

## ABOUT AN ALEXANDER TYPE STATER IN THE NAME OF SELEUKOS I<sup>st</sup>, FROM OSTROV (CONSTANȚA COUNTY, ROMANIA)

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**Keywords:** *Seleukos I, Deculescu, Ostrov, Syria, Seleukid kingdom, Seleukia on the Tigris.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *Seleucos I, Deculescu, Ostrov, Regatul Seleucid, Seleukia de pe Tigru.*

**Abstract:** *In 1961, an Alexander type stater in the name of Seleukos I was bought by the Numismatic Department from the Library of the Romanian Academy. The coin was sold by C. Deculescu, former politician from the interwar period and it was discovered at Ostrov, Constanța County. It belongs to a very rare series of gold coins represented by this single stater (WSM 1335 = SC 56), another lost in commerce, being registered more than 100 years ago (1900 and 1913). There is also a double stater of the same type included in this series (WSM 1334 – SC 55), all of them being struck at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC in an uncertain centre from Cappadocia. The role of these coins seems to be rather ceremonial then financial, related to a special occasion like the foundation of Seleukia on the Tigris in 305-304 BC or the victory over Antigonos Monophthalmos at Ipsos in 301 BC. This discovery is perfectly integrated to the already known horizon of Seleukid coins finds (only tetradrachms) from the same period coming from the hoards discovered at Satu Nou (Constanța county), Rasa (Călărași county), Vedeia (Giurgiu county) and Hinova (Mehedinți county). Also, the finds of gold Alexanders at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC are common in the entire area of Lower Danube, the coins coming especially from the territories controlled by Antigonos Monophthalmos, due to the Thracians or Getae warriors fighting as mercenaries in the Diadochi armies. This stater from Seleukos I is a part of the same phenomenon.*

**Rezumat:** *În anul 1961, Cabinetul Numismatic al Bibliotecii Academiei Române achiziționa un stater de tip Alexandru cel Mare emis în numele lui Seleucos I. Piesa provenea de la C. Deculescu, fost ministru și senator în perioada interbelică, ea fiind descoperită la Ostrov, jud. Constanța, fără să cunoaștem momentul descoperirii. Moneda, de tip WSM 1335 = SC 56, aparține unei serii extrem de rare, reprezentată prin acest singur exemplar (unul similar în comerțul internațional de antichități cu peste un secol în urmă) păstrat și aflat în colecție publică, ca și printr-un dublu stater tip WSM 1334 – SC 55, această serie fiind bătută într-un centru necunoscut din Cappadocia, probabil, la finalul sec. IV a.Cr. Rolul pieselor din această serie restrânsă pare să fi fost mai degrabă ceremonial, emiterea fiind legată fie de întemeierea Seleuciei de pe Tigru în anul 305-304 a.Cr., fie de victoria asupra lui Antigonos Monophthalmos la Ipsos în anul 301 a.Cr. Descoperirea se înscrie perfect în seria restrânsă a descoperirilor de monede seleucide de pe linia Dunării de Jos, pentru care menționăm tetradrahmele din tezaurile de la Satu Nou (jud. Constanța), Rasa (jud. Călărași), Vedeia (jud. Giurgiu) și Hinova (jud. Mehedinți). Descoperirile de monede de aur de la finele sec. IV*

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\*Numismatic Department from the Library of the Romanian Academy.

*a.Cr. constituie un orizont consistent în regiune, ele provenind mai ales din teritoriile controlate de Antigonos Monophthalmos, în condițiile mercenariatului tracic și getic în armatele diadohilor. Descoperirea unui stater de la Seleucos I se înscrie în același orizont și, deși unică până în prezent, nu face notă discordantă cu ansamblul descoperirilor.*

The numismatic collection from the Library of the Romanian Academy includes a Seleukos I<sup>st</sup> stater – the only one of this type in our *Cabinet des Médailles*<sup>1</sup>. Although it was published in a volume few years ago<sup>2</sup>, it deserves a detailed and more focused discussion, having also a special story. Discovered at Ostrov, Constanța county, on the Romanian border of the Danube, it was acquired in May 26, 1961 from a man called Constantin Deculescu, from Curcani, Călărași county<sup>3</sup>.

