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A new eastern bronze coin of Seleukos II Pogon

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Obv: Male head r., with long hair covering neck and pointed beard, diademed; dotted border. *Rev:* In r. field, [...]ΑΣΙ[...]; in l. field, [...]ΕΛΕ[...]; Apollo standing l. holding arrow (or bow?) in r. hand, perhaps(?) resting l. hand on grounded bow; dotted border. 0 Æ 17; 2.54g; Private coll., Ex Yuri Suhanov, Ashdod, Israel 2013.

This numismatic note presents a previously unrecorded Seleukid bronze coin recently sold on the market by the Ashdod based, licensed, antiquities dealer Yura Suhanov.* The new coin combines a bearded portrait obverse type with a standing Apollo reverse. The iconography is discussed in the context of the Parthian campaign of Seleukos II in the 220s BC and a mint attribution to Susa is proposed.

Based on the combination of the bearded obverse portrait and the standing Apollo reverse, the coin was erroneously advertised as a Parthian or Armenian imitation of Antiochos III. However, the placement of the remnant traces of letters on the reverse allows for the credible reconstruction of the legend as [B]ΑΣΙ[ΛΕΩΣ] [Σ]ΕΛΕ[ΥΚΟΥ]. The reconstructed legend combined with the image of Apollo, the dynastic patron and progenitor of the Seleukids,¹ leaves little doubt that the bronze coin was intended as a Seleukid royal emission.

The obverse bearded portrait might at first sight appear anomalous for a Seleukid

* I would like to express my appreciation to Panagiotis Iossif and Laura Wright for their helpful suggestions while preparing this manuscript. All errors remain the responsibility of the author. Note the following abbreviations used throughout: SC I = Houghton, A. and Lorber, C. 2002, Seleucid coins, a comprehensive catalogue part I: Seleucus I through Antiochus III (2 volumes), American Numismatic Society, New York. SC II = Houghton, A., Lorber, C. and Hoover, O. 2008, Seleucid coins, a comprehensive catalogue part II: Seleucus IV through Antiochus XIII (2 volumes), American Numismatic Society, New York.

¹ See for example Diodorus Siculus 19.90.1-5; Appian Syrian Wars. 56; Justin 15.4.3-9.

emission. The head appears to sport a Parthianising hair style, long at the back of the neck and worn in an elaborate roll akin to the second century BC ‘Satrap’ statue from Shami, and the numismatic portraits of the first century BC Elymaïote rulers including Kamnaskires III and his successors.² Unfortunately, the very worn nature of the coin makes it almost impossible to discern whether the apparent hairstyling is real or a mere illusion. The hairstyling confusion will only be clarified by the appearance of a better preserved specimen in the future. The presence of the long pointed beard, however, is much more certain.

While it is true that Seleukid kings most commonly conformed to the diadochic practice of being depicted clean shaven, it has been well demonstrated that Seleukid kings could be shown sporting a variety of beard styles if and when it suited their purposes.³ Seleukid monarchs who were normally depicted clean shaven might grow a beard for a specific reason, and kings more commonly shown wearing beards might occasionally be depicted without one; the two portrait types were not mutually exclusive. Lorber and Iossif interpret the spontaneous appearance of bearded numismatic portraits for kings normally depicted clean shaven as representations of so-called campaign beards, the “outward token of a vow to a god or gods to ensure the success of a particular military campaign”.⁴

Of all the Seleukid rulers, the long-nosed obverse portrait on this coin bears a close resemblance to Seleukos II. It is no coincidence that it was Seleukos II who was the first Seleukid king to be depicted with a beard, an attribute which led Polybios to identify him with the cognomen *Pogon* or ‘Bearded’.⁵ Linfert associated the beard of Seleukos II with a hypothetical period of Parthian captivity; the same association has also been wrongly applied to the hirsute Demetrios II a century later although that king did spend over a decade at the Parthian court.⁶ Parthian style hair and a long beard might be seen to support Linfert’s position. However, the different stages of the growth of Seleukos II’s beard can be mapped in numismatic portraiture and has been convincingly linked to the king’s *anabasis* to repulse the Parthian threat to Seleukid rule over the Iranian plateau, c.228-226 BC.⁷ The king’s beard was seemingly the visible expression of a vow to defeat the Parthians, not an advertisement of his defeat and humiliation.

