

An Antiochus lepton of the Tyre mint

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AN ANTIOCHUS LEPTON OF THE TYRE MINT

H. Bartlett Wells

The following coin has come to light:

Obv. Diademed male head right, with ties at nape of neck. Border of dots.

Rev. ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ANTIOXOY, the bases of the letters inward. A club vertically with handle upward; two dolphins, facing and swimming downward with tails elevated, act as supporters at lower end of club. Border of dots.

AE, † †, w. 1.45 g, d. 13 mm.



The kinship-ties of this coin are at once apparent. It is of the class of the following examples, in the order of their publication:

Edgar Rogers, *The Second and Third Seleucid Coinages of Tyre*, NNM 34 (1927), p. 4, fig. 1 (assigned to Antiochus IV);

Edward T. Newell, *The Seleucid Coinages of Tyre - a Supplement*, NNM 73 (1936), p. 8, No. 20A (Antiochus III) and p. 13, No. 35A (Antiochus IV);

Edward T. Newell, *The Western Seleucid Mints* (1941), No. 1280 (Antiochus III);

Arthur Houghton, *Coins of the Seleucid Empire* (1983), No. 730 (Antiochus III).

Each of these relatives of the present coin is a lepton, or quarter, of the Tyre mint issued under a Seleucid king Antiochus. The only deliberate feature of the present coin which is new is that of the two dolphins appearing as supporters to the club, and the only considerable question it raises is one as to whether the coin should be assigned to Antiochus III, or to Antiochus IV. A review of the literature cited above may help toward a decision.

Rogers mentions his example in passing, as being a single specimen in his own collection. He assigns it to Antiochus IV, but offers no explanation, perhaps because that king is not germane to his overall subject which commences with Alexander Balas.

Newell (1936), who alone refers to both kings, says of his Antiochus III example (20A, from the Rouvier collection and subsequently WSM 1280; 1.13 g) that he identifies the head expressly with «Antiochus III's late portrait». In speaking of the Antiochus IV counterpart (No. 35A) he refers to two specimens, apparently then his own,

that weigh 1.50 g and 1.04 g respectively, and he refers again (he had done so first on page 8) to the Rogers specimen, now for the first time giving its weight as 0.81 g.

WSM (1941) lists as No. 1280 under Antiochus III only the coin of 1.13 g from the Rouvier collection, that had been No. 20A in the author's NNM 73, and calls it a «bronze quarter». Thus Newell continued to hold that such a coin was issued at Tyre under Antiochus III. WSM goes no further than that reign and does not list coins of Antiochus IV.

Houghton (1983) publishes as No. 730 a coin of 1.25 g in his collection, assigning it to Antiochus III. He does not report a lepton or quarter for Antiochus IV.

Thus it would appear that the criterion for distinguishing between these two almost identical types is royal portraiture. Arthur Houghton, of whose collection the new coin now forms part and who has kindly furnished the accompanying photographs of it, confirms through persuasive arguments my own at first tentative belief that the coin belongs to Antiochus III. He points out the sharp features and balding temples of «Antiochus III's late portrait» having, like that on most other bronze issues of Tyre, a pronounced orbital and a very pointed nose. This he sees as quite different from the somewhat blunter features of Antiochus IV, whose hair-style was also different.

The solicitude and skill that went into these miniatures of value trifling in their day was extraordinary – even now each letter on the reverse of this new coin remains well-formed and perfectly legible under magnification. The engraver will likewise have taken some pains to ensure that the royal image followed a specific iconography for a particular ruler.

There is this further point. Some Tyre coins of Antiochus III – the Houghton copper of 4.26 g at No. 728, and the WSM ones of 6.67 g and 5.37 g at No. 1256 – show on their reverses a small dolphin swimming toward the left and downward near the edge of the coins at approximately four o'clock. A second dolphin is perceived by Newell on WSM 1256 at about eight o'clock although I cannot make it out in the illustration, and he points to a date PIE (year 115 of the Seleucid era or 198–197 B.C.) on the very similar WSM 1258 without dolphin. I do not find such a dolphin on any other illustration of a Seleucid Tyre coin that is available to me. Accordingly I find it even more advisable to conclude with Houghton that the new lepton with two dolphins is of Antiochus III.

Being concerned to make certain that the club has its handle upward as in all Seleucid cases, I asked Dr. James Read, a specialist in mammalian marine biology at the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of Natural History, whether he could confirm my impression that the dolphin figures on the reverse of the coin have their bellies toward the edge of the coin and consequently, in order that they may be swimming right-side up, must be at the bottom of the design, acting as supporters of the club. He examined the coin under a low-power microscope and with lighting directed at it from various angles, and he supported my impression that this was the case. With regard to species he informed me that this was a common Mediterranean dolphin, but closer than that one could not come – the figures are too small, too highly stylized, and too worn to permit more precise identification.

The central conical cavities on both sides, by the way, are for either Antiochus III or Antiochus IV well inside the time range (Seleucus II–Demetrius II, second reign) within which I have encountered this cavity on Seleucid coppers. These particular cavities appear to have been struck upon the present coin after the types had been applied, and it continues to puzzle me what purpose this may have served at that place and time. Centering of the cavity on the almost circular flan is good on both sides; it is also good on the reverse type, itself well-centered, but poor on the obverse type, which is off-center toward the left.