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SELEUCID COINAGE AND THE
LEGEND OF THE HORNED BUCEPHALAS*

PLATE 8

[21] Balaxian est provincia quedam, gentes cuius Macometi legem observant et per se loquelam habent. Magnum quidem regnum est. Per successionem hereditariam regitur, quae progenies a rege Alexandro descendit et a filia regis Darii Magni Persarum.... Frigida quidem provincia est. Inveniebantur in hac provincia equi qui descenderant a natura equi regis Alexandri, Bucifalch nomine, qui nascebantur omnes cornu habentes in fronte sicuti Bucifalch, quia ab ipso equo eque conceperant. Sed postea fuit destructa tota illorum natura. *Il Milione del Marco Polo*¹

Beginning with the study of Bactrian coinage in the 19th century, numismatics have on occasion been able to contribute to historical inquiries in a most significant way. Yet coin scholars, historians and philologists still seem, all too often, to work in parallel universes and to remain unaware of each other's potential help. The present study is the result of one collaboration, drawing on the history of Seleucid coinage – in fact, largely that of the eastern satrapies – and literary tradition as well. In this paper we re-examine evidence concerning horned entities in a Seleucid iconography, on coins and elsewhere. Our particular focus is on the horned horse-head coins which have wrongly been considered to represent Alexander's favorite horse, Bucephalas. Based on these coins, we suggest an explanation for how the most bizarre literary tradition concerning the famous horse came to be: the legend that Bucephalas got his name «ox-head» because he actually had ox horns growing from his head.

We contended that the ancients, much like their modern counterparts, had mistakenly interpreted Seleucid coins bearing the likeness of a horned horse as depictions of Bucephalas. Before discussing the evidence of the coins them-

Bibliography

SC A. HOUGHTON and C. LORBER, *Seleucid Coins*, vol. I (New York 2002). References are to the catalogue numbers

* All translations of the ancient texts are those of the authors unless otherwise indicated. In addition, we wish to express our thanks to Dr. Oliver Hoover and Brian Kritt for valuable insights and information concerning pre-Seleucid iconography in the Near East, and to O. Hoover also for his review and constructive criticism of the article. Any remaining errors or misconceptions are exclusively ours.

¹ *Redazione latina del manoscritto* ζ, ed. Alvaro Barbieri (Parma 1998).

selves, it is first useful to rehearse the ancient literary tradition on the naming of Alexander's horse.

Except for the winged horse Pegasus, Alexander's horse Bucephalas was perhaps the most celebrated horse of antiquity.² Remarkable for his size and beauty, Bucephalas commanded an extraordinary price, the highest ever known in the ancient world, but he attracted no buyers because of his wild and unconquerable spirit.³ His taming by the adolescent Alexander both marked the young prince as extraordinarily at one with the forces of nature and forecast his future greatness as a world conqueror.⁴ Almost indomitable in spirit, Bucephalas could be ridden into combat only by his master, and more than once he rescued the impetuous Alexander from death or danger on the battlefield.⁵ When the stallion died in Alexander's last great battle on the banks of the Hydaspes, Bucephalas was buried with extraordinary honors with a city named after him, but following the death of Bucephalas the tide of Alexander's career of conquest soon began to ebb and then retreat: Bucephalas it seems was intrinsically linked to Alexander's fortunes. It therefore naturally became a matter of speculation in antiquity how such an extraordinary animal, virtually Alexander's avatar, came to bear such an ordinary name: Bucephalas, or «ox-head.»

