance with the Seleucids, in spite of its remote location.

The deified Ecbatana issues of Demetrius I also must be seen in the context of a civic reaction to usurpation. With Seleucus II and Demetrius II there was a clear need for the ruler to change his image in accordance with the changing political situation, and indeed kings themselves manipulated their personal imagery with varying degrees of success. In this case, the city changed the image of the king to reassert its adherence to the Seleucid kingdom. One would have expected a self-deification on the part of the ruler, as was the case with Antiochus IV or VI, as there would have been an onus on the king to reclaim the lost areas. However, Demetrius I does not seem to have been a strong king nor a popular one⁵⁶², and self-advertisement does not seem to have been among his talents. That having been said, Demetrius I must have retained some popularity in the east or he would not have been deified as such. Civic deification on silver coins may also be evidence for the extent to which Antiochus IV's coinage policies had taken hold; Antiochus IV had turned bronze over to the cities, and this apparent autonomy of silver coinage may be indicative of the next logical step. However, complete numismatic autonomy was never achieved for Ecbatana, as the Parthian kingdom overran the area under Demetrius II, so there is unfortunately no evidence for how the mint's approach to coinage would have evolved.

Conclusion

Whether as part of a civic or royal programme, deification had the effect of legitimising the king's power. With Antiochus I, the cities still controlled the image of the king on silver coinage, and his apotheosis may be seen in terms of civic support for his rule. With Antiochus IV, divinity became much more centralised on silver coins, as the king needed to justify not only the suspicious beginnings of his reign, but Seleucid power in general after the disastrous end to the reign of his father. With Demetrius I we

⁵⁶² Grainger (1997) 41 This unpopularity was due to many factors; at the beginning of his reign he arranged to have the child-king Antiochus V killed (App. Syr. 47). He maintained some popularity in the east due to his suppression of Timarchus, but this success was localised. He effectively abandoned Antioch upon the advances of Alexander Balas (Justin 35.1.5), leaving the usurper to easily seize the Seleucid throne.

see a return to civic honours on silver coins, indicative of the weakening of Seleucid control in the east, but not of Seleucid popularity.

Chapter 9

Seleucid Queens: Legitimacy, Ruler Cult and Power

Introduction

Few Seleucid queens are depicted on coins, and thus it is difficult to identify female portraits in other media. The functions of female portraiture are generally very similar to those of kings, with the exceptions proving the rule. One uniquely feminine portrait function is that of the legitimiser; when a king ascended to the throne at a very young age the mother served as a regent, thus creating the need for a jugate portrait. Women also seem to have been well-represented among portraits indicating a civic ruler cult, and perhaps also the state cult in the case of Cleopatra Thea. Warlike imagery is virtually non-existent in female portraiture, but it is important to keep in mind that it is exceedingly rare in Seleucid male portraiture, particularly among the legitimate kings. In the coinage of Cleopatra Thea, by far the most prolific coin issuer of the Seleucid queens, we have a more generalised image of power and authority, with an image that varied in accordance with royal need; in fact the portraits of Cleopatra Thea, jugate or otherwise, occupy a class by themselves.

All Seleucid kings married; one of the primary functions of these marriages was to cement alliances with other kingdoms. Seleucus I's marriage to the Bactrian princess Apama justified his rule in the east, Antiochus Hierax's marriage to Laodike of Bithynia aided his takeover of Asia Minor, and virtually all of the Seleucid kings after Alexander Balas married Ptolemaic princesses, securing political alliances with their nearest and most powerful rival. However, this is not to say that women had no active role in political life. For example, Laodike, mother of Seleucus II and Antiochus Hierax, was instrumental in facilitating Hierax's rise to power, considering that he was only fourteen at the time of his accession.⁵⁶³ It is perhaps surprising in this context that we do not have more female portraits of Seleucid queens. Even in the role of a wife and mother, queens

⁵⁶³ Plutarch *Moralia* 489a Ogden (1999) 133

were a vital part of royal life. However, familial piety does not seem to have been a feature of Seleucid coinage after Seleucus II. Whatever their political influence, women were rarely the sole rulers of the Seleucid empire, and even a jugate coin would send a mixed message about who was in control. Alternating portraits between king and queen could have been potentially economically destabilising in a large area. The Ptolemies were able to use coinage to commemorate wives and mothers on coinage because their rule was stable and their kingdom small; for the Seleucids this was not possible.

