

# New Bactrian and Indo-Greek kings?

*A guide for auction houses by Jens Jakobsson*

This brochure contains an introduction to my research, published during the last four years. The history of the Hellenistic settlements in the east, the Bactrian and Indo-Greek kingdoms, is largely based on the coins of their rulers. Only a few of them were known from written sources. During the last decades, painstaking work of numismatists like Osmund Bopearachchi and Robert Senior, to name but two, has given us a chronology that is at least approximately correct, which is quite remarkable for such a long unknown stretch of what must have been a highly dramatic history.

Nevertheless, I have directed attention to what could be the last corrections to the regent lists. Four of the five cases presented here are possible additions of overlooked

homonymous kings, which is hardly surprising – it was standard procedure for earlier numismatists to keep the number of Indo-Greek rulers down to a minimum. The existence of the first of these kings, that of Antiochus Nicator, would mean a major change to early Bactrian history, and hundreds of coins would have to be reattributed.

Below, each case is briefly presented, including possible captions for auction houses.

**Jens Jakobsson**

*Lund, Sweden, February 2011.*

## **Acknowledgements.**

Mark Passehl has contributed to all of these ideas except the last. The help of L.M. Wilson and Professor Bopearachchi, and several others, has also been valuable.

**HOW TO PRINT AS A FOLDER on A4:** In properties, set printing for 2 pages per sheet. Then print pages 8 & 1, reinsert sheet upside down (holes on same side), and print 2 & 7. For second sheet, first print 6 & 3 and then 4 & 5.

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[iens.jakobsson@pub.malmo.se](mailto:iens.jakobsson@pub.malmo.se). This text will be available on my homepage, [www.alexandersarvtagare.se](http://www.alexandersarvtagare.se) (on the English page). The text may be distributed freely, as long as reference is given, and the captions may be edited as you please. I kindly hope the guide will be of help.



**Figure 1.** A gold stater struck by Antiochus Nicator? (Courtesy of Ira & Larry Goldberg Coins & Collectibles, *The Millennia Collection*, May 26, 2008, lot 63.)

## 1. Antiochus Nicator, son (?) of Diodotus I c.235-220 BCE

**Reference:** *Antiochus Nicator, the Third King of Hellenistic Bactria?*, Numismatic Chronicle (2011).

**Thesis:** The coins attributed to the first king of Bactria, Diodotus I and his son Diodotus II, were struck either in the name 'Diodotus' or 'Antiochus'.

The 'Antiochus' coins have been interpreted as the first semi-independent coins of Diodotus I, in the name of Antiochus II, but with Diodotus' own portrait and reverse, the thundering Zeus. I suggest that they were instead struck by a *Bactrian* king named Antiochus, presumably a younger brother of Diodotus II. This Antiochus was overthrown by Euthydemus I c.230-220 BCE, and was later commemorated

as 'Antiochus Nicator' on coins of Agathocles. The article was reviewed by Professor Frank Holt, author of *Thundering Zeus*, who finds the hypothesis an acceptable alternative – he also once suggested the idea in passing.

### Case in brief

a) Most historical works assume that Polybius (*Histories*, 11.34) claimed that Diodotus II was followed by Euthydemus I. But Polybius only states that Euthydemus killed the (unnamed) *descendants* of Diodotus I, so Diodotus II need not have been the last member of this dynasty.

b) It would be unprecedented if Diodotus I would have issued his first coins in the name of Antiochus II. Semi-independent Hellenistic rulers usually combined their *own name* with the portrait of their better-known suzerain (or of Alexander) for their first coins, not the other way around. It is difficult to understand how anyone would have associated the 'Antiochus' coins with Diodotus.

c) Numismatic evidence indicates that the 'Antiochus' coins were later than the 'Diodotus' coins. The 'Antiochus' coins have no similarities with the last genuine Seleucid coins, but are closely linked to the first issues of Euthydemus I. Hoard findings and other indications support their late date.

**Caption.** For those who wish to refer to this article, this caption describes gold and silver attributed to Diodotus, in the name of Antiochus (Bopearachchi, BNbact, *Diodote I et II*, series 1-4).

An alternative explanation would be that this coin was not issued by Diodotus I himself, but by a later member of his dynasty, Antiochus (Nicator) of Bactria, who used Diodotus' portrait. Though this Antiochus is not mentioned in any sources, numismatic evidence presented by J. Jakobsson suggests that he could have ruled between Diodotus II and Euthydemus I, possibly c. 235-220 BCE.



**Figure 2:** On this Heliocles/Laodice tetradrachm (above), Heliocles' portraits resembles the tetradrachm of Heliocles I (below). Courtesy of CNGcoins, auctions 67:1026 and 129:183.

## 2. Heliocles and Laodice, ruling after Eucratides I ? c.145 BCE

**Thesis:** Silver coins today attributed to Eucratides would instead have been issued by Heliocles (the future Heliocles I, but not yet king) and queen Laodice, perhaps Eucratides' widow. The coins are BNBAc, *Eucratide I*, series 13-16.