It is clear that the ancients themselves did not actually know the origin of Bucephalas's name, indeed that no indisputable explanation was put forth in the earliest or contemporary sources on the life of Alexander. That much is certain from the variety of possibilities offered and from the lack of any debate-ending appeal to an early authority. The most probable explanation seems to be one offered by the ancient scholiasts and lexicographers: that the name Bucephalas (Βουκεφάλας) derived from a type of brand in the shape of an ox-head used to distinguish a superior breed of horses from Thessaly, the so-called *buce-*

² The horse's name is properly spelled Boukephalas (Βουκεφάλας), as the better authorities show: Plut. *Alex.* 6; Arr. *Anab.* 5.14; Strabo 15.1.29.14; Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 8.154.2; sch. in Luc. *s.v.* κοππαφόρον; Suda, *s.v.* κοππατίλας; Tzetzes, *Chil.* 1.810, etc. Cf. LIDDELL/SCOTT, Greek-English Lexicon *s.v.* Βουκεφάλας. Βουκέφαλος, on the other hand, is the generic designation of a kind of horse from Thessaly (*infra*, n. 7).

³ Size and beauty: Arr. *Anab.* 5.19; *Excerpta Vaticana* 183 (derived from Arrian). The price of 13 talents (derived from Chares, FGrHist 125 F18) was of course a wild exaggeration meant to enhance the exceptional, indeed unique nature of B. (cf. Gell. 5.2.2; Plut. *Alex.* 6.1; Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 8.154). On the value of cavalry horses in the 4th through 2nd cen. BC at Athens see J.H. KROLL, An Archive of the Athenian Cavalry, *Hesperia* 46, 1977, pp. 83-140 (also, BRAUN, *infra*, n. 7), who cites the relevant sources and suggests a 1200 drachma ceiling on valuation, with a range of 300 to 1200 drachmas. The value of a horse purchased by Dolabella at the end of the Republic (Gell. 3.9) is the next highest known purchase price from classical antiquity (HS 100,000), equaling about a third of the supposed price of B. three centuries earlier. However, the economies of the periods, as well as the wealth of the elites and the particular modes of their conspicuous expenditure in the two cultures, are not comparable.

⁴ F. SOMERSET, LORD RAGLAN, *The Hero* (London 1936), pp. 177 ff., accords this event a ranking in his tally sheet of heroism (his «point 11»).

⁵ E.g., Gell. 5.2.3-4; Arr. *Anab.* 5.19.5; Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 8.154; Diod. Sic. 76.6; Curt. 6.5.18.

phalus (βουκεφάλος) or *bucephalion* (βουκεφάλιον).⁶ Indeed, in the 1960's and 1970s, corroboratory evidence that *bucephalas* (βουκεφάλας) was used as the designation of a certain type of branded horse was unearthed in the Kerameikos and in the Athenian Agora.⁷ However, it is not our purpose in this paper to scrutinize the ancient explanations once more in an effort to determine the 'correct' one.⁸ In fact, an absolute determination is probably impossible. Our interest is rather to identify the curious origin of the most fantastical by far of the ancient explanations, that Alexander's horse was so named from ox horns sprouting from his head.

The Byzantine glossary known as the *Etymologicum Magnum* mentioned this possibility precisely in order to reject it, but without indicating its source or sources:

Etymologicum Magnum (207) s.v. 'Bucephalus': The horse which Alexander owned. Not, as some think, because he had ox horns. That is wrong. He was adorned by Alexander with gilded (horns). Further he was not named Bucephalus because of the horns, but because this is what horses in Thessaly were called, as they have an ox-head brand (ἔοντες ἐυκεκαυμένον βουκράνιον). The fact that some horses of the Thessalians are called bucephalus Aristophanes shows in his *Anagyros* (frag. 41) «Don't weep. I'll sell you a bucephalus.» (208) Again: «Gently rub down the bucephalus and koptatian [i.e., the one with the brand of the letter *koppa*: ϙ].»

For what it regards as the proper explanation, the *Etymologicum Magnum* relies on Hesychius, who, it seems, knew not of the 'horned' Bucephalus theory:⁹

Hesychius, s.v. *bucephalus*: a horse with an ox-head (βουκράνιον) branded on its flanks. Also, Alexander's horse, from which it is said he founded a city in India.

