

Every Inch a King

Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship
in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds

Edited by

Lynette Mitchell
Charles Melville



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SELEUCUS I, ZEUS AND ALEXANDER*

Kyle Erickson

This chapter will examine how Seleucus attempted to develop a set of royal imagery that drew both on Alexander and on a personal connection to Zeus, in order to justify his rule over the largest portion of Alexander's empire. The limited contact that Seleucus' empire had with the Mediterranean between his retaking of Babylon (312 BC) and the battle of Ipsus (301 BC) may have affected how Seleucus presented himself to his largely non-Greek subjects. In this connection I believe that the horned rider coins that I will discuss not only depict a Macedonian king but also draw on traditional local iconography. In the first instance, however, after successfully gaining a Mediterranean foothold with his victory at Ipsus, Seleucus was forced not only to rely on his personal connection to his citizens at Babylon and subjects further east, but also to compete directly with his former allies and other successors to Alexander: Lysimachus, King of Thrace, and Ptolemy, King of Egypt. Both of these could claim a closer connection to Alexander as they had held high positions within Alexander's inner circle. To succeed in his position—at least as far as the contest over imagery was concerned—Seleucus chose to continue many of Alexander's traditional coin types even after he took a royal title, as did the other successors. At the same time, however, Seleucus also began to create new personal connections to the traditional Macedonian royal god, Zeus. Seleucus was therefore able to legitimate his rule both through his connections to Alexander and through his own role as a Zeus-favoured king.

* I would like to thank Lynette Mitchell and Charles Melville for the opportunity to present this paper at the Every Inch a King conference and for the feedback I received. I would also like to thank Nomos AG and the Classical Numismatic Group, Inc. for the use of their images.

Please note the following abbreviations:

SNG Spencer = *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum, Great Britain, Volume I, Part I. The Collection of Capt. E.G. Spencer-Churchill, M.C., of Northwick Park.*

OGIS = Dittenberger, ed. *Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*, 2 vols.

PFS = seals in Hallock, R.T. *Persepolis Fortification Tablets, Oriental Institute Publications*

Seleucus and the Image of Alexander

As we will see Seleucus developed his own iconography, but he also drew on Alexander's imagery in order to justify his rule. Although portraits of Alexander are relatively rare on Seleucus' coinage, when they are used they can readily be explained. Alexander is only clearly identifiable on the coins from three mints, Susa, Ecbatana, and a mint most likely at Babylon, all minted *ca.* 300–298 BC (see Table).¹

Table. The coinage of Seleucus, 312–*ca.* 295 BC.

Type	Obverse	Reverse	Date	Mint(s)
Zeus <i>Aetophoros</i>	Heracles in a lion-head headdress	Seated Zeus carrying an eagle	From 312/1	Empire wide
Zeus <i>Nikephoros</i>	Heracles in a lion-head headdress	Seated Zeus carrying Nike	From <i>ca.</i> 300	Empire wide
	Alexander in elephant headdress	Nike holding wreath and stylus	<i>ca.</i> 300–298	Susa, Ecbatana, Babylonian mint
	Zeus	Elephant-drawn chariot	From <i>ca.</i> 296	Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, Susa, and Bactria
Susa Trophy Type	Helemeted Seleucus	Nike crowning trophy	<i>ca.</i> 305/4– <i>ca.</i> 295	Susa
Horseman type	Heracles in a lion-head headdress	Horned helmeted rider on horned horse	<i>ca.</i> 295	Ecbatana

The gold coinage from these three mints featuring Alexander is not on the more common Attic weight standard but on the Persian standard, suggesting that the coins were designed only for circulation in the east. The design on the gold coinage from the three mints is nearly identical: the obverse features the head of Alexander facing right in an elephant headdress with the paws tied around the neck in imitation of Alexander's Heracles type. The reverse features a standing Nike facing the left, holding

¹ Babylonian mint: Houghton and Lorber, *Seleucid Coins*, no. 101; Susa mint: Gold: Houghton and Lorber, *Seleucid Coins*, no. 183; Bronze: Houghton and Lorber, *Seleucid Coins*, nos. 189, 190; Ecbatana mint: Gold: Houghton and Lorber, *Seleucid Coins*, no. 218, Bronze: Houghton and Lorber, *Seleucid Coins*, nos. 222, 223. See Kriti, *Seleucid Mint of Susa*, for the accepted dating of these issues; cf. Houghton and Lorber, *Seleucid Coins*, 67–68, Dahmen, *Alexander on Coins*, 15.

a wreath and stylus. The reverse type is nearly identical to the common Nike reverses of Alexander's Athena/Nike gold coins. Therefore the major innovation on this coinage is the image of Alexander, which draws heavily on the earlier Ptolemaic coinage issued from 322–317 BC.² This is interesting, as Seleucus' version of the Alexander-in-elephant-scalp motif did not draw on the contemporary Ptolemaic image, rather on the first model of this image, which Seleucus had most probably first come across while in Egypt.

