



سکه سلوکی با روکش نقره در موزه ملی ایران

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چکیده

طی بررسی مجموعه سکه‌های سلوکی موزه ملی ایران، یک درهم روکشدار از نوع سکه‌های نقره پیروزی سلوکوس اول با کتیبه آرامی شناسایی شد. در مرحله نخست، ویژگی‌های اصلی آن مورد بررسی قرار گرفت و در مرحله بعد با سایر نمونه‌های مشابه و تطبیقی در دوره سلوکی سنجیده شد. تنها نمونه مشابه با درهم موردنظر توسط نیکلاس ویت از مجموعه پیچ‌فورک، سیدنی معرفی شد که درهم شناسایی شده در موزه ملی ایران نمونه جدید دیگری از این نوع سکه محسوب می‌شود. مقاله حاضر با ارائه انواع مختلف سکه‌های روکشدار با کتیبه آرامی به محل ضرب و چرایی ضرب آنها می‌پردازد.

واژگان کلیدی: سلوکوس اول، سکه روکشدار، سکه پیروزی.

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A Plated Seleucid-type Coin in National Museum of Iran

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Abstract

During a study of the Seleucid coins of the National Museum of Iran, a plated drachm of Seleucus I showing a trophy with Aramaic letters was discovered. At first, its complete specifications were analyzed and compared with other similar plated examples of the same period. The only published example of this denomination with Aramaic letters is a drachm that has been introduced by Nicholas Wright from the Pitchfork Collection, Sydney. A new example from the collection of the National Museum of Iran has come to light. This paper deals with the types of plated coins with Aramaic letters, where they were minted, and why they were minted.

Keywords: Seleucus I, plated coin, trophy coin.

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Introduction

Counterfeit coins, plated coins, and imitations are a great challenge in the field of numismatics as they occur frequently in ancient coinage. Literary historical sources are full with examples of cities and rulers who resorted to adulterating the official coinage in order to extent their financial resources. For example, we know that in the last phases of the Peloponnesian War, the Athenians found themselves in such dire financial straits that in 406/5 B.C., they issued a silver plated coinage to be used as a short term emergency issue. Once the crisis had passed, this coinage was demonetized and recalled from circulation (Kroll 1996; Van Alfen 2005: 336-340). An imitative coin can be a morally neutral issue, although the degree of closeness to its model may be open for debate. Unfortunately, it is often impossible to determine the intent behind ancient imitative coinage because we have no contemporary sources about most of them. What we can do, is to observe their behavior in circulation based on hoard evidence and archaeological provenance. This paper reviews some of what we know about plated trophy coins in the period of Seleucus I.

Historical Context

When Alexander died unexpectedly in 323 BC, Seleucus received no territory in the initial par-

titution of the empire, but he received the prize satrapy of Babylonia in 320 BC in recognition of his role in the murder of Perdikkas (Errington 1970: 58). Seleukos ruled Babylonia until 316 BC when he was driven out by Antigonos Monophtalmos. After a period of serving Ptolemy I of Egypt as a naval commander, Seleucus raised a small force and reclaimed Babylonia for himself in 311 BC (Diodorus 19.90.1-91.5). Although Antigonos remained a threat, Seleucus expanded his small territory into an empire by conquering the Upper Satrapies, and at last proclaiming himself king in 305/4 BC (Appian, Syr. 55; Sachs and Wiseman 1954: 203). In 301 BC, he killed Antigonos at the battle of Ipsos (Diodorus 20.106.3-5). From the fall of Antigonos to the late 280s BC, Seleucus spent most of his energy on the consolidation of his empire and the expansion of his territory to the east. The vast territories of Seleucus with several wars required a great amount of money for their maintenance.