Laodike, Wife of Antiochus IV and Seleucus IV, mother of Demetrius I

Due to the sheer number of Seleucid queens named Laodike, there is no scholarly consensus on the chronological position of this particular queen within the timeline of Seleucid queens. Hoover identifies her as Laodike IV, which is the enumeration followed here, but gives no explanation for this placement of the queen.⁵⁶⁴ Grainger places her fifteenth in the Seleucid line of Laodikai⁵⁶⁵, but his line includes all women associated with the Seleucid royal family using the name Laodike, including foreigners married into the Seleucid family such as Laodike of Bithynia⁵⁶⁶, and all daughters who receive mentions in the sources; however, he does not differentiate these from the Seleucid queens bearing the name. This method is unbearably confusing and as such is useless. Ogden identifies her as Laodike VI⁵⁶⁷, based on wives and daughters of the immediate Seleucid family bearing the name, regardless of whether or not they became queen. Therefore it would seem that Hoover's placement of this queen is based on women named Laodike who actually became queen. Since there were Seleucid sons named Antiochus who never became king⁵⁶⁸, and who are never numbered as such, Hoover's numbering of the Laodikai in terms of queenship is preferable because it is internally consistent in its numbering of kings and queens. This not only reduces the vast numbers of Laodikai listed by Grainger, but gives preference for those of significant political influence. However, as this Laodike is the only one to have been portrayed on coinage, it will suffice for the purposes of this study to simply refer to her as Laodike.

⁵⁶⁴ Hoover (2002) 84

⁵⁶⁵ Grainger (1997) 50

⁵⁶⁶ *ibid*

⁵⁶⁷ Ogden (1999) 133

⁵⁶⁸ Ogden (1999) 147

This Laodike was the daughter of Antiochus III, and was initially married to her brother, known to us as “Antiochus the Son,” the eldest of Antiochus III’s children⁵⁶⁹. Upon his death she married her brother Seleucus IV, a union which produced the child-king known as Antiochus the Boy, and the future king Demetrius I⁵⁷⁰. After the death of Seleucus IV she married a further brother, Antiochus IV⁵⁷¹, their son being Antiochus V. While the original intent of Antiochus III’s marrying of her to the first brother may have been to keep the family line pure, perhaps taking its cue from the Ptolemaic approach, the separate branches of the family produced by the ensuing levirate brother-sister marriages caused much of the havoc that was to plague the later Seleucids.⁵⁷² In terms of Seleucid family life, it must be admitted that this situation was an odd one, given that the Seleucids did not usually practice brother-sister marriage. Grainger does not accept that this Laodike married three of her brothers successively, and states, inexplicably, that she was the mother of Demetrius II rather than Demetrius I, and furthermore that her parentage is unknown.⁵⁷³ Mørkholm does not accept Laodike’s unusual marital history as fact, but gives no explanation.⁵⁷⁴ As unusual as Laodike’s marital history may have been, and as distasteful as it may seem to many modern scholars⁵⁷⁵, there is no written evidence to suggest that it is historically inaccurate. It must be remembered that while brother-sister marriage was uncommon amongst the Seleucids, it was the rule for the Ptolemies, and therefore within the wider Hellenistic context Laodike’s marriages to her brothers are not as surprising as one might think. Another factor is that Seleucid marriage practices up until the reign of Laodike were otherwise incestuous, the best example being Antiochus I’s marriage to his stepmother⁵⁷⁶, and so in this context a brother-sister marriage is also understandable. Also not to be underestimated is the motive behind these successive marriages; the Ptolemaic kingdom was basically a peaceful one, albeit an incestuous one,

⁵⁶⁹ Appian Syr. 4-5 Antiochus the Son is an example of an Antiochus who never became king and therefore is never numbered as such.

