# ISRAEL NUMISMATIC JOURNAL

## VOLUME 17

### 2009–10

### CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>A Tribute to Arnold Spaer</td>
<td>DAN BARAG AND BOAZ ZISSU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>A Bibliography of Arnold Spaer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>An Early Seleucid Bronze Hoard</td>
<td>CATHARINE LORBER AND ARTHUR HOUGHTON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Hasmonean Coin Chronologies: Two Notes</td>
<td>DAVID HENDIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>The Coinage of the Nabataean King Malichus I (59/58–30 BCE)</td>
<td>RACHEL BARKAY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>The Shewbread Table on the Coins of Mattathias Antigonus: A Reconsideration</td>
<td>ZOHAR AMAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>The Ramat Rachel Hoard of Tyrian Shekels</td>
<td>YOAV FARHI, URI DAVIDOVICH, YUVAL GADOT, AND ODED LIPSCHITS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>The Distribution of Coins of the Jewish War against Rome in Galilee and Phoenicia</td>
<td>YINON SHIVTIEL, BOAZ ZISSU, AND HANAN ESHEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td>A Note on Coins from the First Revolt against Rome Discovered at Carnuntum, Austria</td>
<td>RONNY REICH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>Sixteen Bar Kokhba Coins from Roman Sites in Europe</td>
<td>HANAN ESHEL, BOAZ ZISSU, AND GABRIEL BARKAY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td>Bar Kokhba Coins from Herodium (Hebrew University Expedition)</td>
<td>ROI PORAT, EHUD NETZER, YAakov KALMAN, AND RACHEL CHACHY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106</td>
<td>Halved Bronze Coins from the Bar Kokhba War</td>
<td>DAN BARAG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113</td>
<td>Coins from the Bar Kokhba Revolt Hidden in Me’arat Ha-Te’omim (Mugharet Umm et Tūeimin), Western Jerusalem Hills</td>
<td>BOAZ ZISSU, HANAN ESHEL, BOAZ LANGFORD AND AMOS FRUMKIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>148</td>
<td>A Note on a Medallion of Antoninus Pius from Neapolis: The Largest Medallion Minted in Palestine</td>
<td>ROBERT DEUTSCH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151</td>
<td>The Coinage of Jaffa in the Roman Period</td>
<td>AVNER ECKER</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
177  Yoav Farhi: City Coins from Roman Palestine Made of Lead and Comparable Materials
187  Eitan Klein: The Hercules Relief (Oscillum?) from Khirbet el-Karmil Reconsidered
198  D. M. Metcalf: Some Byzantine Lead Seals of Scholastici
206  Alla Kushnir-Stein: Four Inscribed Lead Weights from the Collection of Arnold Spaer
213  Nikolaus Schindel and Wolfgang Hahn: Imitations of Sicilian Folles of Constantine IV from Bilad al-Sham
233  Nitza Amitai-Preiss and Yoav Farhi: A Small Assemblage of Lead Sealings, Weight and Coins from the Early Islamic Period
238  Dan Barag: A Hoard of Amalricus I Deniers from the Vicinity of Bethlehem

246  Obituary: Dan P. Barag
248  Obituary: Hanan Eshel
251  Obituary: Silvia Mani Hurter
253  List of Addresses of Authors
255  Abbreviations
An Early Seleucid Bronze Hoard

CATHARINE LORBER AND ARTHUR HOUGHTON

ARNOLD Spaer shares our passion for Seleucid coins and for recording hoards. Both Seleucid numismatics and the hoard literature have benefited richly from his contributions, which are by no means limited to these two special fields. In recognition and thanks, we offer him an early Seleucid bronze hoard, recorded from commerce in 2006. We believe it is of particular interest because the record of Seleucid hoards, though very large, includes relatively few bronze hoards. Of these, only five date from the third century, and none is as early as the bronze hoard published here. It is the only known hoard provenance for most of the coin issues it contains.