The adoption of Ptolemaic imagery may reflect the cooling relations between Seleucus and Ptolemy around 300 BC. Seleucus may have been attempting to assert his claims in Syria through the use of similar imagery. However, as Dahmen has noted, the figure on Seleucus' coinage is neither diademed nor does it have the horns of Ammon.³ This difference is significant as it removes the two features of the coinage that could be connected with Egypt and creates a more generic heroic type that emphasises the importance of the elephant. The elephant image noted above had a personal significance for Seleucus as both a result of his Indian campaigns and also their effective use in his army. Furthermore, the journey into India represented through the elephant headdress demonstrates a connection between Alexander and Seleucus that no other successor could claim.⁴ The creation of this coinage is usually attributed to one of several reasons: Seleucus' campaign to India; the victory at Ipsus, and even the foundation of Seleucia-on-the Tigris.⁵ The image of Nike on the reverse normally appears to be crowning the Seleucid horned horse that is depicted on all the gold issues of this coin.

The other example, featuring images of Alexander on the bronze coins, comes from Susa and Ecbatana. The types are nearly identical at the two mints and are divisible into two denominations: the obverse of all coins features the image of Alexander in the elephant headdress; the style of the lower jaw of the scalp is dependent upon the mint and is identical to that of the gold image. The reverse of the larger denomination features the

² Dahmen, *Alexander on Coins*, 15; Stewart, *Faces of Power*, 315; Hadley, "Royal Propaganda", 53.

³ Dahmen, *Alexander on Coins*, 15.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵ Newell, *Eastern Seleucid Mints*, 113; Tarn, *Greeks in Bactria*, 131; Hadley, "Royal Propaganda", 53; Stewart, *Faces of Power*, 315; Dahmen, *Alexander on Coins*, 15. Newell, Tarn, Hadley, and Stewart use the earlier dating of coinage to *ca.* 305–300, and thus prevent an association of the coinage with Ipsus or the foundation of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, as well as moving the production of this coinage closer to Seleucus' Indian campaign. Dahmen does not appear to prefer any of the three options she proposes. Hadley highlights the nature of Alexander as a protecting deity.

image of Nike standing to the left holding a wreath and stylus. She often appears to be crowning an anchor.⁶ The reverse of the smaller denomination features an anchor with the flukes upward. All of the bronzes feature a legend that reads “[coin] of Alexander”.

These coins all reinforce the Seleucid claim to the Alexander heritage by the inclusion of two common symbols of Seleucus I: the horned horse head and the anchor. These coins also seem to derive their motif from the simultaneously issued precious metal coinage, and therefore probably have the same effect in mind.

Nevertheless, the use of Nike on this coinage may demonstrate that it is, in fact, a victory coinage commemorating Ipsus, the Indian campaign, or it may celebrate the success of Seleucus in retaking the eastern portion of Alexander's empire. As the dating of these coins most closely follows Seleucus' victory at Ipsus, it is probable that this is the victory that is being reflected. Perhaps the story in Plutarch which suggests that Alexander abandoned Demetrius and Antigonus for Seleucus and Lysimachus before Ipsus may provide a rationale for an increase in Alexander imagery in the Seleucid Empire.⁷ On the other hand, the fact that Seleucus possessed a Mediterranean empire after Ipsus and could no longer solely rely on his military skill and relations with the citizens at Babylon to legitimate his rule may have prompted him to incorporate Alexander-imagery to a greater degree in order to compete with his rivals. The clearest literary example of Seleucus claiming Alexander's support comes from Diodorus Siculus: “Alexander standing next to him (Seleucus) in a dream had given him a clear sign of the future leadership that was destined to happen to him in the course of time”.⁸ This passage is placed by Diodorus in the year 312/11 BC but probably dates from later, 305 BC at the earliest when Seleucus claimed the kingship.⁹ In light of the new dating of the Seleucid Alexander coins to 300–298 BC,¹⁰ it may be possible to date the advertisement of this dream to the same period, assigning Seleucus' first claims of Alexander's support to after Ipsus. Together, these coins and the story of the dream clearly demonstrate that Seleucus drew some of his legitimacy as ruler from his connections with Alexander.

⁶ Houghton and Lorber, *Seleucid Coins*, nos. 189 and 222.