C. Deculescu was a very special person. Born in 1889, he was a hospital doctor between 1912-1914 at Colțea and Filantropia hospitals in Bucharest and later in Sinaia Hospital, Prahova county. Doctor in medicine from 1916, he served as captain (medical officer) in the 11<sup>th</sup> Reds (Cavalry) Regiment in the Great War in 1917-1918. Becoming member of the National Paesant Party, he was Ilfov County's prefect between 1928 and 1930, Ilfov County's senator in the Romanian Parliament (1930-1932) and General Secretary of the Health Ministry in 1932. After several years of political imprisonment during the 50's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, under the communist regime, he was partially rehabilitated from the next decade and died in 1988<sup>4</sup>. Having a strong passion for numismatics and archaeology, he was a member of the Romanian Numismatic Society in the interwar period. As such, he was close to the most important antiquities shops from Bucharest, owned by I. Candrea and Aram H. Papazian. From them he bought in 1943 six tetradrachms originating from the Rasa hoard (IGCH 460), four Alexander the Great type and two issues from Seleukos I<sup>st</sup>, one of which later sold to the *Cabinet des Médailles* of the Library of the Romanian Academy in 1960, C. Deculescu providing also all the details concerning the origin of the coins<sup>5</sup>.

It was not the sole coin transaction of C. Deculescu to the above-mentioned *Cabinet des Médailles*. In the same day, May 26, 1961 (when he sold the Seleukos I stater) he also sold two solidi, one of them from Iovianus and the other from Valens, both of them discovered in a vineyard at Curcani<sup>6</sup>. We must also add that in the same year, but on February 11<sup>th</sup>, he sold 11 gold coins (Macedonian and Hellenistic staters, late Roman solidi and Byzantines), without provenance, which means he still probably had in his possession part of his interwar period collection<sup>7</sup>.

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1. Gold coins Inventory of the Numismatic Department from the Library of the Romanian Academy, no. AV.A. 179 (1828).

2. Preda, Petac 2006, p. 55, no. 224.

3. Inventory Registry of the Numismatic Department from the Library of the Romanian Academy, after 1919, p. 264, no. 1686.

4. Predescu 1999, p. 260.

5. Inventory Registry of the Numismatic Department from the Library of the Romanian Academy, after 1919, p. 133, no. 809; see also Vilcu, Neagu 2012, p. 607.

6. Inventory Registry of the Numismatic Department from the Library of the Romanian Academy, after 1919, p. 264, no. 1686.

7. Inventory Registry of the Numismatic Department from the Library of the Romanian Academy, after 1919, p. 258, no. 1657.

Anyway, all the registered information and his entire behaviour suggest a high degree of confidence in his notes concerning the provenance of the coins.

Returning to the Seleukos I stater, it seems to be one of the highest rarity, as follows:

## SELEUKID EMPIRE

### Seleukos I



Fig. 1

Obv. Head of Athena to right, wearing Corinthian helmet.

Rv. ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ (to right, downward) – [Σ]ΕΛΕΥΚΟΥ, to left, upward.

Nike walking left, keeping wreath and *stylis*; under the left wing, monogram  $\boxtimes$ ; under the right wing, ΔΙ?

Stater 12 h; 8,47 g; 18 mm; inventory AV.A. 179 (1828); fig. 1 (1,5:1)

WSM, p. 237, no. 1335, Cappadocia or Northern Syria, mint A (were ΔΙ? under the right wing).

SC, p. 32, no. 56, uncertain mint 2, Cappadocia, Eastern Syria or Northern Mesopotamia, after 305 BC. (the same from WSM, but by mistake ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ to left and ΣΕΛΕΥΚΟΥ to right and also ΔΙ? under the right wing).

Preda, Petac 2006, p. 55, no. 224 (where two dots on the reverse, under the right wing).

