

HELLENISTIC ROYAL ICONOGRAPHY ON COINS

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1. Introduction

Why focus on coins to study Hellenistic royal iconography? Certainly they are small and often not in a good state of preservation; details are not easily visible. But coins have some important advantages. First, they are subject to control by officials, and, if they come from the capitals of the empires, it is very likely that they conform to a picture of the king accepted by the royal court, if not invented there. Sculptured portraits, on the contrary, often show a very free interpretation of the king's portrait, depending upon the intentions of the patron. There are only very occasionally problems in identifying kings' portraits on coins, but in the case of heads from statues identification is often very problematic. When heads have been identified, it was done nearly always with the help of the portraits on the coins. Finally, these portraits not only allow us to follow the appearance of single rulers and of dynasties, sometimes over long periods. They reveal changes as well in the way a ruler presented himself during his reign; they also reveal the continuation or the changes from father to son, and sometimes the relations between the portraits of kings of different dynasties.¹ Of course the basis for such a study is not the same in the different empires. In Ptolemaic Egypt kingship was a firm institution, based on the traditions of Egypt of the Pharaohs. The portrait of the founder of the dynasty, Ptolemy I, was shown until the end of the independence of Egypt, in order to emphasize dynastic continuity. Living kings and queens can be found only occasionally on coins. The situation in empires is completely different, where, in the Macedonian tradition, the individual role of the king was considered more important than the institution of kingship: most of all in the Seleucid empire, where we possess an almost complete series of ruler's portraits from the first to the last king. The situation was similar in Bactria, but there we still have problems with sequence, homonymy and the dating of some of the kings. In the kingdoms of Asia Minor, Bithynia, Pontus and Cappadocia the situation is good. The Antigonids in Macedonia are not very helpful in this respect: between portraits of known rulers there are gaps. The situation is at its

worst in Persia where the king was repeatedly assassinated. An exception of

All the portraits: In similar or different Macedonian in the Hellenistic to each other.

One answer starting with Persia were: by means of satraps of the represent an century BC.

2. Alexander

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worst in Pergamon, where the portrait of the founder of the dynasty, Philetairos, was repeated for a long time, until the creation of the Cistophori, with the sole exception of two isolated coin portraits of Eumenes II.²

All the questions raised in the introduction can be applied to the rulers' portraits: In what ways did the Hellenistic kingship manifest itself? Were they similar or different in the various kingdoms? Were they all taken over from Macedonian, Persian and other earlier monarchies? Or were some of them created in the Hellenistic period? How widely were they diffused? How do they relate to each other? What is the meaning of every single one of them?

One answer is clear. The Hellenistic ruler-portrait is something completely new, starting with Alexander the Great. Rulers in Egypt, the ancient Near East and Persia were shown in generic "portraits" as ageless, ideal men, identifiable only by means of an inscription. Even the earliest portraits of rulers on coins, showing satraps of the late 5th and 4th century in Asia Minor, are generic and do not represent an actual physiognomy.³ The change came in the second half of the 4th century BC.

2. Alexander and rulers influenced by him

Alexander's portraits of coins are generic and individualized at the same time. They are influenced by representations of gods and heroes, but Alexander's own features can be easily distinguished, and vice versa it can be shown that they influenced the features of gods and heroes. Alexander is shown as the young ruler that he was, without a beard (very unusual until that time), with *anastolê*, the mane of a lion, suggesting courage and strength, and with long hair, which was up to that point in time considered as effeminate. Thereafter this feature was seen as a link between the king and young gods and heroes such as Apollo and Achilles, as especially shown by T. Hölscher.⁴ In the tradition of Egyptian Pharaohs, Alexander is shown with a divine attribute, the horns of Zeus Ammon, showing that he is a recipient of divine power (fig. 1).

The Alexander-type of portrait survived Alexander. Tryphon, a Seleucid usurper (142-138), presents himself completely differently from his legitimate predecessors, but portrays himself similar to Alexander, with long hair and an idealized face (fig. 2).

Mithradates VI of Pontus (120-63) does not follow the portraits of his ancestors. The kings from Pontus did not adopt Greek, but Iranian names, and consequently did not represent themselves according to the Greek ideals of human beauty. Mithradates VI changed this royal appearance. During his long reign of 57 years he was shown mainly in two portrait-types, an earlier one (fig. 3) and a later one

(fig. 4) which did not indicate the real age of the king at all, although he was an old man at that time. The influence of the portrait of Alexander the Great is obvious. It has often been shown that this image was directed towards the Greeks and against the Romans.