⁷ Plutarch, *Demetrius* 29.

⁸ Diodorus Siculus 19.90.2–4.

⁹ Hadley, “Royal Propaganda”, 53.

¹⁰ See Kritt, *Seleucid Mint of Susa*, for the accepted dating of these issues; cf. Houghton and Lorber, *Seleucid Coins*, 67–68, Dahmen, *Alexander on Coins*, 15.

Seleucus and Alexander's Zeus

Seleucus also tried to make propagandist mileage out of Alexander's connection with Zeus. Zeus was the god who was most frequently depicted on Seleucus' coinage, as he was also on Alexander's. Zeus appears on four distinct types of Seleucus' coinage. Two of these types are related to Alexander's image of Zeus. These two are Alexander's type, often with the name Seleucus instead of Alexander, and a modified version of the type. The obverse of both types features the head of Heracles in a lion-head headdress. The image on Alexander's tetradrachms was a bearded Zeus seated on a throne carrying an eagle in his outstretched right hand. In his left hand he holds a staff behind the back of the throne. As he carries an eagle he is known as *Zeus Aetophoros* (Zeus carrying an eagle) (fig. 1). Seleucus modified this type by replacing the eagle with the goddess of victory, Nike; therefore the figure becomes *Zeus Nikephoros* (Zeus carrying Nike) (fig. 2). The *Zeus Aetophoros* type remained popular throughout the reign of Seleucus, although at many mints it was replaced by the Zeus



Figure 1. Seleucid AR tetradrachm—Seleucus I, *Zeus Aetophoros*: Classical Numismatic Group (www.cngcoins.com) electronic auction 211 (3 June 2009) lot 269.



Figure 2. Seleucid AR tetradrachm—Seleucus I, *Zeus Nikephoros*: Classical Numismatic Group (www.cngcoins.com) electronic auction 211 (3 June 2009) lot 274.

Nikephoros type. This modified issue shows Zeus as a patron of Seleucus while retaining a connection to Alexander.

In the first instance, however, Seleucus needed to reaffirm his connection to Alexander, as the other successor kings after Alexander also did. The post-Ipsus coinage reflects the importance of the victory motif of the successors. It also stresses the importance of Alexander either in victory on the Lysimachus' coinage or by his conspicuous absence on some of Demetrius' coinage. Therefore, the choice of Zeus *Nikephoros* as the main deity on the coinage of Seleucus I may represent a desire to be seen as a legitimate continuator of the Alexander's empire and as the victor of Ipsus.

The strongest links between Seleucus, Alexander and Zeus can be found in the literary tradition. Here, Seleucus is often connected to Alexander and many of the portents which are used to justify Seleucus' rule either occurred during Alexander's campaigns or have Alexander in them. The latest source in this tradition comes from the fourth-century (AD) author Libanius in his *Oration in Praise of Antioch*. Here Libanius relates a less well known version of Seleucus' origin; this version connects Seleucus to Alexander through the Macedonian royal lineage. Seleucus is said to have been a descendant of Heracles through Temenus.¹¹ This heritage links Seleucus both to Zeus and to Alexander (as the Macedonian monarchs claimed descent through this same line). This is not the only reference to Zeus in Libanius' foundation narrative for Antioch; rather the entire narrative reveals Zeus as founder of Antioch. Later in Libanius' oration he links Seleucus to Zeus and as the fulfiller of Alexander's plans. This is done through the story of the foundation of Antioch:

And Zeus sent from his sceptre to the altar his companion, the beloved bird. And it flew down into the middle of the fire and seizing the thighs wrapped in flames, carried them off. When the event caught the attention of all eyes and had made clear what was done was not done without the gods, Seleucus put his son on his horse in order to follow the flight from earth and to guide the horse along the path of the bird, wishing to know what the bird would do with the things which it had snatched away. And he, while riding and looking upwards, was led to Emathia by the bird. The eagle, descending there, placed the sacrifice on the altar of Zeus Bottiaeus, which was established by Alexander after the spring had refreshed him; and it seemed to all, even to those not skilled in interpreting, that Zeus was advising to build a city on that place. And thus Alexander's desire for a settlement, and the

¹¹ Libanius, *Orationes* 11.91.

beginning of the task moved towards its end and the chief of the gods was our founder due to his prophetic sign.¹²

This story carefully links the foundation of Antioch with Seleucus and his son (probably Antiochus) and Zeus, as well incorrectly linking the foundation to Alexander. This story shows Seleucus as favoured by Zeus in his new foundation, but also shows Seleucus as the legitimate successor to Alexander. While this story is very late, it may reflect elements of Seleucid propaganda.

