

Zeitschrift: Schweizer Münzblätter = Gazette numismatique suisse = Gazzetta numismatica svizzera

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Numismatische Gesellschaft

Band: 38-42 (1988-1992)

Heft: 159

Artikel: The reigns of Antiochus VIII and Antiochus IX at Damascus

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-171510>

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SCHWEIZER MÜNZBLÄTTER

Gazette numismatique suisse *Gazzetta numismatica svizzera*

Herausgegeben von der Schweizerischen Numismatischen Gesellschaft (SNG)
Gedruckt mit Unterstützung der Schweizerischen Akademie der Geisteswissenschaften (SAGW)

*Publiée par la Société suisse de numismatique (SSN)
avec l'appui de l'Académie suisse des sciences humaines (ASSH)*

*Pubblicato dalla Società svizzera di numismatica (SSN)
con il contributo dell'Accademia svizzera di scienze morali (ASSM)*

Redaktion: Dr. F. Koenig, Cabinet de Numismatique, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire,
Case postale 516, CH-1211 Genève 3

Administration: Italo Vecchi, Niederdorfstrasse 43, CH-8001 Zürich, SKA Bern, Konto 100849/41

Erscheint vierteljährlich. Die Mitglieder der SNG erhalten gratis: Schweizer Münzblätter und Schweizerische Numismatische Rundschau. Jahresbeitrag: Fr. 80.–, lebenslange Mitgliedschaft: Fr. 1600.–.

Revue trimestrielle. Les membres de la SSN reçoivent gratuitement la Gazette numismatique suisse et la Revue suisse de numismatique. Cotisation annuelle: fr. 80.–, membre à vie: fr. 1600.–.

Rivista trimestrale. I membri della SSN ricevono gratuitamente: Gazzetta numismatica svizzera e Rivista svizzera di numismatica. Quota sociale annua: fr. 80.–, membro a vita fr. 1600.–.

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THE REIGNS OF ANTIOCHUS VIII AND ANTIOCHUS IX AT DAMASCUS

Arthur Houghton – Wilhelm Müseler

To students of Seleucid history the final, convulsive years of the Empire have been among the most difficult to trace. The absence of adequate numismatic material has often made it impossible to know accurately which king ruled at which location, and the consequent historical silence has led some scholars to impute periods of rule for individual rulers which, with time and the discovery of new coins, have then needed substantial revision.

A case in point is the city of Damascus during the reigns of Antiochus VIII Grypus and his half-brother Antiochus IX Cyzicenus, antagonist claimants to the Seleucid throne who ruled in Cilicia, Syria, Pheonicia and Coele-Syria between 121 and 95 B.C. The known

silver coins of the Damascus mint, which are dated in accordance with the Seleucid era (S.E., whose first year equates with 312/311 B.C.) and which bear the distinctively different portraits and inscriptions of the two kings, are clear as to who held the city until about 108/7 B.C.

As E. T. Newell has shown in his study of the mint of Damascus, the coins of Antiochus VIII Grypus proceed in an orderly and uninterrupted manner, beginning with Grypus' coins of S.E. 193 (120/19 B.C.) and ending with a rare issue of S.E. 199 (114/13 B.C.).¹ The immediately succeeding silver issues, of S.E. 200, 201 and 202, belong to Cyzicenus; and these are, in turn followed by coins of Grypus, who evidently retook Damascus about 109 B.C. and struck tetradrachms dated in S.E. 204 and 205 (109/8 and 108/7 B.C.).²

With the exception of S.E. 203, for which no coins have been recorded, the record of Damascene issues struck by both kings is therefore unbroken to S.E. 205. At this point, however, there is an apparent hiatus in the production of silver: the next issue of the adversary brothers, and the last which Newell records, is a tetradrachm of Grypus dated S.E. 209.³ An important question is who controlled Damascus in the intervening years: Grypus, as is implied by the record of silver issues; or Cyzicenus, hypothesizing that the gap was real and was caused by a dramatic change of administration? And who controlled the city after S.E. 209? Newell noted the existence of a small series of bronzes of Cyzicenus of the Eros/Nike type, dated in S.E. 201, 202, 205, 211 and 212, which he thought might have been issued at Damascus.⁴ If such was the case, it was then clear that Cyzicenus had returned to Damascus in S.E. 205, relinquished control to Grypus about S.E. 209, then retook the city for a third time at some point during or before S.E. 211. Newell was, however, very uncertain about what had actually occurred.⁵