⁵⁷⁰ Supplementum Epigraphiae Graecum (1923) vol. vii. 17

⁵⁷¹ OGIS 252

⁵⁷² Ogden (1999) 147

⁵⁷³ Grainger (1997) 50

⁵⁷⁴ Mørkholm (1967) Ch 2. *passim*

⁵⁷⁵ Macurdy (1932) Ch. 2 *passim* does not detail the life of this queen.

⁵⁷⁶ Appian Syr. 59-61

and these brother-sister marriages were intended to duplicate this. Antiochus III had suffered two usurpations, one from a distant relative, thus creating a desire to reduce the number of branches in the Seleucid family tree.



Figure 66 Bronze coin depicting Laodike IV mint unknown. Hoover (2002) 81ff.

On coinage Laodike is first portrayed singly on isolated bronze issues during the final year of the reign of Seleucus IV (Figure 66). Upon the death of Seleucus IV, she was depicted alongside her young son, known to us as Antiochus the Boy. She again makes a brief solo appearance on the bronze coinages of Antiochus IV. Finally, she is depicted conjoined with her son Demetrius; all these portraits would support evidence of marriages to Antiochus IV and Seleucus IV. Her marriage to Antiochus the Son is not supported by numismatic evidence but he died before becoming king, and so did not have a large role in Seleucid history.

The first depiction of Laodike appears on a bronze series from an uncertain mint, possibly Antioch on the Orontes.⁵⁷⁷ These coins were first minted under Seleucus IV, and seem to have continued into the reign of Antiochus IV, as discussed below. Little attempt has been made to identify the woman, although some scholars have identified her with Demeter.⁵⁷⁸ Hoover correctly argues that this should not be the case, since the woman bears no specific attributes connecting her to the goddess.⁵⁷⁹ Based on the clearer jugate portraits discussed below, Hoover identifies the woman as Laodike IV.⁵⁸⁰ From a religious perspective, Hoover argues that the usage of the veil on these coins indicates an

⁵⁷⁷ Hoover (2002) 81 Spaer (1998) 914-915 Houghton (1983) 90

⁵⁷⁸ Gardner (1890) 43

⁵⁷⁹ Hoover (2002) 82 This methodology is highly applicable to the tendency of many scholars to compare Hellenistic portraits with Alexander.

⁵⁸⁰ Hoover (2002) 82

attempt to associate the queen with Aphrodite in the Ptolemaic fashion.⁵⁸¹ However, not all scholars agree that the veil is meant to refer to Aphrodite; Davis and Kraay argue that the veil on Ptolemaic coinage is meant to define the portrait as posthumous; however, they do not give an explanation as to why this should be the case⁵⁸². Hoover further argues that the lack of a veil in her jugate portraits is meant to emphasise the queen mother's humanity whereas these are meant to refer to the Laodike's divinity;⁵⁸³ however, as the significance of the veil is difficult to determine precisely, it is not possible to make these analyses with any certainty. This is not to dismiss the religious context of these coins; on the contrary, the fact that these portraits appear on a localised bronze series would make it very likely that they are reflective of a local ruler cult in honour of the queen. The lack of numismatic precedent for a female portrait, does, in this context, require some explanation. Given that Laodike IV was the first Seleucid queen of the immediate Seleucid family, which would have been compounded by her marriages to two of her brothers, she may well have enjoyed more personal popularity than earlier Seleucid queens who married into the family from outside, thus leading to the establishment of a personal ruler cult.

As far as the political significance of these coins is concerned, Hoover argues that Seleucus IV ordered the minting of these portraits "...in order to promote an image of family stability for his regime, which tended to focus its efforts on recovery from the economic and political difficulties brought on by his Roman entanglements."⁵⁸⁴ He further suggests that they may have been issued to celebrate the birth of his son, thus emphasising the importance of the Seleucid family.⁵⁸⁵ It is perhaps unwise to overemphasise the political significance of a bronze series whose design may or may not have been ordered by the king. The lack of a definite location for these coins would also speak against any serious political significance. Also, the depiction of two different rulers on coins could have created confusion as to who controlled the Seleucid kingdom and therefore it does not seem likely that Seleucus IV would order that his queen's

⁵⁸¹ Hoover (2002) 84

⁵⁸² Davis and Kraay (1973) plates 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 28

⁵⁸³ Hoover (2002) 83

⁵⁸⁴ Hoover (2002) 85

⁵⁸⁵ *ibid*

portrait be placed on coins. Thus it is best to view these coins within the context of the civic ruler cult, whose image would have been chosen by city officials rather than the king.