Mithradates VI enthroned his son Ariarathes IX as king of Cappadocia (101-87). The son presented himself like his father, the source of his power, and had his portrait (fig. 5) resemble the earlier portrait type of Mithradates (fig. 3).

The portrait of another son of Mithradates VI, Pharnakes II, king of the *Regnum Bosporanum* (63-47), is very similar. He became king after a conspiracy against his father, who committed suicide. Nevertheless the portrait (fig. 6) intentionally resembles Mithradates and, at the same time, Alexander the Great.

Pharnakes II himself was murdered by his official Asander, who usurped the throne. Asander's face is different, but he still has the characteristic hairstyle like that of Mithradates (fig. 7). This is an example where a usurper is trying by means of his portrait to demonstrate continuity, which in fact does not exist.

We have seen several examples of the adaptation of the portrait of Alexander the Great. The Seleucid usurper Tryphon wanted to break with the legitimate dynasty. Mithradates VI wanted to be a new Alexander and to free Asia Minor from the Romans as Alexander freed it from the Persians. His sons, Ariarathes IX in Cappadocia and Pharnakes II in the Bosporian kingdom, wanted to look like their glorious father. Finally Asander, who murdered Pharnakes II, tried to hide this crime by portraying himself in a similar manner to the dead king. Seleucid empire, Pontus, Cappadocia, Bosporian kingdom: the intentional resemblances to Alexander were found in different dynasties and, in their later examples, formed a network, one portrait depending on the other.

Roman examples like the portraits of Caesar, Pompeius and M. Antonius⁵ will not be considered in this paper.

3. Diadochs

The portraits of the Diadochs Ptolemy I (fig. 8) and Seleucus I (fig. 9) show many features in common: strong neck; strong, round chin; wrinkles down from the corners of the mouth, which among other traits are responsible for the severe expression of the faces; deeply sunken eyes under strong brows, slanting down; protruding lower part of the forehead; curly hairstyle; all these features shown in a very plastic style, exaggerating every single shape. Many traits are borrowed from the portrait of Alexander, but transposed in a later age. This mixture is influenced by representations of Heracles, the prototype of a man who is still strong even in his maturity. The features of Ptolemy I remind us of a caricature,

which was certainly shown in a strong men about bulls with only strong to be author of dynasties. Their leadership were rapidly collapsed sufficient.

4. Sons of the I

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5. Bactrian soldiers

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About half a century the same type of Eucratides. The traits which fit well to frequently shown speak about a "common one dynasty only

which was certainly not the intention of the artist. Other early Hellenistic kings were shown in a similar way. These Diadochs were shown as energetic, physically strong men about whom stories were told that they tamed lions, wild boars and bulls with only their hands. The common features in their faces are much too strong to be authentic. We are facing a "Zeitgesicht" of the Diadochs and founders of dynasties. The heirs of Alexander had to legitimize their rule. They showed their leadership qualities, their successful actions. The divine pedigrees, which were rapidly constructed (Seleucus I a son of Apollo etc.) were not considered sufficient.

4. Sons of the Diadochs

With the second and the following generations of Hellenistic kings the ruler's portrait changed radically. These kings were the sons of kings and consequently legitimate by descent. Let us look at Ptolemy III (246-222/1) (fig. 10) and Seleucus II (246-226) (fig. 11). There is no representation of strength, tension or pathos in the faces any more, they are shown reserved, quiet and distant. H. Kyrieleis⁶ connected this type of ruler portrait in Egypt with the local traditions there. Contemporary portraits in the Seleucid empire can be compared to a certain degree, too⁷ (fig. 11). We find kings' portraits like this during certain generations.

5. Bactrian soldier-kings

A very characteristic tradition of rulers' portraits can be found in Bactria. Some of the most beautiful kings' portraits on coins come from this kingdom, but there is still uncertainty as to the sequence and chronology of the kings, which were often ruling in different parts of the empire at the same time.

The famous Eucratides, a usurper (c. 170-145),⁸ intentionally has his portraits (fig. 12) resemble some of the legal kings before him, for example Agathocles (c. 190-180) (fig. 13), as if he were one of them.

