

In the wake of Alexander the Great's death in 323 BCE, his generals all separated, breaking his kingdom into smaller pieces for themselves. These are often referred to as the successor kingdoms. One of the most famous of these cases is that of Ptolemy, one of Alexander's generals who also wrote his own history of Alexander's campaign to the east. Ptolemy took the kingdom of Egypt for himself, which his family ruled until the beginning of the Roman Empire. Still, observation of Ptolemaic coins reveals that they still preserved many of their own Greek customs.

This specific coin from the St Olaf collection shows the head of Zeus on the obverse, and an eagle standing on a thunderbolt on the reverse. Both the eagle and the thunderbolt are traditionally symbols of Zeus, and thus show that the Ptolemies honor him specifically among the gods. The reverse of this coin also features the words "ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ," or "of King Ptolemy." The letter sigma also appears to the left of the bird, but this is where identification of this coin starts to be confusing. The person who worked with this specific coin before me thought that this coin was made by Ptolemy I Soter, king from 305-285 BCE, and that the sigma represented his name. However, Ptolemy I Soter coins typically show a portrait of himself wearing the aegis of Zeus<sup>1</sup>. However, upon looking at examples of his coins, the one in the St. Olaf collection is definitely not one of his portraits, but rather a traditional portrayal of Zeus. So, I suggest that this is not a coin from Ptolemy I Soter, but rather a later Ptolemaic mint from the late third century when bronze coins of this sort are very common.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> G.K. Jenkins, "Ancient Greek Coins: The World of Ancient Numismatics," by G.K. Jenkins. G.P. Puntam's Sons. New York. 236.

<sup>2</sup> G.K. Jenkins, 246.