2 Smith, RRR 1988, *Hellenistic Royal Portraits*, Clarendon Press, Oxford: pl. 57, nos. 2-4, pl. 78, no. 4.

3 Lorber, CC and Iossif, PP 2009, ‘Seleucid Campaign Beards’, *L’Antiquité Classique*, vol. 78, pp. 87-115. The Diadochi (Greek Diadokhoi) were the Successors to Alexander the Great.

4 Lorber and Iossif 2009, p. 91.

5 Polybios 2.71.4.

6 Linfert, A 1976, ‘Bärtige Herrscher’, *JDAI* vol. 91, p. 158; see also Smith 1988, p. 46, n.2; contra Lorber and Iossif 2009, pp. 98-9, 105; Wright, NL 2012, *Divine Kings and Sacred Spaces: Power and Religion in Hellenistic Syria (301-64 BC)*, Archaeopress, Oxford: pp. 58-9.

7 Lorber and Iossif 2009, pp. 95-6. *Anabasis* is the Ancient Greek word conventionally used to describe this up-country expedition.

The king initially sported a stubbly beard at Uncertain mint 37 in western Mesopotamia from where, it has been posited, he embarked on his campaign.⁸ It developed into a short curly beard at Nisibis,⁹ a portrait type still in use when the king progressed to Susa.¹⁰ The mint at Susa produced the most extensive coinage of Seleukos' Parthian campaign suggesting a prolonged stay in Elymais. After the production of initial portraits showing the king with a short beard, Susan bronzes start to depict a longer pointed beard,¹¹ a portrait type also adopted on the king's arrival at Ekbatana.¹² A *bullā* (seal impression) from Seleukeia on the Tigris and further fully bearded portraits at Uncertain mint 37 and the ΔΕΑ monogram mint associated with Antioch are perhaps testament to the westward return of Seleukos to challenge the invasion of Antiochos Hierax.¹³ The royal head on this coin, with its longer pointed beard, fits well within the typology outlined by Lorber and Iossif, and suggests that the coin may have been minted at one of the major eastern centres such as Susa or Ekbatana.¹⁴

Apollo and his associated attributes formed one of the largest corpora from which the Seleukids drew inspiration for their coin types.¹⁵ The form of Apollo on the reverse of this coin, standing left, examining an arrow (or bow?) in his right hand, was a slight variation of the form most commonly used by Seleukos II where the god in the same pose leans his left elbow on a tall tripod. On this coin there is no space in the right field for Apollo to be leaning on a tripod although there are heavily worn traces which might betray the existence of an upright bow below the god's left hand. A standing Apollo examining a bow without a tripod is known only from the reverse of a single bronze type minted at Susa, the obverse portrait of which was 'probably bearded'.¹⁶

A standing Apollo leaning on a grounded bow was a more common type variant for Seleukos II and appears used by Seleukos II as a reverse type on coins of all three metals

8 SC II pp. 666-7, no. Ad161.

9 SC I p. 271-2, nos. 749-50.

10 SC I p. 279-81, nos. 788, 795-6.

11 SC I p. 281, nos. 797-8 and perhaps 799.

12 SC I p. 286, nos. 822-824.

13 Invernizzi, A 2004, Seleucia al Tigri. Le impronte di sigillo dagli Archivi I: Sigilli ufficiali, ritratti, Edizioni dell'Orso, Alexandria: p. 40, pl.16; Uncertain Mint 37, SC I: p. 252, nos.685-6; ΔΕΑ monogram mint, SC I: p. 260, nos. 711-2.

