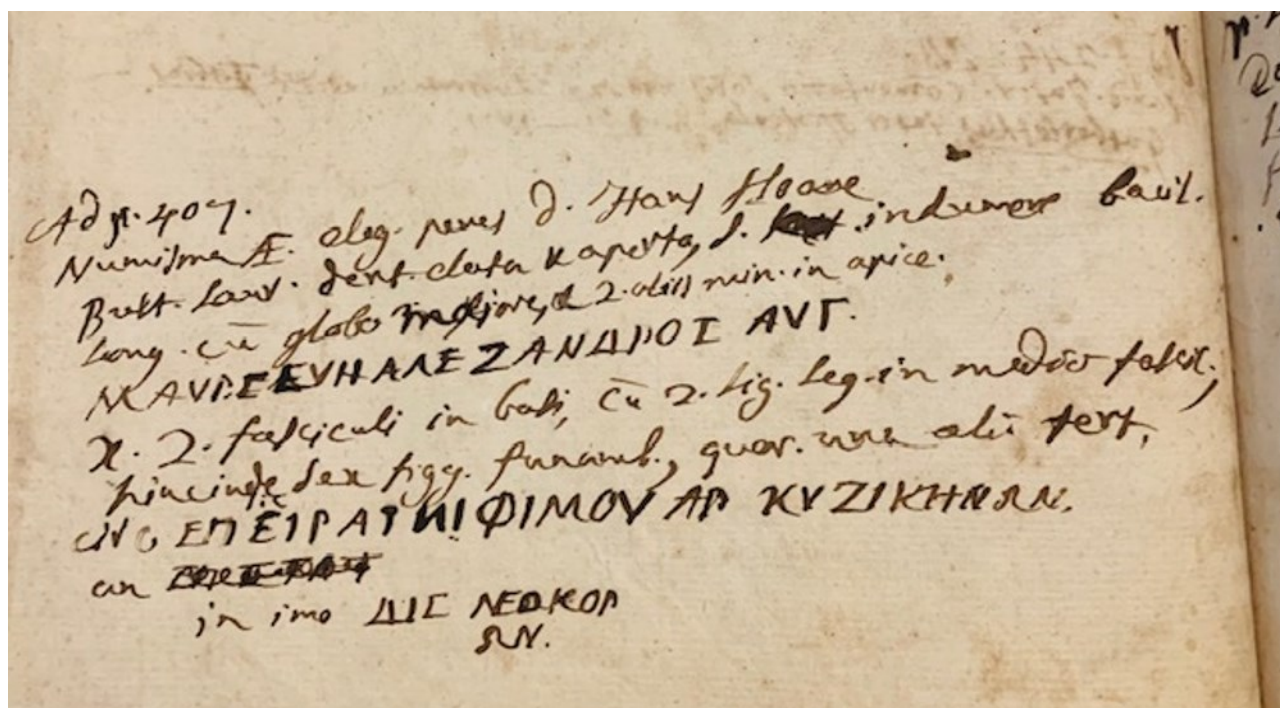


A New Coin from the Collection of Sir Hans Sloane

Andrew Burnett

A copy of Jacques Spon, *Recherches curieuses d'antiquité, contenues en plusieurs dissertations sur des medailles, basreliefs, statues, mosaïques, & inscriptions antiques; enrichies d'un grand nombre de figure en taille douce* (Lyon: Thomas Amaulry, 1683)¹ was acquired at the time by the historian and numismatist John/Jean Masson (1666-1747).² Masson was a Huguenot refugee who settled in Britain and brought new standards of numismatic scholarship to Britain.