1 The authors profited from discussions with Oliver Hoover and Panos Iossif.
REGION OF HOARD FORMATION

Our hoard was clearly formed in Syria Seleucis, because seventy-two coins in the assemblage were struck by mints in that region. We use the term “assemblage” rather than “hoard” at this stage because some of the coins are obviously intrusive and the closing coins have yet to be considered. Even though the vast majority of the coins are products of the Antioch mint, the presence of eighteen civic bronzes of Seleucia Pieria (25% of the Syrian component) is a clue that the hoard was formed in Seleucian territory. Kevin Butcher has demonstrated that in the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman periods the cities of Seleucia Pieria and Antioch each employed their own civic coinage and excluded the municipal bronze coins of neighboring cities.3 As we shall see below, the contents of our hoard probably imply that similar policies were in effect in Seleucia in the Early Hellenistic period.

CLOSURE OF THE HOARD

Ordinarily, the most recent coins in a hoard are also the most numerous, but that is not the case here. We can easily exclude the second-century issues — two bronzes of Antiochus IV, two of Alexander Balas (one quasi-municipal), and one of Demetrius II. The absence of coins of Antiochus II suggests that the hoard closed before his reign, and that the three bronzes of Seleucus II and the singleton of Seleucus III were either very late additions to the hoard, or more likely modern intrusions.

This still leaves the hoard with a rather peculiar structure. There are sixty-one bronzes from the time of Seleucus I, as opposed to only twelve of Antiochus I. The anomaly is not attributable to a closure at some early point in the reign of the latter king, for all three periods of his Antiochene coinage are represented in nearly equal numbers. A possible explanation for the odd structure of the hoard could be the nature of monetary circulation at Seleucia Pieria. The presence of numerous royal bronzes of Seleucus I from other mints suggests a provisional hypothesis: that the Seleucian civic authorities initially allowed “outside” bronze coinage to enter their market, but eventually recognized the benefits of a monopoly and limited the circulation of non-Seleucian bronze coins in order to protect their local mintage. Such a policy could account for the low representation of Antiochene bronzes of Antiochus I, which were produced in great abundance and should have flooded the market at Seleucia in the absence of artificial restraints. It is noteworthy that this presumed policy involved the protection of an earlier civic coinage, for Seleucia struck no municipal bronzes in the reign of Antiochus I.

A policy of excluding royal bronze coinage differs slightly from the policies deduced by Butcher from his survey of monetary circulation at Seleucia and Antioch. He looked first at the Late Hellenistic period beginning c. 80 BCE, a time when royal bronze coinage was no longer being produced in Syria Seleucis. In the Early Roman period, SC bronze coins of Antioch were common in both cities, indicating that they did not have the authority to exclude this provincial coinage. This observation underscores the point that the city government of Seleucia also lacked the inherent authority to ban Seleucid royal bronze coinage from its territory. The city must have obtained the permission of Seleucus I for such a ban, probably as part of the euergetic grant that allowed it the privilege of minting its own civic coinage.

THE ANTIOCH COMPONENT OF SELEUCUS I

The large Antioch component of Seleucus I presents a further puzzle. Although the hoard contains five bronze coins of Alexander the Great, it includes only one example of Seleucus’s common “double” of the Apollo/Athena Promachos type, and that coin bears a countermark of Seleucia Pieria. The sparse representation of the Apollo/Athena Promachos series, together with the countermark, refutes the provisional hypothesis offered above and suggests instead that from the very beginning royal bronze coinage of Antioch was systematically excluded from Seleucia and admitted only after countermarking. The presence of three smaller Apollo/tripod “units” may indicate that the ban did not extend to this denomination, perhaps because Seleucia did not produce sufficient “units” to meet the local demand. This is generally consistent with the coin finds from excavations at
Seleucia Pieria, which included only two Antiochene “doubles” but six “units” and four “halves.”