John Tzetzes, accomplished plagiarist of early literature, is purely derivative and need not detain us:

⁶ The scholia and lexica also refer to such horses as *koptatiai* or *koptaphoroi* in reference to the seldom used Greek letter *koppa*. The *koppa* roughly resembled the *bucranium* or bull skull (ϙ) so often amassed at sacrificial cult sites. Cf. scholia in Lucianum, s.v. κοππαφόρον; scholia in Aristophantem, *Nub.* 22a.1; Suda, s.v. κοππατίας; Arrian, *Anab.* 5.19.5; *Excerpta Vaticana* 183; Strabo 15.1.29; Plin. *NH* 8.154.2; *Etymologicum Magnum* (207) s.v. βουκέφαλος; Hesychius, s.v., βουκέφαλος; C. Iulius Solinus 45.8; Tzetzes, *Chil.* 1.811; *Historia Alexandri Magni* 1.15, 4.1.1, 13.30.

⁷ Kerameikos: K. BRAUN, *Der Dipylon-Brunnen B1: Die Funde, Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung* 85, 1970, pp. 129-132, 198-269; pls. 83-92; Agora: KROLL (*supra*, n. 3), pp. 86-88.

⁸ A.B. BOSWORTH, *Historical Commentary on Arrian's History of Alexander* (Oxford 1980), ad 5.19.5, relying on KROLL (*supra*, n. 2), accepts as «certainly the correct derivation of the name» the explanation that βουκεφάλας «was a type of horse from Thessaly branded with a bull's head to authenticate its pedigree. But if so, it is left unexplained why Alexander's horse was called by the name of a generic breed of horses. It would be something like calling your dog «German Shepherd» or «Doberman.»

⁹ Hesychius' lexicon (of 'rare' words) was probably published in the 5th century AD: H.G. WILSON, *Scholars of Byzantium* (London 1983), p. 43; K. LATTE, *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon* (Copenhagen 1955); the *Etymologicum Magnum*, in the 12th century.

He got his name Bucephalus in this wise: because he had the head of an ox (βὸς κεφαλῆν) as an authenticating mark on his shoulder. He did not, however, possess either an ox's head or horn.¹⁰

The likely proximate source of the lexicographical entry is the so-called Alexander Romance.¹¹ Not all versions of the Romance have this explanation. Here are two that do:

Historia Alexandri Magni 13.30: «King Philip was astounded when saw his [Bucephalus's] size and beauty and the fact that he had an ox's head branded on his right thigh and a horn on his head.»

Historia Alexandri Magni 4.1.1: Philip said, «Bring him here so I can look at him.» They left and brought the horse, bound with two chains, fearsome but full of good looks, with an ox's head branded on his right thigh and a horn on his head.

These texts offer two explanations, both the standard (the most likely) and the fantastic. It so happens that the first entry of this 'vulgar' (i.e., unlearned) tradition survives to us in the Latin text of an obscure excerptor of Pliny the Elder, namely, C. Iulius Solinus:¹²

Solinus, 45.8: «Alexander's horse was named Bucephalus, either from the ferocity of his appearance, from the distinguishing mark which he had branded on his shoulder (an ox's head), or because there protruded from his forehead some small threatening horns.»
[*Alexandri Magni equus Bucephalus dictus sive de aspectus torvitate seu ab insigni, quod taurinum caput armo iniustum habebat, seu quod de fronte eius quaedam corniculorum minae protuberabant...*].¹³

It is striking that Solinus' text, while drawing almost verbatim on his perennial principal source, the elder Pliny, also offers additional material and in so doing echoes precisely the dual explanations offered by the *Historia Alexandri Magni*.¹⁴ His text thus represents the first surviving intrusion of this popular tradition into the mainstream scholarly literature. Less scholarly and more credulous

¹⁰ Johannes Tzetzes, *Chiliades* 1.810-815. Tzetzes flourished ca. 1150 AD: WILSON (*supra*, n. 9), pp. 190-196. His wording in Greek makes it appear that he or his source had consulted the Vatican Fragments (*supra*, n. 3) and conflated the information found there with another source such as the *Suda*, or Hesychius.