It is important to note that Zeus was the principal god for the Argead kings of Macedon, especially Philip II and Alexander. In fact, after Perdiccas I, the Argead kings considered themselves the offspring of Zeus through two routes; descent from Argeas, son of Macedon, son of Zeus and from Temenus, descendant of Heracles, son of Zeus.¹³ Therefore, Libanius' account of Seleucus' descent through Temenus links Seleucus with the line of Argead kings that ended with Alexander IV. This is the only clear literary indication of a direct link between the Seleucid royal family and the Argead royal house. This may be a result of the fourth-century (AD) date of this work, by which time the origin of the Hellenistic monarchs could well have been forgotten and assimilated to the family of Alexander. Antiochus I of Commagene made the same connection in his royal tomb at Nemrut Dag, where he traces his own lineage through the Seleucid house back to Alexander.¹⁴ The basis for the familial connection between the Seleucids and Alexander is unclear and may purely be a result of Antiochus I of Commagene's propaganda, and this confused tradition may be reflected in Libanius' narrative. As we have already seen, Seleucus advertised a connection to both Alexander and Zeus, as did Ptolemy and Lysimachus.¹⁵ However, Seleucus' connection to Alexander was far more limited than the other new royal houses.

Much of the other literary evidence for a connection between Zeus and Seleucus either directly references Alexander or is reminiscent of Alexander legends. The first connection may be found in the second-century AD travel-writer, Pausanias, who makes a biographical note on Seleucus:

¹² Ibid., 11.86–88.

¹³ Bohec-Bouhet, "Kings and Zeus", 42.

¹⁴ Cf. Sanders, *Hierothesion of Antiochus I*.

¹⁵ Antigonids: See Bohec-Bouhet, "Kings and Zeus", 41–50; Lagids: See Theocritus 17.20–27; Lysimachus: See Hadley, "Royal Propaganda", 63–64.

And a little further away there is a statue of Seleucus, whose future good fortune was shown by unmistakable signs. For Seleucus, when he set out from Macedon with Alexander, sacrificed in Pella to Zeus, the wood that lay on the altar advanced of its own accord towards the image and ignited without the application of fire.¹⁶

This brief note implies a favourable sign from Zeus for Seleucus that could be interpreted to favour his future kingship. While Alexander is present in all of these stories, only in the dream is he the main actor. The other stories present Seleucus as favoured by Zeus, and it appears that this connection is developed in Seleucus' coinage.

Indeed, Seleucus' other coin types emphasise his connection with Alexander only through the connection to Zeus. This was particularly the case with Seleucus' *Nikephoros* coinage, which became the most widely used type in the western part of his empire after 300 and was introduced into the eastern capital, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, in ca. 295 BC. Most interestingly, the *Nikephoros* type may have first originated under Antigonus at Antigoneia, a city which Seleucus destroyed and indirectly replaced with Antioch.¹⁷ The presence of Nike suggests a strong connotation of victory. This would have been especially relevant for Seleucus after his victory over Antigonus. These coins mark a continuation of the Alexander tradition, but also suggest a new association of Seleucus with Zeus, where Zeus is the god responsible for Seleucus' victory.

The *Nikephoros* coinage is often considered a victory coinage since it portrays the goddess of victory crowning Zeus.¹⁸ The victory alluded to on these coins must be that of the battle of Ipsus, which was fought between the successors of Alexander in 301 BC, as coins with similar iconography are also used by the other successors after the battle to advertise their victories. On the reverses of some of Lysimachus' coins, Athena is shown facing left with a spear and shield at her side, while in her left hand she holds a winged Nike (fig. 3). The goddess Nike is reaching out to place a wreath on the Λ in Lysimachus' name as it appears in the legend. The obverse shows a head of Alexander with flowing hair, a diadem, and a ram's horn.¹⁹ The action of Nike crowning the name Lysimachus clearly represents divine support, in this case from Athena and Nike. Lysimachus also made clear use of Alexander's divine image with the stunning portrait

¹⁶ Pausanias 1.16.1.

¹⁷ Houghton and Lorber, *Seleucid Coins*, p. 8.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Hadley, "Royal Propaganda", 57, plate VIII; *SNG Spencer*, no. 106.