Before 305/4 BC, the silver coins of Seleucus were of the Herakles and Zeus types and were inscribed with the names of Alexander’s heirs, Philip III Arrhidaios, or Alexander IV. However, after this date, they were inscribed with the name of Seleucus I alone or with his son Antiochus I. Around 300 BC, Seleucus began to experiment with new types. At Susa, he

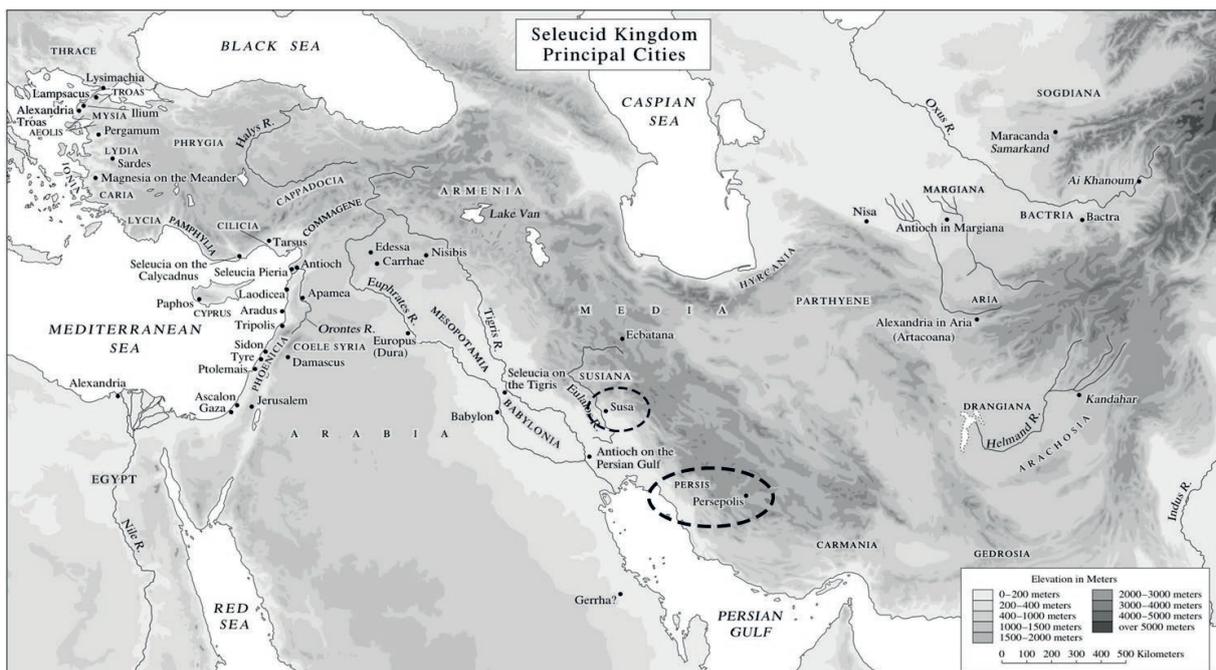


Fig 1. Seleucid Susa and Persis

struck many and varied types. However, one of them was a remarkable series of tetradrachms and drachms bearing a horned and helmeted portrait variously identified as that of Alexander the Great or more likely that of Seleucus I on the obverse and Nike crowning a trophy on the reverse (Houghton and Lorber 2002: 67-78). Some of these coins have Aramaic letters as control marks (Ibid 77) and researchers believe that these coins were not struck in Susa. One such coin has recently been identified at the National Museum of Iran.

According to Kritt's numismatic arguments, these coins commemorate Seleucus' victories in the Upper Satrapies and his subsequent assumption of the royal title in 305/4. This coinage appears to have circulated almost exclusively in Persis and might have been designed specifically for that purpose because its production ceased after the loss of the province around 295. We know based on numismatic evidence that there was a nationality revolt in Persis that made the province the first place to escape the Seleucid orbit (Kritt 1997: 82-84).

A coin of the National Museum of Iran Seleucus I Nikator

AR plated drachm; axis \Rightarrow ; diam. 16 mm; wt. 3.16 g.

Mint: Uncertain mint, perhaps in Persis, around 300 – 295 B.C.

Acq. Susa excavation. (Date uncertain)

Obv. Head of a hero r. (assimilating Seleucus, Alexander, and Dionysus), wearing Attic helmet decorated with panther skin and adorned with bull's ears and horns, legs of panther skin tied around the neck, dotted border.

Rev. ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ (?) on r., ΣΕΛΕΥΚΟΥ (reading downward) on l., Nike standing r., crowning trophy adorned with Greco-Macedonian armour, between Nike and trophy, $\pi\upsilon$; dotted border.