¹¹ Cf. R. MERKELBACH, *Die Quellen des griechischen Alexanderromans* (Munich 1977); R. STONEMAN, *The Greek Alexander Romance* (New York 1991); E. BAYNAM, *Who put the 'romance' in the Alexander Romance?*, *Ancient History Bulletin* 9.1, 1995, pp. 1-13. The origin of the *Alexanderroman* has been dated to no later than the 3rd cen. AD: cf. MERKELBACH, p. 91; A. AUSFELD, *Der griechische Alexanderroman* (Leipzig 1907), pp. 251 ff.; W. KROLL, *RE* 10.1719.

¹² Text with introductory essay: T. MOMMSEN ed., *C. Iulii Solini Collectanea Rerum Memorabilium*² (Berlin 1908); more recently, with a detailed analysis of the dating and of an ancient 'second edition' of Solinus's work: H. WALTER, *Die collectanea rerum memorabilium des C. Iulius Solinus*. *Hermes Einzelschriften*, Heft 22 (Wiesbaden 1969).

¹³ The Latin word *minae*, "threat", "weapon", "bulwark" is classical and properly used of a bull's horns: cf. LEWIS/SHORT, *Latin Dictionary*, *s.v.*

¹⁴ It is impossible to tell if Solinus is here conflating Pliny with material from another unnamed source (*fons ignotus*) or working from an annotated manuscript of Pliny. Cf. WALTER (*supra*, n. 12), pp. 6-8; 57.

than the later lexicographers, however, Solinus retails the ‘horn’ theory without criticizing or rejecting it.

Solinus seems to have assembled his compilation following the rule of the Antonines but before the accession of Diocletian.¹⁵ He was a typical, unabashed florilegist; most of his material was copied almost wholly from Pliny or Pomponius Mela.¹⁶ There occasionally appeared, however, some other material in his *Collectanea Rerum Memorabilium*, and of that some from unidentified sources. The reference to the horned Bucephalas is one of the items with an unknown source.¹⁷ From the other available evidence we have considered, it is reasonable to attribute its provenance provisionally to the Alexander Romance literature. Indeed, it will even be possible to conjecture the ultimate source of this particular thread in the Alexander Romance, and to do so by means of an unusual analogy with the modern scholarly tradition. We contend that the tradition of the horned Bucephalas derived from a misunderstanding of certain coinage issued by early Seleucid monarchs (Seleucus I Nicator, Antiochus I Soter, and Seleucus II Callinicus), coinage displaying a ‘horned horse’. In these issues the horse’s head bears distinctly taurine horns.

Seleucus I Nicator (r. 305-281) used the type at Pergamon for a brief medallic emission in silver (*Pl. 8, 1*), and at Apamea and Carrhae for small bronzes. Most horned horse-heads were struck farther East; at Ecbatana, he struck some rare silver with a horned rider on a horned horse.¹⁸ Others came from the mint at Seleucia on the Tigris and from two mints in Bactria: Baktra and Ai Khanoum.¹⁹ The type was used more intensively by his son Antiochus I Soter (r. 281-261). After an inaugural medallic tetradrachm struck at Sardis, bearing his father’s horned (and thus deified) portrait on the obverse (*Pl. 8, 2*), he struck a few minor bronzes at Dura-Europus.²⁰ But Antiochus I focused his attention on an impressive series of horned horse heads in precious metals, exclusively at the Bactrian mints.²¹ These include gold staters and silver tetradrachms (*Pl. 8, 3*), drachms and hemidrachms. No coins bearing the horned horse heads are known of Antiochus II Theos (r. 261-246). His successor, Seleucus II Callinicus (r. 246-225), issued but two small bronze issues of the type, at Seleucia.²²

¹⁵ MOMMSEN (*supra*, n. 12), pp. vi-vii.

¹⁶ MOMMSEN, pp. viii-xvi.