The gold dual portraits of Laodike and Antiochus the Boy constitute the first Seleucid example of the jugate portrait of a mother and son. This young prince, whose reign was situated between those of Antiochus III and IV⁵⁸⁶, was only nine when he ascended the throne, thus creating the need for his mother to rule alongside him. Gold octodrachms were issued in Antioch, featuring the son's head in front of the mother's⁵⁸⁷. When compared to the jugate coins of Cleopatra Thea and her son Grypus, it is perhaps significant that the son's portrait is placed in front of the mother's, perhaps indicating the mother's recognition of her son as the legitimate ruler and acknowledging her regency as temporary. However, this may be an over-interpretation; the arrangement of the portrait heads may simply be seen as convention, since Ptolemaic jugate coins seem to prefer to place the male head in front. With its full cheeks and disproportionately large eyes, the king's portrait does appear very young, and so it would not perhaps have inspired much confidence in his abilities if the portrait were shown alone. While the intention of showing the mother's portrait as well may have been to imply stability, this in all likelihood would have created confusion as to who was actually in control of the kingdom, particularly within the context of the youth of the king. Another problem is that the jugate portrait had never before been used among the Seleucids, and thus a new approach to the royal image would have created even more uncertainty. In any case this confusion did not last long, as it seems that Antiochus IV, the uncle and future step-father of Antiochus the Boy, seems to have done away with him within a year of his accession.⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁶ It is unclear why this king, however short his reign may have been, is not numbered in the manner of other Seleucids. Of course, none of the Seleucids were numbered as such at the times of their reigns, as it is only their epithets that distinguish them. This Seleucid seems to have been the only one devoid of an epithet; perhaps it is for this reason that he is not numbered among the Seleucid kings. As discussed below, there is also the issue that the dual rule with his mother may have created confusion as to exactly who was in control.

⁵⁸⁷ Le Rider (1999) 187

⁵⁸⁸ Diod 30.7.2 While the death of Antiochus the Boy should be regarded as suspicious, it is difficult to put all the blame on his uncle. The fact that Laodike was willing to marry Antiochus IV after the death of her

Laodike's solo bronze portraits reappear during the early years of Antiochus IV, but by this time their use had spread to Antioch⁵⁸⁹, Seleucia⁵⁹⁰, and Ake-Ptolemais.⁵⁹¹ In the first instance the increase in the application of the queen's portrait is almost certainly due to the spread of her ruler cult. Longevity would have been a major factor in the increasing use of her image, since she had by this point been married to three Seleucid kings, and in this context should be seen as a legitimiser. Additionally, Antiochus IV may well have used her image to legitimise his role as the new king, having effectively usurped the position from his nephew.⁵⁹² As previously discussed in the section on Antiochus IV, this king used his own deified image to establish himself, and seems to have drawn upon the longevity and popularity of his wife to further establish his rule. In addition to the religious and political functions for the image of Laodike IV, the widespread use of her image also seems to have carried an economic benefit. A commonly used image always carried more economic viability than a new one, and from this series we can see how a new image quickly became an established one.



Figure 66 Jugate coin of Demetrius I and Laodike. Houghton (1983) 991

Laodike makes her final appearance on the early issues of Demetrius I, where she is pictured conjoined with her son (Figure 67). Traditionally this portrait has been identified as being Laodike, the wife of Demetrius I⁵⁹³, but for a variety of reasons I argue that this is inaccurate. First of all not all scholars agree on the identity of his wife,

son raises questions as to her involvement in his death. However, it is entirely possible that she married Antiochus IV as a means of self-preservation.