Figure 3. Lysimachus AR tetradrachm—Lysimachus, Alexander/Athena: Classical Numismatic Group (www.cngcoins.com) Mail Bid Sale 82 (16 September 2009) lot 346.

on the obverse. Ptolemy, having taken Alexander's body, also made use of Alexander's image on his coinage by fashioning multiple portraits of Alexander. On the other hand, the *Nikephoros* type that Seleucus produced is not as clearly connected to Alexander as it lacks a portrait of the king.²⁰

Demetrius Poliorcetes, the son of Antigonus and a combatant for the remains of Alexander's empire, also made a clear break with the Alexander tradition. Although his coinage contains many of the same elements as that of the other successors, it does not always reference Alexander. One of Demetrius' victory types features Nike on the prow of a ship and an archaic Poseidon on the reverse. Even though he was defeated at Ipsus, Demetrius still issued coinage that reinforced his naval supremacy through the use of victory images.²¹ The lack of an Alexander reference may be related to the story in the first-century AD biographer and philosopher, Plutarch, in which Demetrius and Antigonus are abandoned by Alexander in a dream before the battle for choosing the watchwords "Zeus and Victory" rather than "Alexander and Victory".²² Although late, this story may represent a contemporary shift in propaganda by the successors. Alexander's former lieutenants claimed a close connection to Alexander whereas Demetrius was unable to claim an equivalent connection after his father's death in the battle at Ipsus, as he had not served under Alexander. Seleucus faced a similar problem, although of a slightly different kind, since while he was

²⁰ The continuation of the Heracles obverse may have been enough to suggest that Seleucus was a legitimate successor. This is especially the case if the Heracles obverse has obvious features of Alexander. However, this is not the same claim as placing the clearly recognisable image of Alexander on the coinage.

²¹ Hadley, "Royal Propaganda", 57, plate VIII; See Bellinger and Berlincourt, "Victory", 29–30 for a more specific analysis of the message of this coinage.

²² Plutarch, *Demetrius* 29.

one of the contestants for honours after Alexander's death, he had held an inferior position under Alexander.

Seleucus' Zeus Coinage

Importantly, Seleucus' other associations with Zeus suggest that he may have claimed a personal connection to the god and not only desired to emulate Alexander, but also to equal him. Seleucus appears to have taken a middle path between the veneration of Alexander as founder of his empire, chosen by Lysimachus and Ptolemy, and the path of self-deification chosen by Demetrius with fewer references to Alexander.²³ Thus Seleucus not only drew on Alexander for legitimacy, but also appears to have adopted much of the symbolism of Alexander's coins, though he also modified it so that it referred to himself rather than to Alexander.

There are three important pieces of Hellenistic evidence that show Seleucus as favoured by Zeus but not connected to Alexander. One of Seleucus' innovative coin types features Zeus and elephants. On this type the head of Zeus appears on the obverse and an elephant drawn chariot appears on the reverse (fig. 4). The reverse of these coins refers to Seleucus' elephant corps, which was a key element in his army. Their importance for Seleucus led Demetrius to disparage Seleucus as the master of the elephants.²⁴ Furthermore, the elephants played a key role in Seleucus' victory at Ipsus. The obverse of these coins advertises a connection to Zeus that when combined with the reverse provides a specific



Figure 4. Seleucid AR tetradrachm—Seleucus I, Zeus/Athena in elephant chariot: Classical Numismatic Group (www.cngcoins.com) Mail Bid Sale 81 (20 May 2009) lot 576.

²³ For Demetrius' cult which does not include any reference to Alexander before Ipsus see: Plutarch, *Demetrius* 10.18–22 and Diodorus Siculus 20.46.2.

²⁴ Plutarch, *Demetrius* 25.

reference to Seleucus' most famous fighting unit. The link between Zeus and the elephants must also contain a reference to Ipsus and victory (or Seleucus' victorious eastern campaigns) and provided a powerful claim to divine support. As this image does not relate to any image produced by Alexander, we should not view these coins as a simple continuation of the Zeus sponsorship of Alexander, but rather a new connection between Zeus and Seleucus.

To support this case, there are also two other independent instances, unrelated to the coinage, where Seleucus is connected directly to Zeus' cult during the Seleucid period. In the first place, after Seleucus' death Athenian colonists at Lemnos substituted his name for that of Zeus in the festal libation.²⁵ It seems likely that Lemnos was recognising a mythological connection between Seleucus and Zeus when it celebrated him for liberating them from Lysimachus. Furthermore, Seleucus had received the cult title Seleucus Zeus *Nikator* in a list of the priests of the Seleucid family by the reign of Seleucus IV.²⁶ This title suggests that Seleucus I was readily identified with Zeus within his empire and that this connection was no longer dependant on Alexander. Additionally, it suggests that the Zeus *Nikephoros* coinage can be associated with Seleucus' personal connection with Zeus and not just a modification of Alexander's coinage.