¹⁷ MOMMSEN, p. xv: *restant denique apud Solinum originis incertae alia minora fere et ita comparata, ut cum narratio ipsa aperte ex Plinio Melave pendeat, tamen apud Solinum quaedam inveniuntur, quae non leguntur apud illos neque addi potuerunt.*

¹⁸ Pergamon: SC 1; Apamea: SC 35; Carrhae: SC 47; Ecbatana: SC 209, 213; A. HOUGHTON/A. STEWART, *The Equestrian Portrait of Alexander the Great on a New Tetradrachm of Seleucus I*, SNR 78, 1999, pp. 27-35, based on a recent, unique Ecbatana tetradrachm of Seleucus I: head of Alexander in lion-skin / galloping horseman on horse, both horned.

¹⁹ B. KRITT, *Dynastic Transitions in the Coinage of Bactria* (Lancaster, Pa. 2001), p. 182.

²⁰ Sardis: SC 1036.1; Dura-Europus: SC 363, 367-368.

²¹ SC 426-434; 461-466 (Sogdian imitations); 467-470 (uncertain far eastern mints).

²² SC 767-8.

Still today A. Anderson's article is the most thorough collection and examination of the ancient literary sources on the history and legends surrounding Bucephalus.²³ In the course of detailing the various ancient explanations of the origin of Bucephalus's name, he makes the following curious and revealing observation:

I mention incidentally that von Schwarz, *Alexanders d. Gr. Feldzüge in Turkestan*², 99-100, proposed that Alexander's epithet Dulcarnain, the Lord of the Two Horns, was bestowed upon him from the fact that he rode a horse that was represented with two horns. Von Schwarz identified as Bucephalus the representation of a beautiful horse on a coin that he saw in Turkestan, which was held at too high a price for him to purchase.²⁴

What von Schwarz must have seen of course was one of the Seleucid coins described above. Von Schwarz's conjecture appears to have been the first attempt in modern scholarship to ground the legend of the horned Bucephalus in numismatic evidence. This has since come to be a widespread scholarly view. For instance, G.K. Jenkins writes,

«Further east at Baktra (Balkh) there is sometimes another reverse type (364), the head of Alexander's famous horse Bukephalos wearing, like the kings, the horns which were often the typical marks of royalty and even divinity, surmounted by a splendid flame-like mane.»²⁵

O. Mørkholm makes the same identification:

«A few drachms (142) [ESM 481] and hemidrachms (143) [ESM 482] show an interesting reverse type: a horseman with horned helmet and flying *chlamys* galloping to the right on a horned horse. On account of the horned helmet the rider must be the same as the one portrayed on the victory series of Susa just mentioned [= ESM 424 and 414], and consequently Newell identified him with Seleucus. My contention, that Alexander is here represented, seems to receive some support from the horned horse on the small silver of Ecbatana. This can hardly be other than the most famous horse of its time, Alexander's Bucephalus or Ox-head. The only feasible way of representing a horse of this name on the small scale of the coins would be to supply it with horns, and legend did indeed provide Bucephalus with such a feature.»²⁶

While *prima facie* not an unreasonable approach, this line of interpretation in fact turns out to be a false lead. The horned horse-heads on Seleucid coins, it has recently been argued persuasively, are not representations of Bucephalus at all.²⁷ The horse-head seems rather to have been a personal symbol of Seleu-

²³ A.R. ANDERSON, Bucephalus and his legend, *Am. Journ. of Philology* 51, 1930, pp. 1-21.

²⁴ ANDERSON (*supra*, n. 23) pp. 6-7. Ref.: F. VON SCHWARZ, *Alexanders des Grossen Feldzüge in Turkestan*² (Munich 1903), pp. 99-100.

²⁵ G.K. JENKINS, *Ancient Greek Coins*² (London 1990), p. 133.