Eucratides' son Heliocles I (c. 145-130) cannot easily be distinguished from his father (fig. 14). We cannot say if the two men really looked so alike, or if we have here one of the many intentional resemblances of son to father.

About half a century later Theophilos (around 90) has himself reproduced with the same type of face (fig. 15), although he was not a member of the line of Eucratides. The three kings all have very similar faces with resolute expressions, which fit well to the military equipment (helmet, spear) with which they are frequently shown on the coins. The similarities are so strong that we can almost speak about a "dynastic" face of Bactrian kings, even if they do not belong to one dynasty only.

Figures

- Fig. 1 Alexander the Great. Tetradrachm, posthumous (Lysimachus). P.R. Franke, M. Hirmer, *Die griechische Münze*, München 1964, pl. 176 top, left side. By courtesy of Photoarchiv Hirmer, München.
- Fig. 2 Tryphon of Syria. Tetradrachm. Franke, Hirmer op. cit. pl. 206 bottom, right side. By courtesy of Photoarchiv Hirmer, München.
- Fig. 3 Mithradates VI of Pontus. Tetradrachm, earlier portrait type. W. Wroth, *A Catalogue of Greek Coins in the British Museum. Pontus, Paphlagonia, Bithynia, and the Kingdom of Bosphorus*, London 1889, pl. 8,7.
- Fig. 4 Mithradates VI of Pontus. Tetradrachm, later portrait type. W. Wroth op. cit. pl. 9,2.
- Fig. 5 Ariarathes IX of Cappadocia. Tetradrachm. Smith 1988, pl. 77,15.
- Fig. 6 Pharnakes II of the *Regnum Bosporanum*. Tetradrachm. F. Imhoof-Blumer, *Porträtköpfe auf antiken Münzen hellenischer und hellenisierter Völker*, Leipzig 1885, pl. 5,5.
- Fig. 7 Asander of the *Regnum Bosporanum*. Tetradrachm. F. Imhoof-Blumer op. cit. pl. 5,6.
- Fig. 8 Ptolemy I of Egypt. Tetradrachm. Kyrieleis 1975, pl. 1,2.
- Fig. 9 Seleucus I of Syria. Tetradrachm, posthumous. A. Houghton, *Coins of the Seleucid empire from the collection of Arthur Houghton* (Ancient coins in North American collections 4, 1983) pl. 33,596.
- Fig. 10 Ptolemy III of Egypt. Tetradrachm. Kyrieleis 1975, pl. 16,4.
- Fig. 11 Seleucus II of Syria. Tetradrachm. P.R. Franke, M. Hirmer op. cit. pl. 205 top centre. By courtesy of Photoarchiv Hirmer, München.
- Fig. 12 Eucratides of Bactria. Tetradrachm. Photo Numismatische Zentralkartei, Institut für Numismatik, Vienna University.
- Fig. 13 Agathocles of Bactria. Tetradrachm. U. Westermark, *Das Bildnis des Philetairos von Pergamon*, Uppsala 1961, pl. 20,5.
- Fig. 14 Heliocles I of Bactria. Tetradrachm. Photo Numismatische Zentralkartei, Institut für Numismatik, Vienna University.
- Fig. 15 Theophilus of Bactria. Tetradrachm. E. & W. Szaivert, D.R. Sear, *Griechischer Münzkatalog II. Asien und Afrika*, München 1983, 447 fig. 7867.



(Lysimachus). P.R.
hen 1964, pl. 176 top,
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trait type. W. Wroth,
Pontus, Paphlagonia,
1889, pl. 8,7.

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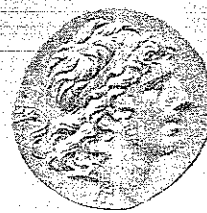
Szaivert, D.R. Sear,
nchen 1983, 447 fig.



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Fig. 16 Alexander the Great of Macedonia, V.

Fig. 17 Antiochus of Syria, V.

Fig. 18 Ptolemy of Egypt, Strocker, Mainz 19.

Fig. 19 Tyche of Antioch, V.

Fig. 20 Ariobarzanes of Parthia, V.

Fig. 21 Tarkondites of Parthia, V.

Fig. 22 Marcus Antonius, V.