14 Lorber and Iossif 2009, pp. 113-5.

15 Erickson, K and Wright, NL 2011, 'The 'royal archer' and Apollo in the East: Greco-Persian iconography in the Seleukid empire', in Holmes, N (ed) Proceedings of the XIVth International Numismatic Congress, Glasgow, 2009 (volume 1), International Numismatic Council, Glasgow: pp. 163-8; Iossif, P 2011, 'Apollo Toxotes and the Seleukids: Comme un air de famille', in Iossif, PP, Chankowski, AS and Lorber CC (eds) More than Men, Less than Gods. Studies on Royal Cult and Emperor Worship. Proceedings of the Conference Organized by the Belgian School at Athens (1-2 November 2007), Studia Hellenistica 51, Leuven: pp. 229-91.

16 SC I p. 280, no. 794.

across the empire. The following table outlines the distribution of the standing Apollo with grounded bow reverse type citing SC numbers. The last column indicates whether the mint is also known to have produced bearded obverse portraits of Seleukos II. Susa is included on account of its bearded portraiture. It did not employ the standing Apollo with grounded bow type but did, as cited above, produce a bronze issue showing a standing Apollo examining a bow in his right hand.

The mint attribution for this coin must, without other supporting examples, remain speculative. The coin is unprovenanced although Suhanov claims to have purchased it from another dealer who trades in antiquities from across the Middle East, frequently from Iraqi sources. Such ambiguous language does not aid in an attribution, but it does allow for an origin east of the Euphrates.

There is no clear pattern in the corpus of Seleukos II's coinage which links the standing Apollo reverse iconography on this coin with any specific mint or region. The presence of the obverse portrait with pointed beard strongly suggests a Mesopotamian or eastern mint with the portraits at Susa, Ekbatana, Seleukeia on the Tigris (*bullā*), Uncertain mint 37 and the ΔΕΛ monogram mint providing known precedents. The dotted border on the reverse, visible on this coin only in the less worn area above Apollo, is another feature indicative of the principal eastern Seleukid mints at Seleukeia on the Tigris, Susa and Ekbatana. In contrast, there was no tradition of employing dotted borders around reverse types at the ΔΕΛ monogram mint or Uncertain mint 37.¹⁷

It is also notable that the mints at Seleukeia on the Tigris, Susa and Ekbatana were typified during the reign of Seleukos II for their frequent changes of type.¹⁸ At Susa in particular, the bronze issues are 'poorly known, with most varieties surviving in a single specimen,' a remarkable number of which display a bearded portrait of the king and can be associated with the Parthian campaign.¹⁹ The bronze flans produced at the mints at Ekbatana and Seleukeia on the Tigris, however, were most often bevelled. The thick, dumpy flan on this coin is consistent with the majority of Susan emissions under Seleukos II and his immediate predecessors.²⁰ Although any attribution must remain tentative, the combined evidence provided by the iconographic details and the fabric of the coin would all point strongly towards an attribution to the mint at Susa, thereby lending weight to the importance of that mint during the *anabasis* of Seleukos II.

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17 SC II p. 680 no. Ad189.

18 SC I p. 231.

19 SC I p. 279.

20 SC II vol.2 pp. 62-5.

Mint distribution of the standing Apollo with grounded bow reverse type citing reference numbers to the Houghton, Lorber and Hoover Seleucid coins volumes.

Mint	AV	AR	Æ	Mint possibly producing bearded portraits
Sardes		656	660-661, Ad143-145	
Magnesia on the Meander			670	
Ephesos	671		673	
Uncertain mint 37 (western Mesopotamia)		682-684, Ad163-163A		Short and curly, pointed
Antioch	687-688, 701	691	700	
ΔΕΛ monogram mint	703	705		Pointed
Mint using Antioch control	717-720			
Uncertain mint 38 (western Mesopotamia)		Ad164		
Uncertain mint 39 (western)		722		
Uncertain mint 41 (western Mesopotamia)	729			
Uncertain mint 43 (western)		732-733, Ad168		
ON monogram mint (Kommagene or western Mesopotamia)		Ad169-170		
Uncertain mint 44 (eastern Mesopotamia)		Ad171		
Unattributed western mint		736, Ad172		
Nisibis		750		Short and curly
Seleukeia on the Tigris	762, 786		781-784	
Susa				Short and curly, pointed
Ekbatana		809-810, 812		Pointed
Unattributed eastern issue			Ad189	Short and curly
Baktrian mint		832		