The variety of this coin under Seleucus I

As mentioned in the introduction, this coin has two important features: one in terms of production technology (plated coin) and the other in terms of the presence of an Aramaic control mark between Nike and the trophy. This imitative coin features similar control marks of Aramaic letters as those issued during the reign of Seleucus I. So far, they have been attested on three denominations of Tetradrachm, Drachm, and Obol (table 1).

Houghton and Lorber noted two known examples of tetradrachms of this type struck with Aramaic letters on the reverse; both were struck with different dies (Houghton & Lorber, 2002: 78, no.195) (table 1, 1-2). However, these two authors, did not mention any examples of drachms and did not classify them in Seleucid Coins (SC). The only published example of the drachm denomination is a coin in the Pitchfork Collection in Sydney Australia, catalogued by Nicholas Wright (table 1, 3). We have now another example from the inventory of the National Museum of Iran (table 1, 4). Entry no. 5 on table 1 refers to an obol in the Berlin Münzkabinett bearing the same Aramaic control mark as the others. Marest-Caffey had recorded this obol in her catalogue as a plated coin with Aramaic letters, and E.T. Newell makes a note of it in *The Coinage of the Eastern Seleucid Mints* (ESM) (p. 416, fn. 1). This obol is not listed in SC I either.



Fig 2. The drachm of National museum of Iran

Table 1. Imitation Trophy Type Coins with Aramaic Control Marks				
Tetradrachm				
1	H; 	14.60	Paris, Cabinet des medailles, 1968.215.	Marest-Caffey, Group 5, I1
2	H; 	16.58	Numismatica Ars Classica 74 (18 Nov. 2013), lot 294; Peus 376 (29 Oct. 2003), lot 507; Washington, Arthur Houghton coll., 455; Superior (11-12 Dec. 1992), lot 2150. SC 195.	Marest-Caffey, Group 5, J1
Drachm				
3		3.33	Colin E. Pitchfork coll. Wright 2011, no. 55.	Marest-Caffey, Group 6, A1
4		3.16	Susa excavation, National Museum of Iran	51962
Obol				
5		0.53	Berlin, Munzkabinett, 593/ 1909. Hirsch XXV, Philippsen coll. (Nov. 1909), 2858. ESM 416, note 1.	Marest-Caffey, Group 8, A1

Table 1 lists all three denominations: two tetradrachms (entry 1 and 2), two drachms (entry 3 and 4), and one obol (entry 5). This paper focusses on the two drachms, entry 3 from the Colin E. Pitchfork collection and entry 4 from the National Museum of Iran.

There are several similarities and also differences regarding these drachms. The obvious similarity is related to the production method: both of them are plated coins, which is an imitation of genuine drachms base on a bronze core coated with a silver foil and then struck.

The drachms were struck from different pairs of dies. The spots on the leopard skin have been placed differently on the obverse, the horn of the helmet does not protrude at the same angle, and the lower back of the helmet also differs. As for the reverse, it is evident that the wings of Nike are different, indicating the evidence of two different dies.

Plated coins

The application of silver foil over base metal (copper or bronze) cores appears to have been the primary method of plating used for Seleucid-type plated coins. This method, as reconstructed by modern metallurgists and numismatists, involve the initial production of a copper/bronze disk that was then covered with a thin layer of silver foil. Once the core was covered, it was usually heated and then struck with dies (Hoover 2008a: 241).

Michael Crawford issued in 1968 an influential article “Plated Coins – False Coins,” relating to Roman Republican forgeries. It describes a group of ancient coins as consisting of a base metal core (usually bronze) sheathed with silver or gold foil and struck with official or imitative dies (Hoover 2018: 255).

Perhaps the second best-known method of giving the appearance of solid silver to a debased coin is the process of surface enrichment. In the Roman Empire from the third to the fifth centuries C.E., This process was commonly employed for either official issues or counterfeit coinage (Cope 1972: 269). Today, it is not yet determined whether the Seleucids regularly used surface enrichment for their coins or not, although the application of this method seems probable for some issues of Demetrius III and Antiochus XII at Damascus.

