

A unique Silandos medallion of Faustina II from Blaundos in Lydia

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Abstract: During the 2019 archaeological excavation season in Blaundos, a Roman-period bronze medallion was found within a wall of a Byzantine-period structure on the main street. It is a medallion struck by the Lydian city of Silandos, bearing the bust of Faustina II on the obverse and Marcus Aurelius clasping hands with Lucius Verus on the reverse. A literature search revealed that it is a rare and unpublished specimen. Neither *RPC*, the largest database of Roman Provincial Coinage, nor auction databases record any example of it. The iconography, combining the portrait of the empress with a depiction of the co-emperors of the period, does not point to any specific event or incident. The reverse die was, however, used for another medallion struck later by Silandos. This paper aims to introduce, interpret, and discuss this unique Lydian medallion from the 2nd c. CE.

Keywords: Roman provincial coinage, medallion, Lydia, Silandos, Blaundos, Faustina II, Marcus Aurelius, Lucius Verus

During archaeological excavations carried out in 2019 in the ancient city of Blaundos in Lydia, a medallion struck by Silandos that is the main subject of this study was found on the wall of a Byzantine-era workshop located on the main street of the city (Fig. 1).¹ The wall belongs to a small circular storage room in the left-hand corner of the structure (Fig. 2). It is thought that this structure, situated on the main street, is a workshop and the small room is a storage space as archaeological materials such as a pithos and loom weights were found there *in situ*.² The medallion, on the other hand, was found within the dirt of the wall fill. As the outside of the wall was muddy and dirty, the excavation team decided to clean it, and this led to the discovery of Silandos medallion. This location rules out the possibility of a ritualistic use related to foundation rites.³

¹ Blaundos was a city on the border between Lydia and Phrygia, located in today's Sülümenli of the Ulubey district of Uşak. Silandos (today's Selendi district of Manisa) was another Lydian city, located approximately 100 km northwest of Blaundos. In 1995, a single-season excavation was conducted in Blaundos by Uşak Museum (see Akbiyikoğlu 1997). More recent excavations have been carried out in Blaundos since 2018, under the supervision of Prof. Birol Can. In 1999, 2000, and 2002, field surveys were conducted in the city by A. Filges. For a detailed report on these years' works, see Filges 2006. For the history of research from the 19th c. CE, see Can 2017.

² For the main street and this structure, see Can and Beşikçi 2020, 384.

³ It is well known that coins were used for ritual purposes related to construction rites. It is possible to find a single coin or multiple coins left under a statue base, under a building foundation, at the threshold block, or inside a wall. For such examples and commentary on them, see Hunt 2006, 38–47, 52–55, 59–60; Krmnicek 2018. See also Crawford 2003, Appendix III. The use of the medallion, on the other hand, is related to construction rites but differs in function. The Panfilo and Verano Catacombs in Rome provide fine examples of the ritual use of medallions. During excavations in these catacombs, medallions were found affixed to the plaster inside the walls surrounding the niches or to the terracotta plates standing at the entrances of the niches. It is thought that their purpose was to make the deceased more easily identified by his or her visitors. In a rather interesting case, a bronze medallion minted during the period of Lucius Verus was found on the wall of a Christian cemetery dating to the middle of the 3rd c. CE, again

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Fig. 1. Find place of the medallion. (Blaundos excavation photo archive; courtesy B. Can.)



Fig. 2. Aerial view of the main street, the Byzantine-period structure, and the storage room. (Blaundos excavation photo archive; courtesy B. Can.)

affixed to plaster (see Toynbee 1944, 44). All these examples clearly show that the medallions were carefully preserved for generations as mementoes and that considerable significance was attributed to their spiritual value.



Fig. 3. Roman Medallion found in Blaundos excavations in 2019, Inv. no. BL'19-880.440-16. (Blaundos excavation photo archive.)

The object in question is a medallion minted in Silandos during the joint reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (Fig. 3). It is 45 mm in diameter and 49.36 gm in weight. It bears the draped and topknotted bust of Faustina II, r., wife of M. Aurelius, on the obverse. The legend reads *CEBACTH ΦΑΥCΤΕΙΝΑ*. On the reverse side, the co-emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, each wearing a toga, stand facing each other, clasping their right hands and holding scrolls in their left hands. The reverse legend reads *ΕΙΠΙ CΤΑ ΑΤΤΑΛΙΑΝΟV ΑΡΧΟΝ CΙΑΝΔΕΩΝ*. The medallion in question is significant because it has not yet been published in de facto numismatic catalogs, nor in recent numismatic literature.⁴ Roman Provincial Coinage (*RPC*) does not record any example.⁵ No specimens sold at auctions could be identified either.