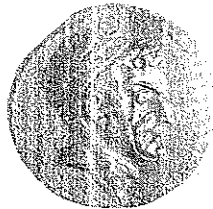
Fig. 23 Cleopatra of Egypt, Auktion 3.

Fig. 24 Cleopatra of Egypt, V.

Fig. 25 Ptolemy I of Egypt, V.



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Fig. 16 Alexander the Great. Tetradrachm. Pedigree coin, minted under Agathocles of Bactria. Photo Numismatische Zentralkartei, Institut für Numismatik, Vienna University.

Fig. 17 Antiochus VIII of Syria. Tetradrachm. Fleischer 1991, pl. 45f.

Fig. 18 Ptolemy X of Egypt. Seal impression from Edfu. H. Maehler, V.M. Strocka Ed. *Das ptolemäische Ägypten* (Akten Symposion Berlin 1976), Mainz 1978, fig. 14.

Fig. 19 Tyche of Seleucia Pieria. Tetradrachm. Fleischer 1991, pl. 58c.

Fig. 20 Ariobarzanes I of Cappadocia. Tetradrachm. Smith 1988, pl. 79,1.

Fig. 21 Tarkondimotos I of Cilicia. Tetradrachm. Smith 1988, pl. 79,3.

Fig. 22 Marcus Antonius. Denarius. *Festschrift F. Matz*, 1962, pl. 27,1.

Fig. 23 Cleopatra VII of Egypt. Tetradrachm. *Münzen und Medaillen AG, Basel, Auktion 31* (1965) no. 525.

Fig. 24 Cleopatra VII of Egypt. Tetradrachm. Kyrieleis 1975, pl. 107,3.

Fig. 25 Ptolemy III of Egypt. Tetradrachm, posthumous. Kyrieleis 1975, pl. 17,1.

Another result of this policy of portraits was the so-called "pedigree-coins" minted by Agathocles:⁹ coins with portraits of predecessors, which were shown to legitimize his own rule. The face of Heracles/Alexander the Great on a pedigree-coin (fig. 16) does not remind us of Alexander at all, but corresponds strongly to the characteristic profile and the short curls of Eucratides.

6. Tryphê-kings in Egypt and Syria

Another group of rulers' portraits follows an ideal of a king diametrically opposed to the military ideal of Bactrian kings: For example portraits of Antiochus VIII (125-96) (fig. 17) and his contemporary in Egypt, Ptolemy X (107-88), of whom we do not possess portraits on coins, but prints of seals in clay (fig. 18). The two kings do not hide their corpulence and their unattractive features, on the contrary, they emphasize them.

Five sons of Antiochus VIII became kings, at the same time or one after the other: Seleucus VI, Antiochus XI, Demetrius III, Philip I and Antiochus XII. They all were shown similar to their very popular father,¹⁰ to show that they will be good kings as he was, to legitimize their rule. Portraits like this were seen for a long time as documents of weakness of rule, of degeneracy and decadence. The apparently visible incompetence of the rulers was seen as a reason for the decline of their empires. This modern point of view corresponds very much to Roman written sources which often reported very negatively about the Hellenistic kings. But the truth was very different. These late Seleucids were permanently engaged in civil war, hardly one of them died a "natural" death, they all died "in their boots." Representations of the kings as generals, like on the Bactrian coins, would not have been very attractive to their subjects, which suffered under the wars and the decline of the economy and standard of living. What these portraits convey is *Tryphê*, a good life of pleasure and luxury for the king and for his people, not one of decadence and effeminacy, as seen by the Romans.¹¹ The associations were wealth, happiness and peace, just the things the people wanted and needed. Names like Tryphon and Tryphaina were now common in the Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties. Rulers' portraits expressing *Tryphê* were invented in Egypt; a little later the Seleucids took them from the Ptolemies.

It is interesting that we find heads and faces like this in the divine sphere, too. The features of the Tyche of Seleucia Pieria (fig. 19), the harbour of Antioch, strongly resemble those of the contemporary King Antiochus VIII (fig. 17); an intentional resemblance which passes from human being to goddess, from male to female. A goddess is certainly not the subject of degeneration — this is one more proof that these features were seen in a positive and not in a negative way.