⁵⁸⁹ Spaer (1998) 963-973 Houghton (1983) 112-114

⁵⁹⁰ Spaer (1998) 1017-1040

⁵⁹¹ Spaer (1998) 1102-1107

⁵⁹² Hoover (2002) 85

⁵⁹³ Forer (1993) 57 Gardner BMC pl XV 1-2 Houghton (1993) 99

although a courtesan named Apama is mentioned in the ancient sources.⁵⁹⁴ Forrer argues that he married his sister Laodike, and identifies the woman in the portrait with her, but does not cite a source for this.⁵⁹⁵ In artistic terms, this portrait bears a significant likeness to the Laodike portraits previously discussed. One might argue that if the portrait is meant to represent Demetrius I's sister-wife that this could be a case of family resemblance, but the ancient literary sources do not offer any support of this. It is also unclear why Demetrius would picture his wife on his coins when her identity is so questionable. While it is possible that the wife of Demetrius I carried more political clout at the time than she is known for today, it still makes more sense to identify the portrait with his mother. By the time of her son's accession, Laodike's image had become well-established and doubtlessly carried some degree of personal popularity, given her ability to outlast three of her three husbands. Demetrius was also very young at the time of his accession and may have sought to use his mother's image to stabilise his rule.

Cleopatra Thea

Cleopatra Thea is possibly the most famous of the Seleucid queens, and certainly had the most eventful reign. As Bellinger puts it, Cleopatra Thea was "...the daughter of a king, the sister of two, the wife of three, and the mother of four!"⁵⁹⁶ Cleopatra Thea, the daughter of Ptolemy VI, first appears as the wife of Alexander Balas, a marriage clearly intended to solidify Ptolemaic control over Syria, although this of course was not the outcome.⁵⁹⁷ Upon his death she married Demetrius II, by whom she had Seleucus V and Antiochus VIII. When Demetrius II was captured by the Parthians, she married his brother Antiochus VII Sidetes, thus making him king⁵⁹⁸, by whom she had Antiochus XI Cyzicenus. The status of her marriage to Demetrius II at this time is unclear; we do not have any evidence of a divorce as such; perhaps his captivity was presumed to be permanent or perhaps it was acceptable for her to have two husbands. Additionally, this situation appears to have been unique in Seleucid history and so it is perhaps unwise to apply any strict rules. After the death of Antiochus VII Sidetes, Demetrius II returned

⁵⁹⁴ John of Antioch FHG IV 561

⁵⁹⁵ Forer (1993) 57

⁵⁹⁶ Bellinger (1949) 58

⁵⁹⁷ Justin 35.2.2 Jos. AJ 13.35-61 Bellinger (1949) 56

⁵⁹⁸ Jos. AJ 13.222-223

from his Parthian captivity, but Cleopatra Thea refused him refuge in Ake-Ptolemias, which she controlled at this time.⁵⁹⁹ Ancient and modern sources blame her for his subsequent murder at Tyre, but this is largely circumstantial.⁶⁰⁰ She ruled on her own briefly after this and indeed was the only Seleucid queen to rule in her own right. As her son Antiochus VIII came of age, she ruled alongside him for a few years. Her reign ended when Antiochus VIII poisoned her.⁶⁰¹

Cleopatra Thea, like Laodike VI, had a highly varied portrait record. Her first portrait is conjoined with that of her first husband, Alexander Balas, but with her head placed conspicuously in front, featuring Egyptian imagery. Her image then disappears from coinage until the death of Demetrius II, after which point she appears solo on silver coins of Antioch and Ake-Ptolemias, and was indeed the only Seleucid queen to have been portrayed singly on silver coinage. Her final issues are perhaps the best known, in which her portrait practically hides that of her son Grypus.



Figure 68 Jugate silver tetradrachm of Cleopatra Thea and Alexander Balas. Houghton (1983) 27 cat. no. 407

The early jugate portraits of Cleopatra Thea are remarkable in the first instance because her portrait appears in front of her husband's at the mint of Seleucia Pieria (Figure 68).⁶⁰² This does not necessarily suggest that she enjoyed any political power in her own right, but it does raise important questions. Alexander Balas, as discussed in the

⁵⁹⁹ Jos. AJ 13.268

⁶⁰⁰ See autonomy

⁶⁰¹ see Antiochus VIII

⁶⁰² Houghton (1983) 27 cat. no. 407

Usurpers chapter, was of questionable descent. While I argue strongly in favour of the idea that he was indeed the son of Antiochus IV, public perception was what mattered at the time. Marriage to a Ptolemaic princess, even one of limited personal political influence, was enough to legitimise Balas' power. Thus it would seem that Balas used his wife's image and its accompanying political clout to solidify his rule. It must be remembered that these issues were relatively short-lived, with Cleopatra Thea's image vanishing from them within a year. It must also be remembered that these issues seem to have been limited geographically. With regard to Seleucia Pieria in particular, Ptolemaic influence was especially important as the city had been under Ptolemaic control until 219, and in this context the portrayal of a Ptolemaic princess may well have helped to solidify Balas' rule there.