The picture is very different for the Medusa/bull series, which accounts for twenty-seven of the forty-three royal bronze coins of Seleucus I, or nearly 63%. All but two of the Medusa/bull bronzes are “doubles,” and to the extent that the controls are visible, all but three coins share the same control, $\Xi$, placed in the exergue of the reverse. The predominance of this control and configuration reflects the fact that this is by far the most common of the surviving Medusa/bull issues. Nevertheless, the strong presence of Antiochene Medusa/bull bronzes in our hoard is difficult to reconcile with the other evidence suggesting that the Seleucian civic authorities attempted to protect their municipal bronze coinage from competition. Butcher suggests that such irruptions of banned coinage into the closed currency markets of Syrian cities might be attributed to special circumstances, such as the movement of troops or regional festivals. Probably the least strained of the possible explanations is that our hoarder conducted business in Antioch late in the reign of Seleucus I or that he resided there for a time and thus acquired current Antiochene bronzes to add to his savings.

**BRONZES WITH A SEATED MALE FIGURE/HORNED ELEPHANT HEAD**

Our hoard contains three specimens of the bronze issue with a seated male figure on the obverse and a horned elephant head on the reverse. An exceptional specimen in the collection of Petr Veselý of the Czech Republic has revealed details of the obverse type that were never observed previously. The seated male figure has a long, rather wispy beard and a cloth wrapped around his head, undoubtedly meant to represent a turban. And, as Newell recognized long ago, he is holding an elephant goad in his right hand. Iossif and Lorber have identified the figure as a representation of the god Dionysus in his aspects as conqueror of India and patron god of war elephants in the Hellenistic armies. The turban of the coin type may be an allusion to the report of Megasthenes, Seleucus’s ambassador to India c. 295, that it was Dionysus who taught the Indians to wear the turban. The intimate connection between Dionysus and elephants is reflected in the Hellenistic practice

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5 Butcher (n. 3 above), p. 147.
6 SC 25; WSM 929.
8 Arrian: *Anabasis* 8.7.
of giving wine to the pachyderms when they were sick and also to rouse them for battle.\textsuperscript{9}

The types of these coins are especially appropriate to Apamea, where the Seleucid war elephants were stabled.\textsuperscript{10} Iossif and Lorber wonder whether the issue should be reattributed from Antioch to Apamea, but are unable to reach a conclusion. Newell assigns it to Antioch because its control mark, the letter Ξ, also occurs on Medusa/bull bronzes of Antioch, many of which are represented in our hoard. The control link is not conclusive, however: it may mean that the two coinages are products of the same mint, or that a moneyer was transferred from one mint to another. A third possibility is that the Dionysus/elephant head bronzes were a special issue struck in Antioch for distribution in Apamea. Our hoard probably tips the balance in favor of Newell’s Antioch attribution. If, as we suggest above, our hoarder spent some time in Antioch, he could have acquired the Dionysus/horned elephant head bronzes there. But if these bronzes circulated mainly or exclusively in Apamea, it would be necessary to multiply the assumptions in order to explain their presence in a hoard formed primarily in the closed market of Seleucia Pieria. The simplest solution is to retain the issue in Antioch.

Iossif and Lorber also question Newell’s date for this issue. He places it in the last year of Seleucus’s reign and interprets it as a victory issue following the battle of Corupedium, in which he infers a significant role for Seleucus’s war elephants.\textsuperscript{11} The accounts of Corupedium do not mention the involvement of elephants, and Aelian implies that only one of the elephants presented by the Indian king Chadragupta to Seleucus was still alive at the time of the latter’s death.\textsuperscript{12} On the other hand, the rare horned horse head/elephant tetradrachms of Seleucus struck at Pergamum\textsuperscript{13} may attest to the presence of elephants at Corupedium despite the silence of our written sources. But Seleucus survived only a few months after Corupedium and neither he nor his army returned to Syria, so an important celebratory bronze issue seems somewhat unlikely at a Syrian mint. A plausible alternative is that the Dionysus/elephant head bronzes commemorate the battle of Ipsus, where Seleucus’s war elephants were critical to the victory. Ipsus was directly relevant to Syria because Seleucus gained title to the region as a spoil of battle. Moreover, an association with Ipsus would allow for a comfortable chronology: the Dionysus/horned elephant head bronzes could fall...