There is also other evidence, independent of the numismatic material, for the continued cult of Seleucus and Zeus long after the end the Seleucid dynasty. A deed of sale from Dura-Europus from AD 180 includes a priest of King Seleucus *Nikator*.²⁷ It is unclear whether or not this marks the continuance of a cult for Seleucus at Dura-Europus or whether the re-creation of the office is an archaising Seleucid revival as part of the Greek cultural renaissance under the Romans of the first–second centuries AD, often known as the Second Sophistic. An interesting relief from the same city shows Seleucus I *Nikator* crowning Zeus *Olympios/Megistos*.²⁸ The relief dates from AD 158, six years before the Parthians lost control of the city to the Romans. Although this relief also comes from two centuries after the end of Seleucid rule, the inhabitants of Dura-Europus either created a new connection between Seleucus and Zeus or continued a Seleucid tradition. Perhaps it was a conflation of the other successor mythologies and that of

²⁵ Athenaeus 6.66; cf. Bevan, "Antiochus Epiphanes", 28; Bevan, "Deification of Kings", 626.

²⁶ OGIS 245; for the cult of Zeus Seleukios see Debord, "Le culte royal", 282–84.

²⁷ Welles, Fink et al., *Dura Europos*, no. 25.

²⁸ Downey, *Mesopotamian Religious Architecture*, 50 gives the god crowned as the Gad of Dura, who Drijvers, *Edessa*, 67 names as Zeus *Olympios/Megistos*.

Alexander that created this origin myth for Seleucus. However, it is clear that by the second century AD Seleucus could be associated with Zeus in his own right.

Seleucus or Alexander: The Horned Horseman

Furthermore, some of images on Seleucus' coins that are often taken to be representations of Alexander may not be him at all, but Seleucus. One of the most interesting problems for identifying Seleucid relations with Alexander is the image of a helmeted figure (fig. 5) and of that figure on a horned horse. These images have been identified either as Seleucus or as Alexander.

I believe that the king portrayed on the coinage is Seleucus, and will examine how Seleucus is commonly portrayed with bull's horns to establish the identity. In a story that seeks to explain the appearance of bull horns on Seleucus statues, Appian (1st–2nd century AD) gives us the following:

Physically he (Seleucus) was well-muscled and large, and once when a bull broke free from its bonds at a sacrifice of Alexander's he blocked it by himself and wrestled it down with his bare hands. For this they add horns to his representations.²⁹

This story provides a legitimate reason (his nearly superhuman strength), for Seleucus to be king, as well as providing a potential background for the bull horns. What this story also reveals is that Seleucus' statues had bull horns, which suggests that the coin figure too is Seleucus.



Figure 5. Seleucid AR tetradrachm—Seleucus I, Horned-Helmeted Figure/Nike crowning a trophy: Nomos AG auction 1 (6 May 2009) lot 117.

²⁹ Appian, *Syriaca* 56.

The image of a horned Seleucus is picked up by the anachronistic and inaccurate description of the foundation of Alexandria in the Alexander Romance:

At the East gate, upon the loftiest tower of all he [Alexander] erected his own statue, and surrounded it with the others of Seleucus, Antiochus, and Philip the physician. He made the (statue) of Seleucus recognisable as it bore a horn for courage and invincibility.³⁰

It seems logical to conclude that the horn was that of a bull, as Seleucus is only ever represented with a bull horn. Libanius also places bull horns on a statue of Seleucus, this time at Antioch. Here Seleucus' horns are associated with respect for the local cult of Io.³¹ While Libanius may be incorrect in his reasoning behind the horns, there is no reason to doubt that the statue existed in Antioch in Libanius' day and Libanius' interpretation represents part of the broad array of potential interpretations for the bull horns. Additionally, a horned statue of Seleucus in the Antakya Museum confirms that Seleucus' representations could include horns.³² The final connection between Seleucus and bull horns is that when Seleucus is deified by his son, horned portraits of him are produced; furthermore, Alexander is never shown with bull horns.³³

I will now turn to the image of the horned horse and rider, as the image is not only iconographically inclusive through the use of bull horns but also through the use of Persian dress (fig. 6). These coins feature the typical obverse of Alexander's coins, the head of Heracles in a lion-skin



Figure 6. Seleucid AR tetradrachm—Seleucus I, Heracles in lionskin headress/horned rider: Nomos AG auction 1 (6 May 2009) lot 119.

³⁰ *Historia Alexandri Magni* 2.28.

³¹ Libanius, *Orationes* 11.92.

³² Houghton, "A Colossal Head in Antakya".

