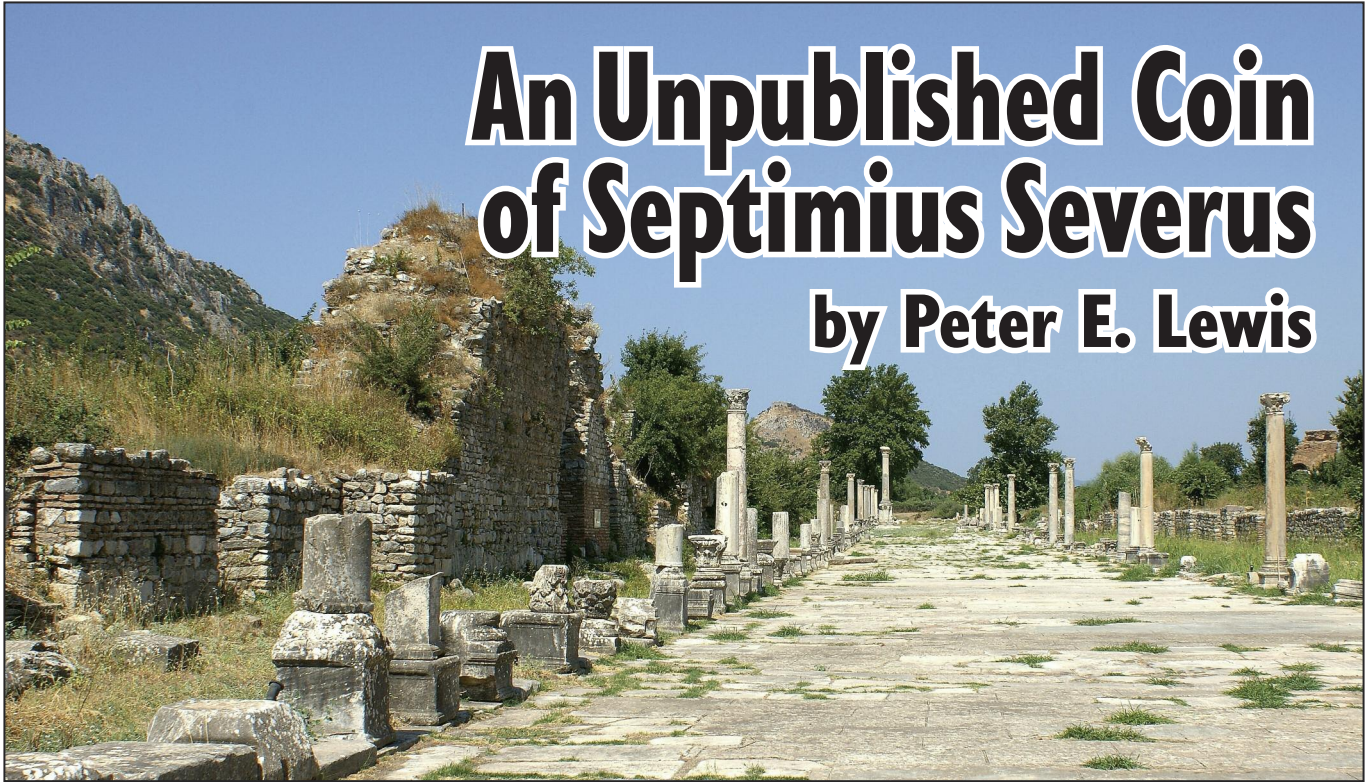


An Unpublished Coin of Septimius Severus

by Peter E. Lewis



The Arcadian Way at Ephesus with Mt Koressos rising on the left. (Wikimedia Commons. Detail of photo by Harald Boehnke.)

THE Centre for Coins, Culture and Religious History (ccrh.org) recently acquired an unpublished, probably unique coin of Septimius Severus who was the Roman Emperor from 193 to 211 AD. (Figure 1) It is a large bronze coin or medallion that was minted at Ephesus, a Greek city on the west coast of Asia

Minor. (Figure 2 – map) Today the ruins of Ephesus are a popular destination for tourists, especially Christians because Saint Paul lived there for two years and wrote an inspiring letter to the Ephesians which is in the Bible.