\textsuperscript{10} Strabo: \textit{Geographia} 6.2.10.
\textsuperscript{11} E. T. Newell: \textit{The Coinage of the Western Seleucid Mints from Seleucus I to Antiochus III} (Numismatic Studies, no. 4), New York, 1941, p. 102.
\textsuperscript{12} Justin: \textit{Epitome of Pompeius Trogus’ Historiae Philippicae} 17.1.7–12; Pausanias: \textit{Periegesis tes Hellados} 1.10.4–5; Aelian: \textit{De Natura Animalium} 9.58.
\textsuperscript{13} SC 1; WSM 1528–1529.
between the Apollo/Athena Promachos series and the Medusa/bull series, making
them the earliest issue marked with the letter $\Xi$, rather than the latest. This
arrangement implies a date around the middle of Seleucus’s reign in Syria — and
not too long after Megasthenes’ mission to India — for the Dionysus/horned
elephant head bronzes.\(^{14}\) In absolute terms, c. 290 should not be too far off the
mark.

THE ATHENA/BULL AND ATHENA/ELEPHANT BRONZES
OF SELEUCUS I

It is rather surprising to encounter nine bronzes of Seleucia on the Tigris in a
Syrian hoard. To be sure, tetradrachms from Seleucia on the Tigris migrated west-
ward in large numbers, but bronze coinage tended to have a local circulation.\(^{15}\)
These nine eastern bronzes represent 20% of all the royal bronzes of Seleucus I in
the hoard, or 15% of all coins attributable to his reign.

The attribution of the Athena/bull and Athena/elephant bronzes to Seleucia on
the Tigris rests on the monogram $\Phi$ which also occurs on early Seleucian
tetradrachms of the Alexandrine type, including the single issue in the name of
Alexander, the earliest issues in the name of Seleucus, and the earliest issues with
the Zeus Nicephorus reverse type.\(^{16}\) But these bronzes are set apart from other
Seleucian bronzes by their fabric, which is thick with a straight rather than
beveled edge. In fact, it is indistinguishable from the fabric of Syrian bronzes,
compelling us to ask whether these two bronze varieties have been wrongly attrib-
uted to Seleucia on the Tigris.

\(^{14}\) Newell (n. 11 above, p. 100) dates the transition from Apollo/Athena to Medusa bull
bronzes to c. 286. A term\(\text{\textit{inus post quem}}\) of 294 is provided by Medusa/bull types
overstruck on a bronze of Demetrius Poliorcetes from Tarsus. A date in the late 280s
for the Medusa/bull bronzes, as proposed by Houghton and Lorber (n. 4 above, pp. 5
and 21), fails to take into account the large volume and many control varieties of this
coinage at Antioch, which clearly required more time than the very limited issues at
other mints throughout the kingdom.

\(^{15}\) Hoards that demonstrate the westward-moving tetradrachms of Seleucia on the Tigris
during the lifetime of Seleucus I include Aksaray (\textit{IGCH} 1400), c. 300 or shortly there-
after; Antakya region, 1994 (\textit{CH VIII}, 250), 295; Asia Minor, 1970 (\textit{CH I}, 55), 293/2;
Ankara (\textit{IGCH} 1399), c. 294/3–290; Mersin (\textit{IGCH} 1424), c. 285 for Lot A, c. 280 for
Lot B; Phoencia, 1997 (\textit{CH IX}, 483), 285–280; Latakia (\textit{IGCH} 1523), 284 or later;
Gordion hoard III (\textit{IGCH} 1403), c. 280; Manissa (\textit{IGCH} 1293), c. 280; Turkey,
1973/74 (\textit{CH I}, 56), c. 275 Armenak (\textit{IGCH} 1423), c. 275–270 (but the only Seleucid
coins are of Seleucus I).