³³ Houghton and Lorber, *Seleucid Coins*, no. 322.

headdress, the reverse features a male rider wearing a horned helmet and holding a spear in his right hand riding a prancing horned horse. The legend reads “[coin] of King Seleucus”. According to Houghton and Stewart the figure is dressed wearing:

a chlamys that billows behind him, a sleeved tunic (*chitoniskos*) that terminates below the hips; trousers; and soft, wrinkled boots. On his head he wears what is evidently an Attic helmet with cheekpieces and a neckguard. From the helmet rise two curved horns; an animal's ear juts rearward from its base. He sits on a saddlecloth made of the skin of an animal, which could be a bull, a lion or a panther (only the sinuous tail just above the horse's rump shows clearly.) In his right hand he holds a spear horizontally, close to his side. The horse, bridled and reined, is adorned with horns that curve upward above the head, similar to those that appear on the rider's helmet.³⁴

Those who have wished to see the figure as Alexander have seen this as a representation of Alexander's adoption of Persian dress. Diodorus states that Alexander never adopted Persian trousers or a sleeved jacket.³⁵ Hoover's argument that this should prevent us from seeing Alexander in this image seems overly pedantic, as this was an image by Seleucus that clearly sought to integrate Greco-Persian cultures, and the trousers were a clear sign of Persian dress.³⁶ However, this does not mean that we should see the image as Alexander; his adoption of Persian dress was always controversial³⁷ and Alexander did not enjoy the best reputation among the Persian elite.³⁸

It therefore seems unlikely that Seleucus would have chosen to represent Alexander in such a controversial fashion, whereas the adoption of Greco-Persian dress by a King of Babylonia and Persia, who had an Iranian wife and *mixobarbaros* son no less, would not be out of place and may have even been expected. The clothing provides an avenue for interpretation of this image. The figure is represented as a king by means of the helmet. He is identified as a Macedonian by the weapon he carries and the manner in which he rides. His clothes are a mix of Persian and Greek costume, identifying him as both Persian and Greek. Finally, the

³⁴ Houghton and Stewart, “Equestrian Portrait of Alexander”, 28.

³⁵ Diodorus Siculus 17.77.5.

³⁶ Hoover, “Identity of Helmeted Head”, 51–62; while I would like to thank Vesta Curtis and Robin Lane Fox for their suggestion that the figure does not actually wear trousers, I agree with Stewart and Houghton that the figure is wearing trousers.

³⁷ Plutarch, *Alexander* 45.

³⁸ Hjerrild, “Zoroastrianism in Seleucid Times”, 144.

best interpretation of the helmet may be of the heroic Babylonian king or god, which the helmet most closely emulates.³⁹

The image, therefore, represents Seleucus' kingdom in about 304 BC, when he controlled Babylonia, Bactria, and the Iranian satrapies and was beginning to look west. It shows Seleucus as the legitimate ruler in all of these regions by his adoption of regional attributes, while still retaining an image that is recognisable more generally. Images of humans with horns (either directly attached or attached to helmets) was a common iconographic trope in Persian, Babylonian and Greek cultures and would have been immediately recognisable as a symbol either of divinity or of heroised kingship. This must be the image that Seleucus wished to project if the coins are correctly dated to *ca.* 304, which places them shortly after his journey eastward and before his western expansion. At this point, Seleucus would be more likely to seek to advertise his own recent victories and establishment of power, than to recognise those of Alexander. The audience for the coins was a mix of his military and the population near the mints. The two sets of coinage were minted in the heart of the old Persian Empire, at Susa and Ecbatana, therefore the audience undoubtedly included some Iranians as well as Babylonians. All three—his Greco-Macedonian soldiers, his Babylonian and his Iranian subjects (and probably soldiers), despite their slightly different cultural referents for the image—could have identified a divine or heroised king.

Having identified the figure as Seleucus, I will now attempt to identify the horse. Whenever the figure in the horned helmet is identified as Alexander, the horned horse is identified as Bucephalas, in a punning reference to his name 'ox-head'.⁴⁰ If the image of the helmeted hero is not Alexander, as seems likely, then the horse should not be Bucephalas. Miller and Walters have convincingly shown the image of the horned horse is a Seleucid symbol that is not connected with Alexander. Furthermore, they have shown that the legend connecting the Seleucid horned horse to Bucephalas is not contemporary but a result of a confusion that began with the Alexander Romance and has continued into the modern era.⁴¹ Indeed Miller and Walters have recently re-examined all of the

³⁹ The famous Namar-Sin tablet shows a divinised Babylonian king represented with a horned helmet very similar to the one which adorns the horned rider. Pritchard, *Ancient Near East in Pictures*, no. 309.