Until a few years ago, there was a single other known stater of this type, today lost. The standard catalogue of E. T. Newell and also the most recent one signed by A. Houghton and C. Lorber mention both of them as a single sample, the same one, coming from Sotheby, May 1900 and Egger, November 1913, lost in commerce<sup>8</sup>. So, the coin discovered at Ostrov seems to be today the single known and preserved piece in a public collection. Comparing it with the coin from Sotheby / Eggerit seems that the two staters were struck with the same reverse die, but having a different obverse (Pl. I, 2,3: 1.5×1). There are small but obvious differences, although it is quite clear that it is the hand of the same engraver making both obverse dies. Recently, a new sample appeared at a public auction<sup>9</sup>, having the same obverse die with the Ostrov coin. The most important aspect is that on the reverse of the coin, under the right wing of Nike, we have for the first time a very clear monogram ΔΙ (Pl. I, 4; 1.5×1). Apparently strange for an issue represented by only three coins, the situation has an analogy on the Western Black Sea shore, where we saw that in Mesembria were used four obverse dies for

8. WSM, p. 237, no. 1335; SC, p. 32, no. 56.

9. Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 353, 17 June 2015, lot 186.

only five known Lysimachus type gold staters<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, discussing about a significant series from Pella (Price 201-203), we noticed that 17 gold coins were struck using seven obverse dies and 12 reverses<sup>11</sup>.

The standard catalogues above mentioned include another significant sample (WSM 1334=SC 55), a distater (extremely rare denomination for Hellenistic kingdoms including the Seleukid one – actually, the single known type of Seleukid double stater) having the same monogram on the reverse and belonging, of course, to the same series (pl. I, 1; 1.5×1). Currently there are only five WSM 1334 type coins known<sup>12</sup> (in Newell's time there was a single one<sup>13</sup>), all of them struck with the same pair of dies. Again, the dies are different (both of them) than those used to strike the same type of staters, but it is again obvious that it was the same engraver making the dies. As it was already noticed, such an unusual denomination couldn't appear without a special occasion, its purpose being a ceremonial one and not financial. Most probably, this entire series (and not only distaters) was struck when Seleukia on the Tigris was founded (in 305-304 BC) or following Antigonos' defeat at Ipsos in 301 BC face to Seleukos and Lysimachus<sup>14</sup>. These dates confirm Newell's hypothesis concerning the possible chronology of WSM 1333 (Alexander type tetradrachm with monogram ΔI under Zeus' throne), coming from Angora hoard<sup>15</sup> (so before 295 BC which is the final date of the hoard) and now sure also for WSM 1334-1335 too (distater and stater having the same symbol ☒ on the reverse, the last one having also a certain now monogram ΔI on the reverse<sup>16</sup>). So, because the firm reading and identification of the monogram present under the right wing of Nike on the reverse of WSM 1335 stater is today certain, Angora hoard and its final date remain credible landmark.

We must notice that in 1941, when Newell WSM was published, the double stater 1334 was the only one known; today there are several more such coins, most of them on the market<sup>17</sup>. Also, Newell WSM 1335 stater was the only known piece until 1960<sup>18</sup> when the sample from Ostrov was discovered, which remains until today the only coin in a public collection.

Concerning the mint, nothing new can be added. As Newell said “the presence of these gold coins suggests that our series probably originated in some centre of commercial or strategic importance... one we would like to see an issue originating in the Cappadocian

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10. Petac 2011, p. 10-11.

11. Petac, Niculescu 2018, p. 139.

12. See Roma Numismatics, Auction XVI, 26 September 2018, lot 380.

13. WSM, p. 237, no. 1334, in commerce.

14. SC, p. 31.

15. Noe 1937, no. 51.

16. See B. Nelson, in Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 353, 17 June 2015, lot 186.

17. For other samples, see: Roma Numismatics, Auction XXI, 24 March 2021, lot 283 (17,19 g); Roma Numismatics, Auction XVI, 26 September 2018, lot 380 (17,24 g); Classical Numismatic Group, Triton XIX, 5 January 2016, lot 2065 (17,16 g); Roma Numismatics, Auction IX, 22 March 2015, lot 425 (17,13 g); Numismatica Ars Classica, Auction 79, 20 October 2014, lot 17 (17,17 g); Classical Numismatic Group-Numismatica Ars Classica-Freeman and Sear, Triton, II, 1 December 1998, lot 463 = Bank Leu AG Auktion 36, 7-8 May 1985, lot 173 (17,18 g); Bank Leu Auktion 20, 25-26 April 1976, lot 157.