\(^{16}\) SC 116, 117.1, 119.1; M. J. Price: \textit{The Coinage in the Name of Alexander the Great and
the Eastern Seleucid Mints from Seleucus I to Antiochus III} (Numismatic Studies, no.
1), New York, 1938, nos. 2–5, 13–14.
Among the provenances cited for these varieties in *Seleucid Coins*, Syria is slightly more frequent than Babylonia. Three Athena/bull bronzes were uncovered in the excavations at Seleucia Pieria, as against two in the excavations at Seleucia on the Tigris. For the Athena/elephant bronzes we have single specimens found in the Antioch excavations and the Seleucia Pieria excavations as contrasted with one from Iraq. These data are inconclusive: the movement of bronze coins from Seleucia on the Tigris to Syria Seleucis might be attributable to troop movements or to a dispersion along the caravan route that ran from Babylonia up the Euphrates, ending at Antioch and Seleucia Pieria. The finds at Seleucia Pieria imply either that Athena/bull and Athena/elephant bronze coins were not affected by the city’s ban on imported bronze currency, or that they are issues of Seleucia Pieria itself. The lack of control linkage to other coins more securely attributed to the Syrian Seleucia makes the latter alternative extremely unlikely. We thus suspect that the ability of Seleucia Pieria to protect its market from “outside” bronze coinage may have been limited to the abundant production of Antioch, the only bronze coinage that constituted a real threat.

**ALEXANDER III**

**Heracles/club and bow in bowcase**

1. 19 mm 5.70 gr. Kerykeion (r.) above club above legend, bow in bowcase beneath legend. Cf. Price 274 (Macedonia) and 3059 (Tarsus, c. 323–317) (Fig. 1).

2. 18 mm 6.38 gr. Bow in bowcase above legend, club above grain ear (l.) beneath legend. Kaunos(?), c. 325–319. Price 2102 (Miletus). The attribution to Kaunos suggested by Ashton (Fig. 2).

**Gorgoneion on shield/helmet** (all probably of Miletus/Mylasa and/or Salamis)


**CIVIC ISSUES OF SELEUCIA PIERIA (Reign of Seleucus I)**

**Quadruples**

6. 26 mm 19.11 gr. *WSM* 896 (Fig. 3).

7. 26 mm 14.36 gr. *WSM* 896 (Fig. 4).
8. 26 mm 12.69 gr.  *WSM* 896 (Fig. 5).
9. 26 mm 13.99 gr.  *WSM* 896 (Fig. 6).
10. 24 mm 12.74 gr.  *WSM* 896 (Fig. 7).
11. 27 mm 13.78 gr.  *WSM* 896 (Fig. 8).
12. 26 mm 14.16 gr. New variety, with control of *WSM* 898 (double) (Fig. 9).

**Doubles**

13. 23.5 mm 10.61 gr. Plain thunderbolt.  *WSM* 897 (Fig. 10).
14. 24×20 mm 8.68 gr.  *WSM* 897 (Fig. 11).
15. 22.5 mm 9.31 gr.  *WSM* 897 (Fig. 12).
16. 19.5 mm 6.25 gr.  *WSM* 897 (Fig. 13).
17. 22 mm 7.24 gr. Winged thunderbolt.  *WSM* 898 (Fig. 14).
18. 22×19 mm 7.71 gr.  *WSM* 898.
19. 23×20 mm 6.00 gr.  *WSM* 898 (Fig. 15).
20. 21 mm 7.66 gr. Plain thunderbolt, unrecorded control.  *WSM* — (Fig. 16).
21. 18 mm 7.13 gr. Winged thunderbolt, control obliterated. Probably  *WSM* 898 (Fig. 17).

**Units?**

22. 18 mm 4.78 gr. Thin flan.  *WSM* 897 var.? (Fig. 18)
23. 22×19 mm 5.88 gr. Thin flan.  *WSM* 897 var.? (Fig. 19)

**SELEUCUS I**

**Antioch**

**Apollo/Athena Promachos r.**

24. 19 mm Countermark of Seleucia Pieria (Fig. 20).