²⁶ O. MØRKHOLM, *Early Hellenistic Coinage* (Cambridge 1991), p. 73. The identification endures in the ANS online catalog (which directly copies E.T. Newell's coin tags for some acquisitions, e.g. 1944.100.14336; 1944.100.14337; 1944.100.14383). Mørkholm's view is expanded by HOUGHTON/STEWART (*supra*, n. 18). But *contra* see now O. HOOVER, *The Identity of the Helmeted Head on the 'Victory' Coinage of Susa*, *SNR* 81, 2002, pp. 58-59.

²⁷ O. HOOVER, *Kingmaker: A Study in Seleucid Political Imagery* (Hamilton, Ont. 1996),

cus I, and not an oblique claim to legitimization via reference to Alexander's favorite steed; so Hoover. The horned horse-head appeared not only on Seleucus's coinage but also on an official seal of his administration.²⁸ (*Pl. 8, 4*) It seems doubtful, though, that the representation might have to do with Seleucus' rescue from battle with Antigonos in 312 BC, as Hoover argues.²⁹ Seleucus may well have been pleased with his rescue by his steed, but there is no evidence that he was so pleased that he decorated with horns the memorial statue which he had constructed. Rather, it may be argued that the depiction of horned beings, e.g., horned humans, horses, elephants (*Pl. 8, 5*) on the coinage of the early Seleucid monarchs, derived from a religious motif common throughout the ancient Near East, antedating the accession of the Seleucids by at least a millennium. The ox's horns were an early symbol in the East of royalty and divinity.³⁰ By employing this representation on their coinage the early Seleucid monarchs were manipulating a powerful religious symbol of the indigenous population they now newly governed in order to link their rule to their subjects' religious traditions and in this way to claim legitimacy.³¹

It is significant that, even after the horned horse-head types ceased, Seleucus II and Antiochus III portrayed themselves on their coins wearing the horns of semi-divinity (*Pl. 8, 6*).³² All such are clearly derived from the victory tetra-

pp. 48-51: «The lack of any numismatic or artistic evidence for the image of Boukephalos in the Successor kingdoms strongly suggests that no major importance was placed on that horse as a possible link to Alexander.» (p. 49).

²⁸ M. ROSTOVITZ, Seleucid Babylonia: Bullae and Seals of Clay with Greek Inscriptions, Yale Classical Studies 3, 1932, p. 48, no. 81; plate IX.3: «The forepart of the body of a horned horse r.; to the l., above, the anchor.» = Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin, no. VA 6120.

²⁹ HOOVER 1996 (*supra*, n. 27), p. 50, citing John Malalas, *Chron.* 202 (where no horns are mentioned).

³⁰ Cf., for example, J. OATES, Babylon (London 1979), p. 41 (on the victory stele of Naram-Sin): «On his famous stele he is depicted wearing a horned helmet: such 'horns of divinity' were normally solely the prerogative of gods.... [I]n later periods single pairs of horns usually identify lower ranks of divinity, for instance, a god's attendants.» Cf. R. WALLENFELS, Uruk. Seal impressions from Hellenistic Uruk in the Yale Babylonian Collection. Ausgrabungen in Uruk-Warka Bd. 19 (Mainz 1994).

³¹ HN, p. 756. «[Seleucus I's] most characteristic device is, however, the head of a horned horse. The horns, which are probably emblematic of divine strength (cf. Appian, *Syr.* 56) reappear on his own head, on his helmet, and very often on the head of elephants.» P. 757. «...AR of Seleucus may have been struck in Central Asia, the head of the horned horse being particularly associated with the East.» Appian, *Syr.* 56, referred to by Head, simply rehearses an aetiological anecdote: that the horns depicted on statues of Seleucus were meant to recall his encounter with a rampaging bull: «Physically he was well-muscled and large, and once when a bull broke free from its bonds at a sacrifice of Alexander's, he blocked it by himself and wrestled it down with his bare hands. For this, they add horns to his representations [προστιθέασιν ἐς τοὺς ἀνδριάντας ἐπὶ τῷδε κέρατα].» An *andrias*, although commonly translated just as 'statue', in fact refers to any image of a man (statue, bust, painting, or coin portrait).