7. Philorhomy

A kind of ruler represented by the sons of Mithradates of eternal youth. Antiochus VI, short, receding Republican portrait collected similar

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7. Philorhomaioi

A kind of ruler's image, very different from what we have so far seen, is represented by Ariobarzanes I of Cappadocia (95-63) (fig. 20), a contemporary of the sons of Antiochus VIII. He is a king by the grace of Rome and an enemy of Mithradates VI of Pontus. He does not show himself as an Alexander-like king of eternal youth like Mithradates, and not as a smiling, corpulent *Tryphê*-king as Antiochus VIII and his sons. He is shown as an old man, with flabby skin and short, receding hair. This is clearly an intentional resemblance to Roman Republican portraiture, to the men which guaranteed his power. R.R.R. Smith¹² collected similar portraits of *philorhomaioi* rulers, who expressed their political orientation towards Rome in their portraits.

Another example of a *philorhomaios* king, a little later, is Tarkondimotos I Philantonios of Cilicia (36-31) (fig. 21), who died at the side of Marcus Antonius at the battle of Actium. If it were not for the royal diadem, we tend to see a Roman, expressing gravitas and discipline, maturity and experience, all the conservative values of the late Roman republic. His master, Antonius (fig. 22), with his long nose with its hooked tip, pinched mouth with little distance between nose and mouth and very protruding chin does not look very different from our king.

On the coins of Cleopatra VII, the last Ptolemaic queen (51-31) we find two different, clearly defined portrait types, the "Alexandrian" and the "Syrian-Roman" type. The Egyptian, Alexandrian type shows her very similar to her father Ptolemy XII. The Syrian-Roman type shows her features more meagre and linear, her chin more pointed, the lips thinner, the nose longer with its tip more hooked. The affinity of this face to Roman republican portraiture has always been evident, but it is more than this. The queen is evidently shown with the features of M. Antonius. So we are confronted with two portrait-types of Cleopatra: one destined for Egypt showing the queen with features very similar to her father, and another one for the Romans showing Cleopatra under the protection of and intentionally resembling M. Antonius.

8. Links with gods and heroes

Many kings are shown with divine attributes on their portraits. The most common are the Ammon's horns on coins of Alexander the Great (fig. 1). But there are many more preserved, recently studied exhaustively by D. Svenson.¹³ This usage comes from Egypt, from representations of the Pharaoh with divine attributes, and it is Egypt where it is mostly found during the Hellenistic period. It is nearly only here that we find combinations of different attributes, like on the famous

posthumous portraits of Ptolemy III (fig. 25) with *chlamys* as an *aegis* (Zeus), scepter as a trident (Poseidon) and the rays of Helios in the hair. This does not mean that the king is now Zeus, Poseidon and Helios in one person; it only indicates his participation of certain divine powers, as H. Kyrieleis¹⁴ has pointed out.

A second possibility of linking gods and kings is the intentional resemblance of the god's face to the king's face, which is very common in the Hellenistic period. We have already seen the head of the Tyche of Seleucia Pieria (fig. 19) resembling the physiognomy of Antiochus VIII (fig. 17). We find this phenomenon perhaps under Philip II of Macedon,¹⁵ then under Ptolemy I in a head of Zeus, and later repeatedly, mainly under Antiochus IV (Apollo, Zeus)¹⁶ and Mithradates VI (Dionysus, Ares, Perseus).¹⁷ This intentional resemblance is contrary to idealizing the king by borrowing some features or the general appearance from gods or heroes, as it was done for example for Alexander the Great (Apollo, Achilles).¹⁸ As has been seen often, Hellenism is a time when gods were shown more human, and human beings more god-like than previously.

9. Conclusions

Before returning to the questions raised in the introduction, which were reproduced above, we can summarize the groups of portraits we have looked at so far:

1. First we saw Alexander, looking like a young god like Apollo or a young hero like Achilles, with long hair and without a beard, in contrast to his father Philip II and other rulers. The Alexander-type was repeated many times and used for contemporary rulers as, for example, Mithradates VI.
2. This representation of a young ruler was not the right type for the Diadochs who became kings in the middle of their lives. Their images were influenced by Alexander and by Heracles, too. The hairstyle became shorter, the expression of physical and spiritual strength was exaggerated, according to the need for personal legitimation.
3. Their sons and successors did not need such personal legitimation, they were born as princes of an institutional kingdom. Their portraits show less personal strength and energy than distance and lack of emotion.
4. In one kingdom the image of the strong, energetic king persisted: in Bactria. Here the ruler was often shown with military equipment.
5. In a period of many civil wars and economic decline the *Tryphê*-portrait of the fat, smiling, wealth-promising king was created in Egypt and soon transferred to

the Seleucid empire by the Romans (effeminate character).