Masson made a few annotations in the book, one of which concerns a coin which Masson saw in the collection of Hans Sloane, presumably before 1716, when Sloane was created a baronet. The annotation and its significance were spotted by Hugh Pagan, who has also kindly supplied this photograph:



This can be transcribed as follows, although Masson's description is highly abbreviated and his handwriting is not easy to decipher:

Ad p. 407
Numisma AE eleg. penes d. Hans Sloane
Bust Laur. dext. elata & aperta. s. ??? basil.
long. cu' globo maiore, & 2 aliis min. in apice
ΜΑΥΡΣΕΥΗΑΛΕΖΑΝΔΡΟΣ ΑΥΓ
R. 2 fasciculi in basi, cu' 2 sig. leg. in mediis fascis
hinc inde sex figg. funeral., quor. una aliu' fert
circ ΕΠΕΙΡΑΙΝΙΦΙΜΟΥ ΑΡ ΚΥΖΙΚΗΝΩΝ
an #####
in imo ΔΙΣ ΝΕΟΚΟΡ
ΩΝ

¹ William St Clair collection = Lyon & Turnbull (Edinburgh) sale 683, 2 Feb. 2022, lot 162 = Hugh Pagan List 93 [2022], lot 76.

² For Masson, see A. Burnett, 'The Hidden Treasures of this Happy Island'. *A History of Numismatics in Britain from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Royal Numismatic Society, Special Publication no. 58; British Numismatic Society Special Publication no. 14, London, 2020), pp. 981-95.

This can be translated (correcting the legends to what can be correctly read today)

To page 407:

Elegant bronze coin in the possession of Mr. Hans Sloane

Laureate bust, with right hand raised and open, left hand holding long sceptre with larger globe, and two other smaller ones at the top

Μ ΑΥΡ ΣΕΥΗ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΣ ΑΥΓ

Two bundles on a base, with two legionary standards in the middle bundle

below this six funerary figures, of which one carries another

around ΕΠΙ Γ ΦΛ ΤΡΟΦΙΜΟΥ ΑΡ ΚΥΖΙΚΗΝΩΝ or #####

ΔΙΣ ΝΕΩΚΟΡΩΝ

This coin, which is still unique, can be identified in the trays of the British Museum, as *BMC Mysia Cyzicus* 264.³ It was recently republished in the online version of *Roman Provincial Coinage*.⁴



It is a remarkable coin of the emperor Severus Alexander (AD 222-235), struck at Cyzicus in Mysia (modern north-west Turkey), and signed by the otherwise unknown C. Flavius Trophimos, who was a magistrate (archon) of the city at the time. Masson unsurprisingly had difficulty reading his name, which is not well preserved on this specimen, but is clearer on some other coins, with other reverse types.

The reverse is something of a mystery, and it was once thought to represent a scene of rope dancing! Similar types, however, appear on the coinage of Cyzicus from the Antonine period to the reign of Claudius II (268-70), and show two men setting fire to large baskets full of branches that have been erected over two altars. This is part of a cult ceremony, presumably in honour of the goddess Kore Soteira, whose head appears on the obverse of some of the Antonine coins.⁵

The unusual depiction of the emperor on the obverse is not connected to the festival, since it occurs with another reverse depicting Zeus in a zodiac. It probably represents the emperor holding an imperial sceptre, although the sceptre with three globes at the end differs somewhat from the slightly later sceptre with a single globe, possibly belonging to the emperor Maxentius, which was discovered in Rome in 2006. Here the emperor also raises his hand in salutation, and it is possible that Alexander visited Cyzicus on his way from Rome to fight the Persians in the east.

The huge collection of Hans Sloane (1660-1753) formed the founding collection of the British Museum. Unfortunately the manuscript catalogue of his collection no longer survives, apparently having been a casualty of bombing in the Second World War. Only a limited amount of information can now be reconstructed about it. For example, we not even know how big it was, as figures of 23,000 and 32,000 have both survived, one obviously a mistake.⁶ The discovery of a new Sloane coin, and such a spectacular one, is therefore of

³ For many years the coin had sat incorrectly on a ticket for 1847,0820.19, and its URL is still https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1847-0820-19.

⁴ *RPC VI* Online temporary number 3040 <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/type/56572>.

⁵ Antonine period: *RPC IV* Online temporary numbers 54, 370, 438, 11653 and 759; Claudius: a unique recent discovery (Naumann 100, 7 Mar. 2021, lot 1320).

⁶ Burnett, pp. 1115-30.

considerable value, and it is only from chance sources such as this that the painstaking job of trying to reconstruct his collection can make any progress.