On the obverse there is a laureate, draped bust of Septimius Severus seen from slightly behind his right shoulder. The Greek legend ΑΥ.Κ.Α.ΣΕΠΙ.ΣΕΟΥΗΡΟC.ΠΙ means “Emperor Caesar Lucius Septimius Severus, Father.” On the reverse a weird statue of Artemis stands between two men. Artemis was the principal deity worshiped at Ephesus and her enormous temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. On coins she

is shown either as this strange mummy-form figure, as on a coin of Claudius (Figure 3), or as a young woman with a bow and arrow, as on a coin of Valerian. (Figure 4) The Greek legend on the reverse of the coin in Figure 1 is ΝΕΟΚΟΡΩΝ with ΕΦΕCΙΩΝ in the exergue, and it means “[a coin] of the Ephesians, temple-keepers.” But who are the men standing on either side of Artemis? The man on the left seems to have a beard while the other does not. They are both bare-chested and hold a spear or sceptre. They are holding the hands of Artemis as if to support her even though she is supported by struts. Determining who they are is made more difficult because the



Figure 1 – Bronze medallion of Septimius Severus (193-211 AD) minted at Ephesus. (Centre for Coins, Culture and Religious History)



Figure 2 – Map showing some of the cities visited by St Paul in the 1st century. (Wikimedia Commons)



Figure 3 – Silver coin (aureus) of Claudius (41-54 AD) minted at Ephesus showing Artemis in her temple. She would appear in the window at the top. *RPC I 2222*. (Centre for Coins, Culture and Religious History)

fields and even parts of the figures have been smoothed by an instrument, perhaps a machine that a dentist would use. This activity is called tooling, and it can adversely affect the original images.

The coin was sold by Ira and Larry Goldberg Coins & Collectables, Inc. It was Lot 340 in the New York Sale, Auction 54, on 11th January 2022. It was described as a medallion, which is probably correct because it is 38 mms in diameter and weighs 24.79 grams, which is much larger than the ordinary coins in circulation in the area at the time. The difference between a medallion and an ordinary coin is rather vague, but rare and unusually large coins are often called

medallions. Presumably they were distributed on important occasions such as the emperor visiting a city. Subsequently they probably entered circulation as multiples of the common coins.

In the description given with the coin by the Goldberg company the two men on the reverse are said to be Septimius Severus on the left and his son Caracalla on the right. If this is correct the coin would be of considerable historical significance because it shows the emperor and his son standing beside the goddess Artemis and supporting her, the implication being that they are also divine. Although emperors were often deified after they died they were not usually

considered divine when alive. However, there are some features of the two men which suggest that they are not the emperor and his son.

The men are bare chested, and emperors do not usually appear in this way. The appropriate dress for a high-class person in the Roman Empire was the toga which was a long sheet wrapped around the body. On another large coin of Septimius Severus minted at Ephesus there are two men on the reverse wearing togas. (Figure 5) They stand before the idol of the goddess and at a lower level, and each is holding a bowl called a patera. They are emptying the contents, probably wine, on to a lighted altar indicating that they



Figure 4 – Bronze coin (aureus) of Valerian (253-260 AD) minted at Ephesus showing Artemis as a huntress. *SNG Von Aulock 1922*. (Centre for Coins, Culture and Religious History)



Figure 5 – Bronze coin of Septimius Severus minted at Ephesus showing two togate figures sacrificing to the goddess. *Karwiese Vol. 5, 402.* (Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 467, Lot 270)

are performing a sacrifice to the goddess. The Greek legend means “of the Ephesians, twice temple-keepers”, which suggests that they are the deceased emperors Hadrian and Domitian who had temples dedicated to them in Ephesus.

However, the togate figures are not named on the coin and could be Septimius and Caracalla, or even Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus as suggested by some numismatists. In any case, they are all emperors wearing togas.