The specific portrayal of Cleopatra Thea on these early coins is drastically different from her image on her later coins. On these issues she is presented in a manner similar to that of other Ptolemaic royal ladies, with her hair styled in what has come to be termed "melon coiffure"⁶⁰³ i.e. many small braids gathered at the back into a chignon. This presentation would have guaranteed the coins' acceptability in the region because coins depicting women in this fashion would have circulated widely in the area. In contrast, Balas' image would need time to establish itself, as the majority of male portraiture in the area would have depicted Ptolemy I. Additionally, a jugate coinage would also have circulated in the area due to its Ptolemaic origins. This is in direct contrast to the jugate portraits of Laodike and her son, as this coin type was not established in the Seleucid empire. We also have available a short lived series of silver staters from the same mint depicting the queen alone, in much the same fashion. As before, solo portraits of Ptolemaic queens would have circulated in the area, rendering this an economically viable type.

⁶⁰³ Plantzos (1999) 47 and Richter (1968) cat. 617 use this term extensively but give no indication of its origins. One early use of this term appeared in A Koester "Hairdressing Among the Ancient Greeks" in *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* Vol 13 66 (September 1908) 350-353 and 356-358. The term refers to the resemblance of the braids to the bands on a melon rather than to the shape of the head (Green 1990 348). However the inventor of the term "melon coiffure" remains elusive.

After these initial portraits, Cleopatra Thea's image disappears from numismatic sources entirely until her first solo reign in Ake-Ptolemais in 126. As Seleucids, neither of her subsequent husbands perhaps felt the need to legitimise themselves through her. However, since Demetrius II was very young when he took the throne, it would perhaps have been wise for him to make use of her image, but as discussed before, he was inept at manipulating his political image. Since our literary sources indicate that Antiochus VII Sidetes derived his power from Cleopatra Thea⁶⁰⁴, it is also surprising that he does not seem to have used his wife's image to solidify his rule. However, it is important to contextualise Cleopatra Thea's earliest coins; they are restricted to a highly Egyptianised region and present the queen in typical Ptolemaic fashion. Even after Laodike, the female portrait was not a Seleucid mainstay, and would have been difficult to circulate as such.



Figure 69 Solo portrait of Cleopatra Thea from Ake-Ptolemais. Houghton (1983) 803

Cleopatra briefly minted solo portraits at Ake-Ptolemais in 126, before minting the more common jugate portraits featuring her son (Figure 69). Newell explained the brevity of these issues in terms of Cleopatra Thea, "Sensing perhaps that public opinion was still too strongly against the sole rule of a woman..."⁶⁰⁵ I would prefer to interpret this evidence more cautiously, as a female portrait, especially given its unusual depiction of the queen, would not have been economically acceptable. That having been said, on the following jugate portraits, Cleopatra Thea's portrait virtually covers that of her son, and in this context it is clear that her image was a widely accepted one. However, the Seleucid jugate portrait did have its precedents, and as such the jugate coins would have been more economically viable than a solo female portrait.

⁶⁰⁴ Jos. AJ 13.222-223

⁶⁰⁵ Newell (1937) 73

The specific portrayal of Cleopatra Thea on her last coins, whether solo or jugate is much more adorned than her earlier image. She is depicted with elaborately styled ringlets and a massive diadem, complete with a veil attached. In a general sense, this would carry the image of wealth and royalty in the sinking Seleucid economy. The sheer thickness of the diadem alone would have emphasised her royalty, securing her hold on the Seleucid throne. This change in image does not appear to have been sudden, as we have a jugate seal of Cleopatra Thea with her second husband Demetrius II. Although this seal is badly worn, the familiar hairstyle can be observed. The diadem and veil are not discernable on this seal, but this may be due to wear. Therefore in this context it would seem that, like many male portraits, Cleopatra Thea's later image may have been based on sigyllographic imagery.