18. Late Collector Sale, Sotheby, May 1900, no. 415 = Egger Sale XLV, November 1913, no. 625; cf. WSM, p. 237, no. 1335.

region”<sup>19</sup>. Both Newell and Houghton-Lorber agree with this opinion, generically calling this centre “mint A”<sup>20</sup> or “uncertain mint 2”<sup>21</sup>.

Discussing about the findings of Seleukid<sup>22</sup> coins or gold coins from the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC at the Lower Danube<sup>23</sup>, we notice that we can speak about two horizons.

For Seleukid coins, we have until now only silver denominations (tetradrachms), coming from the hoards discovered at Satu Nou, Constanța county<sup>24</sup> (seven Seleukid tetradrachms<sup>25</sup>), Rasa, Călărași county<sup>26</sup> (two posthumous tetradrachms from Seleukos I, one of them struck by Attalos I at Pergamon, 279-274 BC, another one from Antioch I, struck at Laodicea Phoeniciae before 246 BC<sup>27</sup>), Vedeia, Giurgiu county<sup>28</sup> (one tetradrachms from Seleukos I struck at Seleukia around 300 BC<sup>29</sup>) and Hinova, Mehedinți county<sup>30</sup> (three tetradrachms, one of them from the co-regency of Seleukos I and Antioch I, 294-281 BC or latest from Antiochus I and a second one from the first years of Seleukia mint, years 300-296/5 BC<sup>31</sup>). A part of these silver coins belongs to a later chronological sequence than our period of interest, another part to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. However, they came from hoards buried around the year 260 BC<sup>32</sup> – thus, in a later period, but including coins from an earlier time, arriving in Lower Danube region soon after they were struck, as part of the Seleukid tetradrachms (the earliest). These hoards were buried probably because of the re-arrangements (political, demographic) following the Celtic invasion of the Balkans (279-278 BC) and especially after their defeat in 277 BC, the entire region being marked by conflicts between Celts and Tribalii. In this context, groups of Tribalii crossed the Danube in the Getic territory<sup>33</sup>.

Concerning the gold coins finds in the area, this is the single one from the Seleukid kingdom, but, coming from the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, it must be included in a consistent horizon of gold coins finds (hoards and also isolated finds) from the same period, from the very end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, Alexander type staters coming mainly from the territories controlled by Antigonos Monophthalmos because of the Thracians and Getae mercenaries fighting in the Diadochii armies<sup>34</sup>. We mentioned the coin hoards or group of coins from Codlea (Brașov county; IGCH 409)<sup>35</sup>, Galați (Galați county; IGCH 799)<sup>36</sup>, Gâldău (Călărași county; IGCH

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19. WSM, p. 238.

20. WSM, p. 237, no. 1335.

21. SC, p. 32, no. 56.

22. Vilcu, Neagu 2012, p. 610-611.

23. Vilcu 2015, p. 193-208.

24. Moisil 1950, p. 53-65.

25. Vilcu, Neagu 2012, p. 611.

26. Moisil 1950, p. 53-65; Iliescu 1961, p. 655-656; Preda 1973, p. 51-53; Preda 1998, p. 140-141; Vilcu, Neagu 2012, p. 603-616.