The obverse iconography is of no additional importance or reference value given the widespread use of empress busts on Roman coins. It has a plain appearance, very close to the portrait of Faustina II on other coins and medallions of the period.⁶ The depiction of the empress is nearest to what is called “a young matron.”⁷ The reverse type, on the other hand, does have a political reference. Marcus Aurelius, who ruled from 161–180 CE, shared the administration of the empire with his adoptive brother Lucius Verus between 161 and 169 CE. In this context, the iconography of two emperors shaking

⁴ The most recent and comprehensive studies of the coinage of Lydia are the colossal works of P. O. Hochard (2020) and D. Kurth (2020). While Hochard’s book, which is also his PhD dissertation, covers the coins of the Lydian region from the 3rd c. BCE to the 3rd c. CE, Kurth’s book includes Greek and Roman provincial issues. The extensive catalogues of both these works do not include any example of the Faustina II medallion of Silandos.

⁵ Please note that all references below to entries in *RPC* IV.1, IV.2, IV.3 and IV.4 use the current but temporary number sequence.

⁶ For a comprehensive study of the portraits of Faustina II on Roman coins, see Beckmann 2021.

⁷ For a recent analysis of the portrait types of the empress, with references to previous literature, see Niederhuber 2022, 89–125.

hands on the reverse contains a basic metaphor that they ruled in harmony. In fact, it marks one of the earliest expressions of the theme of dynastic harmony.⁸ This iconography was introduced in Rome soon after the emperors' joint accession in 161 CE, and it appeared on the coins of the next year.⁹ Similar iconography was used on issues of the Rome mint, but this reverse type was not used on a medallion struck in Rome.¹⁰ On the other hand, the type is used on coins of relatively larger denominations such as dupondius and sestertius.¹¹

On the Roman coins too, the two emperors are depicted standing and holding scrolls, clasping their hands. These issues bear the inscription *CONCORD AVGVSTOR* (*concordia augustorum*).¹² On the other hand, none of these issues has Faustina II as the obverse type. As the Blaundos example is a medallion and has a larger surface, it displays a higher artistic quality and a more pronounced and detailed reverse die. Therefore, there are very small differences from those that were struck in Rome in this regard. However, it is clear that this reverse type was copied from issues struck in Rome given the posture of the two emperors, their position, and their royal apparel as in the provincial type.

The magistrate mentioned on the reverse of the coin is Attalianos.¹³ In the city of Silandos, where the medallion was minted, Attalianos was the first archon, between 163 and 165 CE, during the reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. Therefore, we can suggest this date range for the minting of the medallion discussed here. Apart from the Silandos medallion, there are 14 different coin series with Attalianos's name on the reverse.¹⁴ Two series among them are medallions just like the Faustina II issue discussed here. The first one, with a diameter of 41 mm and weighing 52.23 gm, has the draped bust of a youthful personification of the Senate on the obverse with the inscription *IEPA CVNKAHTOC*, and the emperor Lucius Verus in military dress, galloping over a kneeling and bound captive, r., on the reverse side. The reverse legend is *EΠI CTA ATTAIANOV APXONTOC CIAANΔEQN*.¹⁵ The other medallion is interesting in that its reverse type is the same as the Silandos medallion. It is 45 mm in diameter and 52.69 gm in weight. The obverse type, on the other hand, is the same as one just described. It bears the draped bust

⁸ Harl 1987, 41; Heuchert 2005, 53.

⁹ See Niederhuber 2022, 252. For the initial issues see *RIC* III, nos. 7–11 (March–December 161 CE).

¹⁰ For the only medallion from the mint of Rome depicting these two emperors, see Gnechchi 1912, 35. It has the bust of M. Aurelius on the obverse and the bust of L. Verus on the reverse.

¹¹ For the coins see *RIC* III, nos. 795–800, 803, 822–29 (M. Aurelius); nos. 1278–87, 1292–96, 1308–13 (L. Verus). While there are numerous bronze issues, there are silver and gold issues as well. They have a longer version of the same reverse inscription (*CONCORDIAE AVGVSTOR*). For these coins, see *RIC* III, nos. 7–11, 41–46 (M. Aurelius); nos. 451–56, 470–74 (L. Verus).

¹² See n. 9. For an analysis of the ideology behind this term, see Dal Santo 2016.

¹³ Münsterberg 1985, 149; *LAGM* II, 1062; *LGPN* s.v., Ἀτταλιανός.

¹⁴ For the coins, see *RPC* IV.2, no. 1438 (also Imhoof-Blumer 1908, 132, no. 2; Hochard 2020, no. 2232); nos. 1497–502 (Hochard 2020, nos. 2272–76, 2279–80; Kurth 2020, 108, nos. 8, 11–13, 16); no. 1508 (Hochard 2020, no. 2281; Kurth 2020, 110, no. 15); no. 1757 (Hochard 2020, no. 2231); nos. 2856, 8491 (Hochard 2020, nos. 2229, 2282; Kurth 2020, 110, no. 14); no. 9952 (Hochard 2020, no. 2237); no. 7774 (Hochard 2020, no. 2233); no. 17404.