³² Seleucus II: SC 767 (Seleucia ad Tigris); Antiochus III: SC 1216-1223 (Susa); N. DÜRR, Das Horn des Demetrios II, SM 113, 1979, pp.7-9, discusses a horn on coin por-

drachms of Seleucus I at Susa (*Pl. 8, 7*).³³ Horn iconography continued full strength in Bactria, the former Seleucid satrapy. Indeed, under Eucratides I the horned hero portrait circulated in enormous issues of coinage showing the king in a crested helmet with both ox horn and ear attached; remarkably, his rare «dynastic» issues with rev. conjoined busts of his very human parents also show the two semi-divine symbols on his helmet.³⁴ (*Pl. 8, 8 and 9*) The types continued in use by a number of his successors down to the Indo-Greek king Hermaeus in the 1st century BC.³⁵ In the Seleucid kingdom itself, an echo of the early, horned entity types is to be found on the small bronze of Demetrius I (ruled 162-150 BC). Prolific issues of serrated AE 16-17mm coins bear the familiar, profiled horse-head – without horns this time – and an elephant's head reverse.³⁶ Demetrius may have been seeking, in the types of his ancestors, a visual emblem of his legitimacy as king, for he had gained the Seleucid throne only after putting an end to his cousin Antiochus V and defeating the usurper Timarchus.

We have concluded, then, that Seleucid coinage bearing the image of horned horse-heads was not meant to represent Alexander's Bucephalas. But that is not to say that these coins may not after all have played an important part in the creation of the legend of the horned Bucephalas. We may begin by asking anew how, or better, why such a legend originated. As Alexander's biographer Arrian shows (*Anab.* 5.19), there were already early in the literary tradition two perfectly reasonable explanations for the origin of Bucephalas's name, that it came either from the brand of an ox's head or from a white blaze on his forehead in the shape of an ox's head:

«[Bucephalas], huge in size, and noble of soul, refused all other riders. He had a distinguishing mark, an ox's head brand, on the basis of which they say arose this name that he bore. Others say that he had a blaze on his head (he himself was black), which very much resembled an ox's head.»

We suggest that the alternative explanation of Bucephalas' name as a horse bearing ox's horns came from an unknown ancient observer who saw Seleucid

traits of Demetrius II, with little argumentation and no evidence. But the connection of horned figures with the Seleucids weakens MØRKHOLM's identification of the horned rider on the silver of Ecbatana (*supra*, n. 26). He reasons that the rider is Alexander and that the horned horse «can hardly be other than» Bucephalas. But if the horned horse is not Bucephalas, the rider could be Seleucus himself, as Newell believed. Cf. E.T. NEWELL, *The Coinage of the Eastern Seleucid Mints*, NS 1 (New York 1938), p. 77. HOOVER 2002 (*supra*, n. 26), pp. 58-59, also argues persuasively against the Alexander identification.

³³ SC 173-4.

³⁴ SNG ANS 464, etc. and 484-5; dynastic issues 526-529.

³⁵ SNG ANS *s.vv.* Plato (631), Menander (847 etc.), Strato (996 etc.), Antialcidas (1056), Helicocles II (1150), Philoxenus (1181 etc.), Diomedes (1221 etc.), Amyntas (1243 etc.), Archebius (1296 etc.); Hermaeus (1344 etc.)

³⁶ SNG Spaer 1299-1304.

coinage bearing this suggestive image. If the twentieth century scholars Jenkins and Mørkholm, with their great classical and numismatic learning, could identify the horned horse-heads of the Seleucid coinage as Bucephalas, it is not unreasonable that Greeks living in the Aegean basin or Anatolia in the third century BC might have come to the same opinion. Moreover, this horned horse-head coinage was restricted, in the main, to the eastern part of the Seleucid empire (*supra*, nn. 18-22), nor did it come into being until a generation after Alexander's death. Thus it is not surprising that it would have taken some time for the legend of the horned Bucephalas to enter into the main tradition about Alexander.