6. In the latest Hellenistic period the portrait of Roman emperors was created.

Confronted with other portraits of the coins were quite different (Antiochus VIII and Antiochus IX). The Diadochs, Seleucid kings, the gods (many kings), the persons of the past (Alexander, the Romans, the new emperors). The portraits of the kings were simple as the epigrams of Philadelphos, Tryphon and reached every body. The messages should be found in the intellectuals but to be found on a coin. The philosophers or poets are messages from the past, the messages from the future.

While speaking of the dynasty to the other way of presenting a far away, if similar portraits like that of the whole portrait in time and space, it is not possible to see the Romans, finally, for the people.

the Seleucid empire. It was — intentionally or not — completely misunderstood by the Romans (Polybius), who interpreted the Dionysic component as an effeminate characteristic.

6. In the latest Hellenistic period, kings, depending on the grace of Rome, adopted the portrait of Roman republican officers, showing old, experienced, disciplined men.

Confronted with our portraits, we can say that the means of presenting a king on the coins were quite simple. *Tryphê*, that means the promise of a good life (Antiochus VIII and his sons, Ptolemy X etc.), energy, even physical power (Diadochs, Seleucus I, Ptolemy I etc.), militarism (Bactrian kings), proximity to the gods (many kings through features and/or attributes), affinity to glorious persons of the past like Alexander the Great (Mithradates VI etc.), affinity to the Romans, the new rulers of the world (*philorhomaioi*) etc. The messages of the portraits of the kings are as simple as the messages on the reverse sides of the coins with certain gods or symbols related to the king or his dynasty, and as simple as the epithets:¹⁹ Theos Epiphanes (the manifest god), Philopator, Philadelphos, Tryphon. Coins were a medium of mass communication in antiquity and reached everybody who handled money, even the illiterate. It is clear that such messages should be easily understood by everyone; the recipients were not only the intellectuals but the uneducated people, too. The statements of the coins are to be found on a completely different level than the recommendations given by philosophers or poets as to what a king should be like ("Fürstenspiegel"). These are messages from the élite to their king. Our coin portraits, on the contrary, are messages from the king and his court to the people at all levels.

While speaking about the portraits on the coins, we have jumped from one dynasty to the other. There was no dynastic isolation. As soon as a new, effective way of presenting a king was found, it was copied in other dynasties, sometimes far away, if similar historical circumstances existed there. Citations of older portraits like that one of Alexander, could appear again and again for centuries. The whole portraiture of the kings with its many connections over wide distances in time and space, turns out to be a big network throughout the Hellenistic world. It is not possible to understand a ruler portrait without looking at its context. The Romans, finally, found in this network all they needed to present their emperors to the people.

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Notes

1. I want to thank Susan Pinnells for revising the English version of this text. I hope to have a small booklet about this topic ready for the press soon.
2. Smith 1988, 79 pl. 74, 13-14.
3. J. Zahle 1988. Magt og Billede. *Nationalmuseets Arbejdsmark*, 155-67; Lycian coin portraits. Forerunners of the Hellenistic portraits of rulers on coins. In: *AXIII KonklArch*, 568-69 with bibliography; Herrscher in Lykien. In: *Götter Heroen Menschen in Lykien* (Exhibition catalogue, Vienna 1990), 51-56.
4. *Ideal und Wirklichkeit in den Bildnissen Alexanders des Großen*. Heidelberg 1971; cf. also H. Lauter, Alexanders wahres Gesicht. In: *Festschrift G. Wirth* (1988), 717-43; Smith 1988, 58-62; B.S. Ridgway 1990. *Hellenistic Sculpture I*. Bristol, 108-24.
5. D. Michel. *Alexander als Vorbild für Pompeius, Caesar und Marcus Antonius* (Collection Latomus 94, 1967); L. Giuliani 1986. *Bildnis und Botschaft*. Frankfurt am Main, 70-72 and passim.
6. Kyrieleis 1975, 23-24, 158-59.
7. Antiochus II — young Antiochus III: Fleischer 1991, 121-22.
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