**Apollo/tripod**

Denomination C

25. 15 mm 3.15 gr.  *SC* 18.1.  *WSM* 916 (Fig. 21).
26. 15 mm 3.21 gr.  *SC* 18.3c (Fig. 22).
27. 15.5 mm 3.14 gr.  *SC* 18.3c (Fig. 23).

**Medusa/bull**

Denomination B

28. 20 mm 7.84 gr. Ζ in exergue.  *SC* 21.2b.  *WSM* 925 (Fig. 24).
29. 23 mm 6.26 gr. Same as preceding.  *SC* 21.2b.  *WSM* 925 (Fig. 25).
30. 20 mm 6.75 gr. Same as preceding. SC 21.2b. WSM 925 (Fig. 26).
31. 18.5 mm 6.61 gr. Same as preceding. SC 21.2b. WSM 925.
32. 20 mm 7.71 gr. Same as preceding. SC 21.2b. WSM 925 (Fig. 27).
33. 19 mm 6.21 gr. Same as preceding. SC 21.2b. WSM 925 (Fig. 28).
34. 19 mm 6.52 gr. Same as preceding. Kerykeion c/m under bull. SC 21.2b. WSM 925 (Fig. 29).
35. 20 mm 6.39 gr. Same as preceding. SC 21.2b. WSM 925 (Fig. 30).
36. 19×17.5 mm 6.61 gr. Same as preceding. SC 21.2b. WSM 925 (Fig. 31).
37. 20 mm 6.34 gr. Same as preceding. SC 21.2b. WSM 925 (Fig. 32).
38. 20 mm 6.85 gr. Same as preceding. SC 21.2b. WSM 925 (Fig. 33).
39. 21×19 mm 6.74 gr. Same as preceding. SC 21.2b. WSM 925 (Fig. 34).
40. 19.5 mm 6.85 gr. Same as preceding. SC 21.2b. WSM 925.
41. 22.5×20 mm 7.69 gr. Same as preceding. SC 21.2b. WSM 925 (Fig. 35).
42. 19 mm 4.89 gr. Same as preceding, but possible second control (ΘΣ?) (Fig. 36).
43. 23×19 mm 6.00 gr. Ν above bull, ex. off flan. Probably SC 21.4; WSM 924 (Fig. 37).
44. 19 mm 6.26 gr. ΜΕ (or ΜΕ or ΠΕ) above bull, Λ between hind legs. SC — (Fig. 38).
45. 18 mm 7.83 gr. Partial control in ex., probably part of monogram involving Π. SC —.
46. 19 mm 6.88 gr. Flatness in ex., no visible controls (Fig. 39).
47. 18.5 mm 6.13 gr. Flatness in ex., no visible controls (Fig. 40).
48. 20 mm 7.22 gr. Traces in ex (Fig. 41).
49. 19 mm 6.31 gr. Ex. off flan (Fig. 42).
50. 19 mm 6.46 gr. Appears unmarked, but surfaces a bit rough (Fig. 43).
51. 19×17 mm 6.48 gr. Ex. off flan (Fig. 44).
52. 20 mm 5.04 gr. Surfaces very rough, obliterating controls (if any).

Denomination C
53. 17×15 mm 3.65 gr. SC 22.1. WSM 927 (Fig. 45).
54. 16 mm 2.68 gr. SC 22.1. WSM 927 (Fig. 46).

Seated male figure/elephant head

Denomination B
55. 20.5×18 mm 7.09 gr. SC 25. WSM 929 (Fig. 47).
56. 20 mm 7.14 gr. SC 25. WSM 929. Traces of casting spurs (Fig. 48).
57. 19 mm 8.64 gr. Controls off flan. Traces of casting spurs (Fig. 49).

_Seleucia on the Tigris_

_Athena/bull_

Denomination B
58. 19 mm 9.30 gr. Star(?) above bull. Cf. SC 125 (Fig. 50).