**Reference:** *The Greeks of Afghanistan Revisited*, Nomismatika Khronika 26 (2007). Original idea by Mark Passahl.

### Case in brief

These coins are interpreted as Eucratides' commemoration of his parents Laodice and Heliocles. However, this is based on a conjectural 19<sup>th</sup> century idea that the obverse and reverse should be read as

one sentence, an unprecedented arrangement for Hellenistic coins, which also violates the basic grammatical rule that the issuer's name should be in the genitive<sup>1</sup>. This has been backed with the speculative suggestion that Laodice was a Seleucid princess. As an unfortunate consequence, Heliocles I is seen as Eucratides' son – when in fact his coins closely resemble those of king Agathocles. Drachms of this type are known, which implies that the series was regular coinage – not commemorative medals.

Instead these coins may be attributed to Heliocles and Laodice (whose names *are* in the genitive) ruling briefly after Eucratides' death, perhaps in Ai Khanoum just before its destruction, as one such coin was found there. On some coins, Heliocles strongly resembles his later portraits, when he became Heliocles I.

### Caption

An alternative explanation, offered by J. Jakobsson and M. Passehl, would be that this coin was not issued by Eucratides, but instead by Laodice and Heliocles – perhaps Eucratides' widow and her relative, the future king Heliocles I. The couple may have held the Bactrian metropolis of Ai Khanoum for a few months after the murder of Eucratides, perhaps c.145 BCE, using the well-known king as the emblem for their cause.



**Figure 3:** *Theophilus Autokrator.*  
*Courtesy of the British Museum.*  
*(Obverse)*

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. S. Hollis, 'Laodice Mother of Eucratides of Bactria', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 110 (1996) pp. 161-164

### 3. Theophilus Autokrator, the last Bactrian king? c. 120s BCE

**Thesis:** The very rare Attic tetradrachms of Theophilus Autokrator may belong to a different king than the Indo-Greek Theophilus Dikaios.

**Reference:** *Theophilos Autokrator, a last Bactrian king?*, JONS 202 (2010).

**Case in brief:** Several Indo-Greek rulers issued export coins for Bactria. From Menander, these coins were analogous with their regular silver types – same epithets, reverses, monograms etc. On the contrary, the two Theophilus

series are completely different in types *and* monograms.

#### Caption

This tetradrachm may in fact not belong to the Indian ruler Theophilus, but to a Graeco-Bactrian pretendent, after the nomad conquest of Bactria, according to J. Jakobsson. The unusual epithet Autokrator, 'self-ruler', used by Arsaces I and the Seleucid usurper Diodotus Tryphon, refers to independence. Possibly Theophilus tried to reestablish the Greek kingdom during the 120s BCE, when the nomads were weakened by wars with the Parthians. But with only four coins known, it is certain that Theophilus' attempt failed.



**Figure 4:** Apollo/tripod bronze of Straton Epiphanes Soter (I:B). CNGcoins, electronic auction 243, Lot: 201.

## 4. Straton I:A and I:B c.105-85 BCE

**Thesis:** The coins attributed to Straton I may in fact belong to two kings. Straton I:A issued coins with his mother, queen Agathocleia, and then on his own, using the epithets Soter and/or Dikaios, and the silver reverse of Athena. Straton I:B also used Athena, but held the epithets Epiphanes Soter. The coins of Straton I:B would be BN Bact, *Straton I*, group VI (series 26-28 and 31-32).

**Reference:** *Relations between the Indo-Greek kings after Menander part 2*, JONS 193 (2007).

### Case in brief

Their monograms and bronzes are completely different.

Only Straton I:A is sometimes bearded. The overstrike patterns of Heliocles II suggest that he succeeded Straton I:A but was succeeded by Straton I:B. It is however possible that these are two separate reigns of the same person.

### Caption

Overstrikes indicate that the rule of Straton I, the son of Agathocleia, was interrupted by Heliocles II. This coin seems to have been struck after Straton returned to the throne, but it is also possible that Agathocleia's son was killed, and that this coin belongs to another Straton, a member of the same dynasty. In either case, the Straton who issued this coin was probably the father of Polyxenus.



**Figure 5 (Prev.page).** *Portraits of older Zoilus II (left) and younger Zoilus III (middle). Reverse of the latter drachm (right) with Athena standing, and monogram 212, also shown magnified. (Courtesy of Gorny & Mosch, 152:1572, and Jean Elsen & ses Fils S.A, 93:566.)*

## 5. Zoilus III c.60-30 BCE

**Thesis:** Coins attributed to Zoilus II Soter with the monogram 212 (BNBact, se Fig. 5) may in fact belong to his son Zoilus III Soter.

**Reference:** *A Possible New Indo-Greek King Zoilos III, and an Analysis of Realism on Indo-Greek Royal Portraits*, Numismatic Chronicle (2011).

**Case in brief:** The Zoilus II Soter silver coins with a balding, hollow-cheeked portrait are demonstrably earlier than those with monogram 212, with a younger, sometimes boyish portrait.

I show that markers of age on Indo-Greek portraits should usually be taken seriously, even at this late period, when the portrait quality had generally deteriorated.

### Caption

#### a) For 'Zoilus III' coins

*[Passage in brackets eligible for silver only. And even so, not all portraits are youngish.]*

This coin, with its [youngish portrait and] late monogram, may in fact belong to a son of Zoilus II, who struck very similar coins. J. Jakobsson has tentatively dated him to c. 45-35 BCE.

#### b) For other Zoilus II coins

According to J. Jakobsson, Zoilus II could have been the direct successor (likely brother) of Apollodotus II, and may have been as early as 65-55 BCE. He was, in this construction, succeeded either by Dionysius or his own son, Zoilus III, who issued similar coins to his father, except that the portraits were younger.