Seleucid Plated coins

Plated coins were used during all periods of the Seleucid empire, from Seleucus I to Philip I. 148 Seleucid plated coin types are described in *Seleucid Coins*, Part II (Hoover 2018: 244-245). These issues circulated alongside with regular full-silver official production of these issues during the Seleucid period. Additionally, over half of the imitative tetradrachms are either plated or related to a plated coin through a die link. While it has been suggested that some official issues could have been silver-plated, the extant evidence does not fully support such a



Fig 3. The drachm of National Museum of Iran and Pitchfork Collection r.

conclusion for the trophy coinage (Houghton 1980: 10–11; Hoover 2008a: 243–245), although such debasement was attested at a later period (Marest-Caffey 2016: 13).

It is essential to establish why the Seleucid government might have issued plated coins alongside the official production. One reason for an official production of plated coins of high quality (as good as the regular coinage) might have been in some rare cases where the demand outstripped the supply of full-silver coins, due to a sudden severe financial emergency. The historical record is full of such examples, when cities and rulers found themselves in financial distress—usually during wartime—and resorted to adulterating the official coinage in some way in order to make meet their financial needs (Arist., *Oec.* 1348b.24-33).

Hoover mentions four main plated coin series of high quality during the Seleucid period; the plated Phoenician-weight Tyrian tetradrachms of Demetrios II and Antiochus VII that made up the 1932 Golan hoard (IGCH 1600), the plated coins featuring the types of Seleucus I's Susian trophy series, and the Philip I's Antiochene plated tetradrachms (Hoover 2018: 256).

The plated trophy coins may belong to such a period of crisis. This regular series of Seleucus I type was produced for the use in Persis, which was the scene of a violent uprising and was ultimately lost in c. 295 B.C. A Persian attack on Greco-Macedonian colonists has been reported by Polyaeus 7.40 and in an inscription (OGIS 223), Antiochus I reinforced a Greek polis in Persis, which subsequently bore his name (Alram 1987; Kritz 1997: 132-137; Houghton and Lorber 2002: 77, Hoover 2008b: 213-215).

However, according to the chronologies and overstrikes by the Frataraka coin hoard, Marest-Caffey argued that the coinage, probably minted after the Battle of Ipsos in 301 (Marest-Caffey 2016: 26-27), was conceived with a Persian audience in mind and testified to the Seleucid policies of conciliation towards local populations (Marest-Caffey 2016: 1).

It is yet to be explained, however, why official plated coins had necessarily the same dies as the full silver coins and why, in case, this would be evidence of official production, especially when we consider that the usual response to the use of official dies to produce plated coins is to assume the criminal activity of mint workers.

Imitation Coins

Often the word “imitation”¹ in the context of ancient numismatics, denotes the ubiquitous “barbarous imitation” that are copies of a Greek coin type, but appearing in varying degrees of crudity and differing levels of blundering the model’s inscriptions. Numerous examples of such imitations have been known for the Seleucid Empire with new ones appearing from time to time.

In many cases, the motive for such imitations may lie in a demand for coins in regions where official coins supply did not meet the demand in adequate quantities, either because of insufficient income or because of periods of war (Morkholm 1991: 35). It is important, however, to point out that under certain historical and regional circumstances, in which official coinage could not to meet the demand, counterfeiting occurred just as much as imitation because of the lack of sufficient supply of official coins. This made both types of the unofficial coin, counterfeit and imitation, more acceptable. The relatively large numbers of plated coins and imitations of Susian trophy coins of Seleucus I suggest a similar model in this case for the Seleucid empire (Hoover 2018: 259). Evidence from hoards shows that even after the local Frataraka rulers of Persis began to overstrike Seleucid issues with their own coin types (perhaps as early as 295 BC) (Hoover 2008b: 213-215), the trophy coins remained in circulation and were far less frequently subjected to overstriking than other Seleucid types (the Persepolis 1934-5 hoard (IGCH 1797) and the “Frataraka” 1986 hoard (CH 9.481)) (Curtis 2010: 385-386).