Some years after Newell's review of the late Seleucid coins of Damascus, A. R. Bellinger appeared to put the issue to rest. From the evidence of the Dura Europos excavations, Bellinger concluded that the Eros/Nike bronzes of Cyzicenus that Newell had tentatively suggested might have been struck at Damascus were certainly produced there, and gave confirmed dates to Cyzicenus' second and third periods of rule at the city.⁶ Agreeing with Bellinger's attributions and chronological conclusions, Otto Mørkholm later published a Damascene tetradrachm of Antiochus Grypus of S.E. 214 (99/8 B.C.), apparently providing evidence that in the violent war between Grypus and Cyzicenus the city had changed hands at least six times.⁷ In Mørkholm's view, thus, the history of Damascus roughly paralleled that of Antioch, whose coinage indicated that it had been ruled by Grypus and Cyzicenus during eight successive periods of occupation.⁸

Three tetradrachms of Antiochus Grypus which have recently come to light now show that the assumptions on which such political turbulence are based are not correct. They also indicate that Antiochus VIII reigned at that city for only two periods, and Antiochus IX but one. They are:

The authors wish to express particular thanks to Arnold Spaer, for the information on his coin of Antiochus VIII, and for his helpful comments during the preparation of this article.

¹ E. T. Newell, *Late Seleucid Mints in Ake-Ptolemaïs and Damascus*, NNM 84 (New York 1939), hereafter LSM, 62–69.

² LSM 70–72 (Cyzicenus); 73–78 (Grypus).

³ LSM no. 114.

⁴ LSM 77 For coins of the type, see A. Houghton, *Coins of the Seleucid Empire, etc.* (New York 1983), nos. 885/886, both dated S.E. 202.

⁵ LSM 76: «Did Grypus hold Damascus, or did Cyzicenus? Who can tell?».

⁶ A. R. Bellinger, *The End of the Seleucids*, *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences* 38, June 1949, 88.

⁷ O. Mørkholm, *Some Western Seleucid Coins*, *Israel Numismatic Journal* 3 1965/66, 12.

⁸ E. T. Newell, *The Seleucid Mint of Antioch*, *American Journal of Numismatics* 51, 1917/18, 92–110.

Obv. Diademed head of Antiochus VIII r.; fillet border.

Rev. ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΝΤΙΟΧΟΥ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ Zeus seated on throne to l., holding Nike in outstretched r. hand; to l., monograms as indicated; beneath throne, ⌊ ; in exergue, ΑΙΣ (S.E. 211 = 102/1 B.C.) (no. 1), ΒΙΣ (S.E. 212 = 101/0 B.C.) (no. 2), or ΓΙΣ (S.E. 213 = 100/99 B.C.) (no. 3); laurel wreath border.

Tetradrachms

1. A1 P1 15.63. To l., ⌊ (?) above ⌊ .
Private collection (AHNS 318).
Fig. A.
2. A1 P2 15.88. L. field monogram off flan.
Peus 314, 30.10.1985, 166.
Fig. B.
3. A2 P3 16.12. To l., ⌊ above ⌊ .
Jerusalem, A. Spaer coll.
Fig. C.



Fig. A



Fig. B



Fig. C

Table of Issues

S.E.	<i>Date</i>		<i>Mint</i>		
	B.C.	Damascus	Ascalon	Ake-Ptolemaïs	
192	121/20			G	
193	120/19	G		G	
194	119/18	G			
195	118/17	G		G	
196	117/16	G	G	G	
197	116/15	G	G	G	
198	115/14	G		G	
199	114/13	G	} G C	G	
200	113/12	C		C	C*
201	112/11	C	G	C	
202	111/10	C	G	C	
203	110/09		G	C*	
204	109/08	G	G	C	
205	108/07	G	G		
206	107/06		G	C	
207	106/05		G		
208	105/04		G		
209	104/03	G	<u>G</u>	<u> </u>	
210	103/02		Autonomous	Hasmoneans	
211	102/01	G	Issues	under	
212	101/100	G	(recorded	Alexander	
213	100/99	G	from year 6	Jannaeus	
214	99/8	G	= 98/7 B.C.		
215	98/7		to year 51		
216	97/6		= 52/1 B.C.)		
217	96/5	Issues of Demetrius III, S.E. 217 = 96/5 B.C. to S.E. 225 = 88/7 B.C.			

The style of the three coins as well as their striking technique, their monogram convention (two monograms placed in the left field, one beneath the throne), their monogram relationship with other coins of Damascus (see the tetradrachm published by Mørkholm, cited above) and the exergue date, taken together, unequivocally point to Damascus as their issuing mint. Their existence, however, vitiates any possibility that the Eros/Nike bronzes of S.E. 211 and 212 and, by extension, earlier bronzes of that type, were struck at the same city, and makes unlikely the possibility that Cyzicenus ruled at Damascus after his reign of 113/12 – 111/10 B.C.