For reasons such as these, we suggest, the legend of the horned Bucephalas, based on the 'horned horse-head' coinage, initially found a foothold only in the vulgar tradition, surviving for a long time 'underground' in the popular and fantastical accounts of the popular Alexander Romance, which itself exhibits a striking parallel. In a wildly anachronistic description of the construction of Alexandria, it refers to Seleucus as wearing a horn:

Historia Alexandri Magni 2.28: At the East Gate, upon the loftiest tower of all he [Alexander] erected his own statue, and surrounded it with others of Seleucus, Antiochus, and Philip the physician. He made the (statue) of Seleucus recognizable as it bore a horn for courage and invincibility (καὶ τὴν μὲν Σελεύκου κέρα ἔχουσαν γνωρίζεσθαι πεποίηκεν διὰ τε το ἀνδρεῖον καὶ δυσμάχητον)

The horn was assumed to be an easily identifiable characteristic of Seleucus. As the only portrait known today of Seleucus I wearing a horn occurs on his successor's coinage, it is reasonable to assume that it was the coins that were the source of this curious account in the Alexander Romance. The versions of the Alexander Romance extant today are relatively late, but some scholars have argued that the Romance attributed to the Pseudo-Callisthenes began not too long after Alexander's death. The uncritical florilegist Solinus, we claim, was the earliest to preserve this particular feature of the Bucephalas story. It is in his work, published in the 3rd century AD, that the legend of the horned Bucephalas finally broke into the respectable historical tradition. Once the legend of the horned horse had entered the mainstream, the learned lexicographers were at pains to refute it, but in so doing they only worked to establish its currency.

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Zusammenfassung

Die Auswertung der literarischen und numismatischen Quellen liefert eine Erklärung für die verschiedenen antiken Interpretationen des Namens *Bukephalas* (Ochsenkopf), den das Pferd Alexanders des Grossen trug: Die gehörnten Pferdeköpfe auf Münzen der frühen seleukidischen Herrscher wurden fälschlicherweise als Darstellung des Bukephalas verstanden. Diese irrige numismatische Interpretation bildete bereits in der Antike den Ursprung für die Legende des gehörnten Bukephalas, die während vieler Jahrhunderte in der populären Überlieferung lebte. Die detaillierte Prüfung der Quellen zeigt, dass die Fehlzuweisung auf die Tradition des sogenannten Alexanderromans zurückgeht und durch C. Julius Solinus in die Geschichtsschreibung einging. Die Fehlinterpretation wurde in der modernen Forschung erneut aufgegriffen, zuerst bei von Schwarz, und hielt sich bis in unsere Tage.

S.H./M.P.

Key to Plate 8

- 1 Seleucus I. Horned horsehead / Elephant tetradrachm. Photo CSE 633
- 2 Antiochus I. Horned portrait of Seleucus I / Apollo tetradrachm. SC 323. Naville 1, 1921 (Pozzi), 2929
- 3 Antiochus I. His portrait / Horned horsehead tetradrachm. SC 428. Photo Sotheby 1958 (General Haughton), 148
- 4 Seleucus I. Clay seal, Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (Inv. VA 6120). Photo museum
- 5 Seleucus I. Zeus / Elephant-quadriga tetradrachm. SC 130. RMC
- 6 Antiochus III. His horned portrait facing / Apollo. AE double. SC 1222. Photo courtesy CNG
- 7 Seleucus I. Helmeted hero / Nike placing wreath on trophy. SC 173. RMC
- 8 Eucratides I. Helmeted bust r./ Dioscuri galloping r. SNG ANS 464 ff. RMC
- 9 Eucratides I. Helmeted bust r. / conjoined busts of parents. SNG ANS 526. Leu 18, 1977, 270

RMC = R. Miller coll., Canton, MI, USA



R.P. Miller and K.R. Walters, *The Legend of Bucephalus*