The official trophy issues seem to have been struck primarily for circulation in Persis

1. Imitation coins refer to those coins that appear to have been produced outside of an official Seleucid or foreign mint facility and that attempt to mimic the types, inscription, and controls of mints and workshops other than those at which they were produced. They are usually distinguishable from the official issues by their crudity of style and blundered Greek legends. Coins with these characteristics are often described as “barbarous” in the literature. The main purpose of imitation tetradrachms seems to have been to fill a need in a manner that might be acceptable to royal authorities and local coin-users (Hoover 2008c: 265 & 267).

and enjoyed there some preferential status. It may be that both plated and imitation issues were produced because of the regional demand for these types after the mint of Susa ceased striking this coinage in c. 295 BC².

In other words, individuals became accustomed to using a particular coin type when official coinage was readily available. Therefore, they preferred those same types to appear on imitations as an indicator of their status as being “good money” and as a comforting sign of continuity with the official issues and the full values that they represented (Hoover 2018: 261).

This is by far no comparison to the vast numbers of tetradrachms imitating the inter-regionally circulating Herakles and Zeus types of Alexander the Great, which were struck by various cities and Hellenistic kings to meet the demands of foreign mercenaries and of course trade. Indeed, the early Seleucid kings were also involved in the imitation of Alexander’s coinage, not only in the early empire of Seleucus I and Antiochus I, when the Seleucid dynasty’s coinage identity was still forming, but also later when the needs of international trade or the conservative tastes of mercenaries required them. For this reason, we find the Seleucid mint of Laodicea regularly producing imitation Alexander tetradrachms in the reign of Seleucus III and at Susa still in the reign of Antiochus (Seleucus III: SC 576; Houghton 1999: 179 and n. 9, Antiochus III: SC 1205).

The mint of Trophy coins with Aramaic letters

There are some factors that indicate the trophy coins with Aramaic letters were not struck at Susa. Firstly, Kritt and Wright describe several examples of these types, tetradrachm and drachm with various Aramaic graffiti (inscription) on the obverse or with Aramaic letters on the reverse between Nike and the trophy. They reject Susa as a possible mint with convincing arguments (Kritt 1997: 125). A second indica-

2. Susian trophy tetradrachms of Seleucus I often occur in hoards alongside Frataraka issues. For the overstriking and its chronological interpretation see Hoover 2008b: 213-215.

tion of their origin from the Persis might be the fact that Susian trophy tetradrachms of Seleucus I often occur in hoards alongside Frataraka issues or come from the Frataraka hoard along with early Perseid coins (Curtis 2010: 385-386). Furthermore, a Perseid tetradrachm of Oborzos (205-164 B.C.), that bears an Aramaic grafitto, suggests that this inscription was applied by Iranian natives in Persis (Kritt 1997: 127).

Other factors can be the existence of local imitations of the types found in Baluchistan. These coins are in the name of Antiochus, showing that the Seleucid interaction with the locals of southern Persia continued or resumed under Antiochus I (Houghton 1980: 13). Because of the imitative nature of these coins and anachronistic use of the trophy types with the name Antiochus, they are unlikely to be issues derived from direct Seleucid control of Baluchistan. Thus, the area of diffusion of the Susian prototypes suggests a mint in the Persis for the plated imitations, perhaps Persepolis or Istakhr, but the precise circumstances of this emission cannot yet be specified (Houghton and Lorber 2002: 77). Based on the Kritt, they are local copies using Seleucid types copied at a mint not under the direct administrative control of the Seleucid authorities (Kritt 1997: 128).

Conclusion

The plated coin of the National Museum of Iran is the second known trophy drachm of Seleucus I with Aramaic letters **𐎧𐎠** between Nike and the trophy. This coin was discovered during excavations at Susa. The similar drachm of this variety was published by Nicholas Wright from the Pitchfork Collection, Sidney. Despite the drachms, the crude reuse of the Susian trophy types of Seleucus I, numismatic evidence, and hoards suggest that this irregular series of Seleucus I might have been produced at a mint in Persis, perhaps at Istakhr. In addition, other signs such as the modification of the inscription to the name Antiochus and the use of local control marks seem to suggest that the mint was a Seleucid official installation and this mint produced official emergency issues for use in Persis around 300 – 295 BC.

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