_Athena/elephant_

Denomination B
59. 19 mm 7.63 gr. SC 128a. ESM 15 (Fig. 51).
60. 21 mm 7.71 gr. SC 128a. ESM 15 (Fig. 52).
61. 22 mm 8.01 gr. SC 128a. ESM 15. Thin flan.
62. 19 mm 6.98 gr. SC 128b. ESM 17 (Fig. 53).
63. 20 mm 8.92 gr. SC 128b. ESM 17.
64. 19 mm 8.06 gr. SC 128b. ESM 17 (Fig. 54).
65. 21 mm. 5.74 gr. SC 128c. ESM 18 (Fig. 55).

Denomination C
66. 18 mm 3.91 gr. 𐀚 under elephant’s belly, B to r. Unrecorded control variant; cf. SC 129b, ESM 16 (Fig. 56).

_ANTIOCHUS I_

_Antioch_

_Apollo/tripod, first series_

Denomination B
67. 21 mm 5.84 gr. SC 336b. WSM 933. Thin flan (Fig. 57).
68. 19 mm 7.91 gr. Outer l. field off flan, outer r. field corroded but probably empty. SC 336a? Thick flan (Fig. 58).

Denomination D
69. 11.5 mm 1.70 gr. SC 337a. WSM 935 (Fig. 59).

_Anchor on shield/elephant_

Denomination B
70. 20 mm 5.90 gr. SC 339.1. Thin flan (Fig. 60).
71. 21 mm 6.36 gr. SC 339.2. WSM 942. Thin flan (Fig. 61).
72. 21×19 mm 5.95 gr. SC 339.2. WSM 942. Thin flan (Fig. 62).
Zeus/thunderbolt
Denomination D
73. 11 mm 1.31 gr. SC 344. WSM 950 (Fig. 63).

Antioch I/Apollo on omphalos
Denomination C
74. 15 mm 4.10 gr. SC 351.1 (Fig. 64).
75. 16 mm 4.53 gr. SC 351.1 (Fig. 65).
76. 16×13 mm 2.25 gr. Portrait l., Apollo r. SC 352. WSM 963 (Fig. 66).

Seleucia Pieria
Zeus/thunderbolt
77. 13 mm 1.71 gr. SC 356. WSM 906 (Fig. 67).

Seleucia on the Tigris
Facing Apollo/Nike with trophy
Denomination B
78. 22 mm 9.20 gr. SC 388.3. ESM 172 (Fig. 68).

SELEUCUS II

Antioch
Athena/Nike
Denomination B
79. 20 mm 7.05 gr. SC 692.
80. 19 mm 7.25 gr. SC 692.1. WSM 1016 (Fig. 69).

AEA Mint
Apollo/bull
Denomination C
81. 15 mm 4.33 gr. SC 708a. WSM 1158 (Fig. 70).

SELEUCUS III

Antioch
Artemis/Apollo on omphalos
Denomination C
82. 16 mm 4.53 gr. SC 922 (Fig. 71).
ANTIOCHUS IV

Antioch

Radiate head of Antiochus IV/Apollo archer advancing r.
Denomination C
83. \(SC\) 1410; \textit{SNG Spaer} 997–1001.

Radiate Antiochus IV/eagle
Denomination B
84. \(SC\) 1415; \textit{SNG Spaer} 986–989.

ALEXANDER I

Antioch

Dionysus/elephant
Denomination C
85. \(SC\) 1791; \textit{SNG Spaer} 1477–1479.

Radiate Alexander I/tripod, quasi-municipal issue, dated SE 163 (150/49 BCE)
Denomination C
86. \(SC\) 1789.

DEMETRIUS II, FIRST REIGN

Antioch

Apollo/tripod
Denomination B
87. \(SC\) 1913.1b; \textit{SNG Spaer} 1624–1626.

Figs. 1–10. An early Seleucid bronze hoard
Figs. 11–20. An early Seleucid bronze hoard
Figs. 21–30. An early Seleucid bronze hoard
Figs. 31–40. An early Seleucid bronze hoard
Figs. 41–50. An early Seleucid bronze hoard
Figs. 51–60. An early Seleucid bronze hoard
Figs. 61–71. An early Seleucid bronze hoard