On the reverse of a large bronze coin of Elagabalus, who succeeded Caracalla as emperor, a single togate figure stands sacrificing before Artemis in a temple. (Figure 6) Although not named he is almost certainly the emperor. Therefore



Figure 6 – Bronze coin of Elagabalus (218-222 AD) minted at Ephesus showing him sacrificing to the goddess. The Greek legend means “of the Ephesians, only altogether four-times temple-keepers.” *Mionnet 380.* (Alde Auction, March 2018, Lot 10)



Figure 7 – Bronze coin of Septimius Severus showing three temples. The Greek legend means “of the people of Ephesus, first [city] of Asia.” *BMC 261.* (Roma Numismatics, Electronic Auction 4, Lot 573)



Figure 8 – Bronze coin of Macrinus (217-218 AD) showing Androklos naked except for his fancy boots. He is about to spear a boar. *Mionnet 369.* (Helios Numismatik GmbH, Auction 5, Lot 710)



Figure 9 – Bronze coin of Trajan (97 -117 AD) minted at Ephesus showing Androklos on the right and Koressos on the left. 20 mms. RPC III 2049. (Leu Numismatik, Web Auction 3, Lot 550)

it is unlikely that the bare-chested men in Figure 1 are Septimius and Caracalla. But who are they?

On the reverse of a large bronze coin of Septimius Severus minted at Ephesus there are three temples. (Figure 7) Artemis is in her temple in the centre while on either side there is a temple containing the figure of a man. The man on the right is naked. Obviously in Ephesus these men are being worshiped as gods. As their temples are on either side of that of Artemis they are probably the men on the coin in Figure 1.

In 2004 the coin in Figure 1 was sold by Gorny and Mosch of Munich for US\$1610 plus commission. It was Lot 1959 in Auction 134. In their description of the coin they said that the men on the reverse were Septimius and Caracalla or Koressos and Androklos. Koressos was a mountain god. Mount Koressos is immediately to the south of the present ancient ruins of Ephesus, and a number of houses, known as the terraced houses, were built on the lowest slopes of the mountain.

Androklos was the mythical founder of Ephesus. According to the legend he was the son of the king of Athens and he wanted to migrate across the Aegean Sea to the coast of Asia Minor. He consulted an oracle about where he should settle and was told that a fish and a boar would show him the place. After landing on the coast he fried some fish that he had caught. One of the fish jumped out of the pan and started a fire in the dry grass. A boar in the nearby bushes ran from the fire, but Androklos chased it and killed it at a place north of Mount Koressos, and that was where he built the city. On a bronze coin of the Roman emperor Macrinus minted at Ephesus in 217 AD we see Androklos naked pointing his spear at a nasty-looking boar. (Figure 8) Could Koressos and Androklos be the men on the coin in Figure 1?

The key to solving this problem is a small bronze coin minted at Ephesus by Trajan who was the Roman emperor from 96 to 117 AD. (Figure 9) On the

reverse there are two men clasping hands. The man on the right is naked while the man on the left wears a tunic. Although the legend on this coin is not clear, on other examples it is clearly seen to be $\text{AN}\Delta\text{POK}\Lambda\text{OC KOPHCOC E}\Phi\text{C}$ (Androklos Koresos Ephesus). Therefore the men on the reverse of the coin in Figure 1 must be Androklos with his spear on the right and Koressos with a sceptre on the left. Although Androklos does not look naked in Figure 1 there was probably a roughness in the metal covering his groin and thigh area, and it had not been smoothed away by tooling. Koressos and Androklos are appropriate figures to be standing on either side of Artemis and supporting her because in a way they really did support her, and they were divine or semi-divine figures. Koressos was the mountain god overlooking her city and Androklos was the hero who had founded it.

The medallion in Figure 1 is important historically because it helps us understand how the citizens of Ephesus thought about their city. Obviously the great temple of Artemis was central, but they were also aware of their environment as represented by the mountain god, and of their history as represented by its founding hero.

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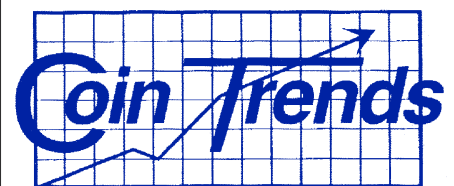
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