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May 7th, 2024

Background Document

This object is a coin minted in Rhodes in Ancient Greece either during the Hellenistic period, dating between 304 BCE and 166 BCE, from the later part of these dates or after, or after, during Alexander the Great's conquests. On the obverse is a portrait of the sun-god Helios and a rose is depicted on the reverse.

Rhodes was a vibrant commercial trading center which had a lot of influence in the region. The city minted their own coins, most of which depicted Helios, the sun-god, on the obverse of the coins. Helios was the patron deity of Rhodes, as the Ancient Greeks told stories of Helios identifying the island as his land. The story goes that Helios wasn't present at the meeting where the children of Cronus and Rhea divided up the world. Afterward, Helios told Zeus he was content with island that he knew would become fertile and rich, which turned out to be Rhodes¹. Its coins were so iconic and useful that it became one of the major standards of coinage around the Mediterranean. Even after Alexander the Great's conquests in the Mediterranean that began in 334 BCE, Rhodes continued to mint their own coins despite being deep into Alexander's empire. Most other city-states' coinage subsequently hailed Alexander the Great, but Rhodes persisted on its own. There is, however, a strong influence of Alexander as Helios became more similar in portraiture to Alexander than he had been in previous decades before Alexander's conquest. Helios was depicted with a center part of long wavy hair "falling like a shaggy mane along the sides of the face"², which is similar to coins depicting Alexander the Great himself. Additionally, there is speculation among numismatic scholars that Rhodian coinage depicts

¹ "Early Hellenistic Coins from Rhodes," GLCL Classical Art History, March 31, 2018, <https://giclarthistory.blogspot.com/2018/03/early-hellenistic-coins-from-rhodes.html>

² Herbert Hoffmann, "Helios," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 2 (1963):121. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40000976>.

Helios as he was built in the Colossus of Rhodes³. Historian Richard Ashton argued that coins minted during the Hellenistic period, also that of Rhodian prosperity, were used to promote and fund the Colossus of Rhodes⁴. That being said, coins that depict Helios with a radiate head are the ones to potentially reflect the statue of Helios, unfortunately, not coins such as this one without a sun-beam crown.

The reverse on the other hand remained extremely similar throughout before Alexander the Great's conquests, throughout, and after. The Greeks had a habit of "canting"⁵, or making puns, on coinage relating an object with the city's name. Rhodes, for instance, primarily used roses on the reverse side of coins⁶; Rhodes in Greek also literally translates to "roses," or even "where the roses grow." Rhodons, or dog roses, are wild flowers that are native to where the town of Rhodes is located, and the flower became synonymous with the city's authority⁷. Roses were central to Rhodes' citizens' identity as Rhodians, and its imprint on coinage demonstrated that vitality to their identity. As an everyday object that was used by Rhodians, the rose on the reverse cemented their identity as Rhodians despite even after Alexander the Great's conquests and technically being citizens of his empire. This coin follows the tradition of canting and also has a rose on its reverse, alongside a bow in its quiver on the left side. Bows were common depictions in tandem with gods, so it's likely that this bow is representative of Helios from the obverse side. Perhaps this bow could also represent Rhodes' power as a city-state, especially considering their continuation to mint coins despite Alexander the Great's conquests.

³ J. Edward Taylor, "Gods, Goddesses and Flying Horses: A History of Coins in Ancient Greece" (2016): 36, https://arefiles.ucdavis.edu/uploads/filer_public/3c/32/3c3235f9-c9fc-4770-a683-f79cb0f0f596/gods_goddesses_and_flying_horses.pdf.

⁴ Tyler Rossi, "The Coins of Ancient Rhodes," Coin Week, May 10, 2022, <https://coinweek.com/the-coins-of-ancient-rhodes/>.

⁵ J. Edward Taylor, "A History of Coins in Ancient Greece": 32.

⁶ J. Edward Taylor, "A History of Coins in Ancient Greece": 7.

⁷ Tyler Rossi, "The Coins of Ancient Rhodes."

This all is to say that the coin is likely dated to late in the Hellenistic period or even after, particularly after Alexander the Great's death in 323 BCE. It is possible, due to the similarities of other coins honoring Alexander, this coin could in fact be from a similar period as the rest of those coins, which could be close to his death or even after.