⁴⁰ Houghton and Stewart, "Equestrian Portrait of Alexander", 29; cf. Miller and Walters, "Seleucid Coinage and Horned Bucephalas", 45–54 for full discussion of the image.

⁴¹ Miller and Walters, "Seleucid Coinage and Horned Bucephalas", 45–56.

evidence for the identification of Bucephalas as represented with actual bull horns, and have shown that the coin images predate any such description. Furthermore, they make a strong case for the name of Bucephalas being derived from the common Thracian brand of an ox-head. So if the horned horse is not Bucephalas then it follows that the rider is not Alexander, and therefore the most likely candidate is Seleucus. The opposite is equally true, if the figure is Seleucus and not Alexander, then the horse is most likely not Bucephalas.

In fact Hoover and others have suggested that the horse was the one on which Seleucus fled from Babylon in order to escape Antigonus. This identification is based on a statue described in Malalas, which Seleucus had set up to honour his steed in Antioch. Miller and Walters reject this attribution as the horse is not described as horned, which seemed to them necessary to identify the horned horse. However this seems unnecessary. The horned horse has a clear connection with Seleucus as it appears to be linked with Seleucus' deification after his death.⁴² As the horse on which Seleucus escaped Antigonus is the only horse we have connected with him, and of which he erected a statue, we should probably identify them as the same figure. The background to the iconography of the horned horse image is clearer. The horns are linked both to the Greek tradition of divine horns and to the Mesopotamian tradition. Additionally, the horns relate the horse to Seleucus' bull iconography. It is perhaps possible to see some images of a bucranium (ox-head) on Seleucid coins as that of the horned horse or vice versa, especially if one considers the difficulty of delineating horned horses and bulls in miniature.⁴³ The horse may therefore make a statement concerning the power of the rider, who is able to control a divine horse.

The identity of the figure in the horned bust demonstrates how Seleucus was able to use an image that is similar to an image that could represent Alexander and to make it his own. These coins demonstrate that Seleucus was willing to separate himself from the image of Alexander, and this holds an important lesson for the Zeus coinage and for the legitimacy of Seleucus as a king. First it forces us to recognise that Seleucus' use of Alexander's coinage served two purposes: to establish continuity with the former king, and then, as the image was modified, it served to legitimate the new royal house. Furthermore, as Seleucus developed his own connections

⁴² Houghton and Lorber, *Seleucid Coins*, no. 322.

⁴³ Cf. *PFS* 261*.

with Zeus, the passage of divine legitimacy no longer necessarily passed from Zeus to Alexander to Seleucus, but could pass from Zeus directly to Seleucus. It is notable that outside of the coinage examined here, Seleucus I and his Seleucid successors seem to have paid very little attention to Alexander on their coinage. Furthermore, they neither incorporated him into their houses nor did they institutionalise him into a cult figure.⁴⁴ It may have been difficult for Seleucus to use Alexander in this manner as his body was clearly in Ptolemaic possession. There seems to be a clear break between the coinage and the literary accounts concerning Seleucus' relation to Alexander. Alexander features more prominently in the literary accounts. This may be a result of the more expansive nature of the literary record as well as the powerful pull of Alexander's image for all writers concerned with his Successors, rather than a choice by Seleucus himself. Seleucus sought to develop the images of Alexander into a new Seleucid image, not by abandoning the image of Alexander but rather by incorporating portions of Alexander's imagery into new types that emphasised Seleucus' own power. However, as his own successor's coinage demonstrates, Seleucus failed in this attempt; a new Seleucid image was created by his son and the coinage was stripped of most remnants of the Alexander image. The image created by Antiochus I became a more personal type that featured the portrait of the ruling king and the image of the new Seleucid ancestor, Apollo. This change moved the iconography of the Seleucid Empire from one that drew on Alexander's imagery to one that was firmly based in the person of Seleucus I and the reigning king. The manipulation of Alexander by Seleucus I demonstrates the difficulties in defining what it meant to be a king and successor to Alexander in the period immediately following his death, and indeed the complexities of reflecting kingship, and what it might mean, in royal iconography, for those producing images as well as for those who had to interpret them.

⁴⁴ Errington, *Alexander in the Hellenistic World*, 170; Hoover, "Identity of Helmeted Head", 54; for the opposing view see Hadley, "Royal Propaganda", 50–65. While various cities and communities continued to mint Alexander's tetradrachms, the practice generally declined on royal Seleucid issues. The popularity of Alexander's tetradrachms as an international monetary standard is a better explanation of the continued issuing of these coins rather than any coherent policy.

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