The following table, based on one constructed by Bellinger in his earlier study, summarizes our current knowledge of the coins struck at Damascus from 121/20 B.C. to 96/5 B.C.⁹ Following Bellinger, the letters G and C represent Grypus and Cyzicenus, respectively, although only published or otherwise known coins which have been certainly assigned to this mint are noted. For comparative purposes, the coins of Ake-Ptolemais and Ascalon have been included.¹⁰ All coins are dated, except those indicated by an asterisk(*).

The gaps in the known coinage of the Damascus mint are evident from the table, but while the record is incomplete, some inferences are nevertheless possible. One is that Cyzicenus occupied the city for one period only, from S.E. 200 (or perhaps from late S.E. 199, although no coin of his is known for Damascus with this date) to S.E. 202 or 203. Grypus regained the city by S.E. 204 and does not appear to have relinquished control there for the duration of his reign. About 98 or 97 B.C., Grypus was assassinated by his war minister, Heracleon, who seized Antioch but was almost immediately overthrown by Cyzicenus.¹¹

Despite his assumption of power in the Syrian north, Cyzicenus seems not to have returned to Damascus. Directly threatened by Grypus' eldest son Seleucus (later, Seleucus VI), who was busying himself in western Cilicia for an assault on Antioch, Cyzicenus likely was not able to commit resources to the recapture of Damascus. Instead, the city fell to another of Grypus' sons, Demetrius III Eucærus, who installed himself there in 96 or 95 B.C. and reigned continuously for the next nine years.

The rule of Grypus and Cyzicenus at Damascus can thus be compared with their occupations of Ascalon. As the coins make clear, Cyzicenus took Ascalon from Grypus in S.E. 199 and held it for another year. Grypus returned in S.E. 201, striking coins every year thereafter until the city gained its autonomy in 104/3 B.C. Further to the north, Cyzicenus seems to have held Ake-Ptolemais, but he does not appear to have capitalized on his position there to return to Coele-Syria after his eviction from Damascus in 110 or 109 B.C. New coins may appear to show otherwise; but the evidence today weighs against it.

Returning to the Eros/Nike bronzes, Newell's and Bellinger's arguments for their attribution to Damascus were strengthened by an ambiguous reference of Flavius Josephus who, summarizing the conflict between Grypus and Cyzicenus, stated that the conflict between the two brothers was prolonged as if they were engaged in a contest between athletes whose strength was exhausted but who were ashamed to yield.¹² This, taken with

⁹ Bellinger 87.

¹⁰ The table of coins of Ascalon has been drawn from A. Spaer, *Ascalon: From Royal Mint to Autonomy*, *Studies in Honor of Leo Mildenberg* (Wetteren 1984) 229–239.

¹¹ Bellinger 75, followed by E. Will, *Histoire politique du monde hellénistique* (Nancy 1967) 374–75, places Grypus' assassination in 96 B.C., but the coinage of Seleucus VI struck at Seleucia on the Calycadnus in Cilicia suggests an earlier date: see A. Houghton, *The Royal Mint of Seleucia on the Calycadnus*, *Kraay-Mørkholm Essays* (Louvain-la-Neuve 1989) 97–98. The record of coins struck at Damascus ends with Grypus' issue of 99/8 B.C., and is thus silent on the question of whether Grypus lived beyond this point.

¹² Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* XIII, 327.

the statement of Eusebius that, following Grypus' return from Aspendus, the Seleucid Empire was divided into two parts, with Grypus reigning in the north and Cyzicenus controlling the south,¹³ suggested a certain balance of power between them. The apparent correspondence of sources has led scholars to accept Eusebius' statement as essentially correct, and thus to overrate Cyzicenus' political position in the years after 110/109 B.C.

This can be seen as an error. There can be no doubt that Grypus' position in north and central Syria was strengthened after his recapture of Antioch and Damascus, and that Cyzicenus was left with little more than a few port cities in Syria and Phoenicia. Yet, even though Grypus failed to retake these coastal areas, there is no reason to believe that following his partial defeat in 110/109 B.C., Cyzicenus was ever again able to mount a successful attack on Damascus. Indeed, the new numismatic material argues against such an assumption. The interpretation of Eusebius' vague statement that Cyzicenus continued to rule in «the south» after Grypus' return from Asia Minor should be revised against this background; and Grypus' victory of 110/109 B.C. should now be seen as having been of greater importance than the literary sources have implied.

¹³ Eusebius, *Chron.* (ed. Schoene), vol. I, 260.