Further to this, we have a large quantity of Isis bust gems available to us, depicting the goddess with a very similar hairstyle to Cleopatra Thea's. Plantzos argues that a Syrian provenanced Isis bust should be associated with Cleopatra I, but due to its provenance, it would seem much more likely that it is meant to be associated with Cleopatra Thea.⁶⁰⁶ Based on this it would seem that we have further evidence of the basis for Cleopatra Thea's later portrait. Additionally, we have a number of Isis seals provenanced in Egypt, all associated with the Ptolemaic royal family.⁶⁰⁷ The Ptolemies assimilated many of their later queens to Isis, the first being Cleopatra I. Cleopatra Thea's Isis image therefore can be placed within the context of the Ptolemaic ruler cult. This association with a goddess would have been intended to solidify the queen's rule, recalling the uses of deification by Seleucid kings. This does raise questions of exactly how useful the image of an Egyptian goddess would have been in the Syrian political context. Although primarily an Egyptian goddess, the cult of Isis seems to have taken some hold in Syria⁶⁰⁸, since gemstones depicting the goddess are found there, the Isis image would have served to solidify Cleopatra Thea's control over the area.

⁶⁰⁶ Plantzos (1999) 54

⁶⁰⁷ Milne (1916) 100

⁶⁰⁸ Plantzos (1999) 54

Smith⁶⁰⁹ attributes a bronze bust from the Villa of the Papyri to Cleopatra Thea, an identification with which I strongly disagree, preferring instead to identify it with Isis. The portrait itself is vague and stylised, with its only resemblance to Cleopatra Thea being the corkscrew hairstyle, lacking her short nose and heavy chin. Cleopatra Thea, although an interesting character, was not one of the longer reigning Seleucid queens. Another issue is that it would not seem likely that such an expensive item would have survived if it is meant to depict such an obscure queen. One indeed suspects that if Grypus indeed did murder her, he would seek to destroy an image such as this one. With these things in mind, it is best to simply identify this portrait with Isis.

⁶⁰⁹ Smith (1988)

Thesis Conclusion

It must be admitted that it is difficult to say anything conclusive about Seleucid portraiture, given the variation between rulers, and even the variation within the corpus of the portrait record of any individual ruler. To attempt to offer generalisations about the nature of Seleucid portraiture is to ignore the variation that typifies it. Even the general scholarly consensus that Seleucid portraiture is successive proves to be incorrect when we examine the considerable homage that Seleucid kings could pay to their ancestors. While variation is extensive, several key factors affected the Seleucid kings, legitimate or otherwise. The autonomy of the various cities within the Seleucid empire, whether legal or practical, affected virtually all kings. Warfare could also have a profound effect on how a king presented himself, but it is important to keep in mind that the Seleucid kings rarely presented themselves in an ostentatiously warlike fashion. Although many modern scholars assume that Alexander's influence on Seleucid portraiture was profound, upon closer examination it is clear that they tended to develop their own images, distinct from Alexander. Usurpation affected many Seleucid kings, and the development of a strong personal image in the face of the usurper was an important aspect to overcoming them. Likewise the usurper needed to manipulate his political image in order to gain support. The image of the individual king was also adapted to suit the various political situations he experienced. This could vary according to the place of the political conflict, or could be affected over time. Some kings changed their images to cope with political turmoil; Seleucus II and Demetrius II adopted older images in the face of usurpers, but retained more youthful images in areas not affected by conflict. Antiochus III and Antiochus VIII demonstrated their longevity as kings by presenting a consistently changing image throughout the Seleucid mints, indicating their abilities to outlast the usurpations they faced. Antiochus I and Antiochus IV sought to legitimise their rule through deified personal images, hinting at their divine right to rule. The few female portraits we have available to us demonstrate that queens were affected by similar political factors to their male counterparts. Thus it is fair to say that the one general conclusion that may be reached about Seleucid portraiture was that it was often adapted to suit the political, economic, and historical context in which it was produced.

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