27. Vilcu, Neagu 2012, p. 610.

28. Mitrea 1992, p. 187-191.

29. Vilcu, Neagu 2012, p. 611; see SC, p. 153, no. 117/1.

30. Dimitriu, Iliescu 1959, p. 259-310; Iliescu 1976, p. 55-60; Vilcu, Neagu 2012, p. 611.

31. Dimitriu, Iliescu 1959, p. 275, no. 51; Vilcu, Neagu 2012, p. 611.

32. Vilcu, Neagu 2012, p. 610.

33. Theodossiev 2000, p. 83-84; Vilcu, Neagu 2012, 611-612.

34. Vilcu 2015, p. 195; Petac, Guțică 2018, p. 168.

35. Seraphin 1899, p. 77-80; Mitrea 1982, p. 65-73; Vilcu 2015, p. 197.

36. Iliescu 1963, p. 300, no. 115, p. 301, no. 122, p. 306-307, no. 162; Mitrea 1967, p. 380, no. 8; Vilcu, Petac 2018, p. 127-131.



774)<sup>37</sup>, Trivale-Moșteni (Teleorman county)<sup>38</sup> and Todorovo<sup>39</sup> (Bulgaria, near the political center from Sboryanovo), all of them burried “in the last few years of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC or even at the very beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC” – Todorovo)<sup>40</sup> and also isolated finds of gold coins from the same period coming from Albești-Muru (Albești-Paleologu, Prahova county)<sup>41</sup>, Cătunu (Cornestii, Dâmbovița county) or Cojasca (Dâmbovița county)<sup>42</sup>, Cocorăștii Mislii (Prahova county)<sup>43</sup>, Reșca (Dobrosloveni, Olt county)<sup>44</sup>, even if most of them are a little earlier.

So, the appearance of this, thus far, single stater from Seleukos I at Ostrov is not a surprise, as it is part of the same phenomenon reflecting the incoming of significant volume of gold (and even large silver) Alexanders from the Middle East and the Balkans especially during the fourth Diadochii war.

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37. Mitrea 1965, p. 73-79; Mitrea 1968. p. 327-330; Vilcu 2015, p. 205-206.

38. Petac, Niculescu 2018, p. 133-142.

39. CH, IV, 28; Dima 2014, p. 52-56; Vilcu 2015, p. 198-200

40. Petac, Niculescu 2018, p. 141.

41. Price, p. 213, no. P 13 A, years 323-317 BC; Thompson 1991, p. 20, no. 183 b, series IX, years 319/318-318/317 BC; see Mitrea 1978, p. 365, no. 1; Preda 1998, p. 108; Părpăuță 2006, p. 168, no. 8; Vilcu, Isvoranu, Nicolae 2006, p. 64, no. 52; Vilcu 2015, p. 198; Petac, Guțică 2018, p. 168

42. Price, p. 330, nos. 2619 or 2620, Sardes, years 323-319 BC; Thompson 1983, p. 23, nos. 219 b-220 b or no. 221 a-b, series XIV, years 320-319 BC; see Mitrea 1984, p. 185, no. 7; Preda 1998, p. 104; Părpăuță 2006, p. 187, no. 132; Petac, Guțică 2018, p. 168.

43. Petac, Guțică 2018, p. 167-170.

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**Plansa I.** Monede de aur de la Seleukos I: 1. Dublu stater, WSM 1334 = SC 55 (Roma Numismatics, licitația XVI, 26 Septembrie 2018, lot 380); 2. Stater, WSM 1335 = SC 56, de la Ostrov (jud. Constanța, Romania); 3. Stater, WSM 1335 = SC 56 (Sotheby, Mai 1900, nr. 415 = Egger Sale XLV, Noiembrie 1913, nr. 625); 4. Stater, WSM 1335 = SC 56 (Classical Numismatic Group, Licitație On-line 353, 17 Iunie 2015, Lot 186).



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Plate I. Gold coins from Seleukos I: 1. Double stater, WSM 1334 = SC 55 (Roma Numismatics, Auction XVI, 26 September 2018, lot 380); 2. Stater, WSM 1335 = SC 56, from Ostrov (Constanța county, Romania); 3. Stater, WSM 1335 = SC 56 (Sotheby, May 1900, no. 415 = Egger Sale XLV, November 1913, no. 625); 4. Stater, WSM 1335 = SC 56 (Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 353, 17 June 2015, lot 186).