¹⁵ *RPC* IV.2, no. 1501. Also see Dürr 1952. Kurth (2020, 108, no. 12) in her catalogue identifies the rider as “Lucius Verus or Commodus.” However, the emperor on horseback must be L. Verus, because Attalianos's office did not extend beyond the 170s.

of the youthful Senate and the legend IEPA CVNKAHTOC.¹⁶ The reverse depicts the two emperors, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, standing facing each other, clasping hands. Like the reverse type, the reverse legend is the same as the Faustina II medallion: ΕΠΙ CTA ΑΤΤΑΛΙΑΝΟΒΑΡΧΟΝ ΚΙΑΝΔΕΩΝ (Fig. 4).¹⁷ It is clear that these two coins, which have the same reverse iconography and legend, were minted from the same reverse die. Thanks to the new specimen found in Blaundos, the number of known samples with this reverse type is now three, all sharing the same reverse die.¹⁸

The iconography of these two emperors clasping hands appears to have been quite popular in the provinces as well.¹⁹ The popularity of this motif is interesting because provincial issues tend to depict local themes on their reverses.²⁰ In addition to the Lydian city of Silandos, 24 different cities struck coins with this type on the reverse.²¹ None of them has Faustina II as the obverse type. Moreover, none of these coins are medallions except for two different issues of Pompeiopolis in Cilicia.²² The mints that struck coins with this reverse type²³ are Pautalia, Philippopolis, Hadrianopolis and Perinthos in Thrace,²⁴ Tium in Bithynia,²⁵ Cyzicus in Mysia,²⁶ Phocaea and Magnesia ad Maeandrum in Ionia,²⁷ Heraclea Salbace in Caria,²⁸ Laodicea ad Lycum in Phrygia,²⁹ Selge and Adada in Pisidia,³⁰ Side in Pamphylia,³¹ Pessinus in Galatia,³² Diocaesarea, Pompeiopolis, Tarsus, Adana, Elaeusa-Sebaste, and Hierapolis-Castabala in Cilicia,³³ Amasea in

¹⁶ Such provincial issues, personifying the Roman Senate, are common in the province of Asia. For detailed information on the provincial issues in the name of the senate, see Forni 1953; Martin 2013.

¹⁷ *RPC* IV.2, no. 1497.

¹⁸ One of the two known examples of the series with the head of the Senate on the obverse (*RPC* IV.2, no. 1497) is in the collection of the British Museum. Another specimen was for sale at auction, see Gorny & Mosch 181 (12/10/2009), 1795.

¹⁹ As stated by Heuchert (2005, 53), more than 200 cities struck coinage during the reign of M. Aurelius-L. Verus, and about 15 percent of them adopted this iconography.

²⁰ This is mainly related to a city's desire to advertise its identity; for detailed information, see Howgego 2005.

²¹ It was also used as the obverse type on the coins of Nysa from Lydia (*RPC* IV.2, nos. 1462, 11505), Attuda from Caria (*RPC* IV.2, nos. 855–56), Anazarbus from Cilicia (*RPC* IV.2, no. 3647), Gadara (*RPC* IV.3, no. 6674) and Philadelphia (*RPC* IV.3, no. 6642) from Syria, and Petra from Arabia (*RPC* IV.3, no. 6626).

²² *RPC* IV.3, nos. 10162, 10165.

²³ Also see Heuchert 2005, 54, table 3.5 for a list of cities with numismatic references.

²⁴ *RPC* IV.1, nos. 3495, 7387, 11132 (Pautalia); *RPC* IV.1, no. 17364 (Philippopolis); *RPC* IV.1, no. 10589 (Hadrianopolis); *RIC* IV.1, nos. 8665, 8961 (Perinthos).

²⁵ *RPC* IV.1, nos. 10405–6.

²⁶ *RPC* IV.1, no. 2325.

²⁷ *RPC* IV.2, no. 1082 (Phocaea); *RIC* IV.2, no. 1042 (Magnesia ad Maeandrum).

²⁸ *RPC* IV.2, no. 902.

²⁹ *RPC* IV.2, nos. 2141, 11602–3.

³⁰ *RPC* IV.3, nos. 3500, 4960 (Selge); *RIC* IV.3, no. 7276 (Adada).

³¹ *RPC* IV.3, no. 17342.

³² *RPC* IV.3, no. 4105.

³³ *RPC* IV.3, nos. 6163, 10248 (Diocaesarea); *RPC* IV.3, nos. 10162, 10165 (Pompeiopolis); *RPC* IV.3, no. 3584 (Tarsus); *RPC* IV.3, no. 6007 (Adana); *RPC* IV.3, no. 4921 (Elaeusa-Sebaste); *RPC* IV.3, no. 10242 (Hierapolis-Castabala).



Fig. 4. Another medallion struck by Silandos, which shares the same reverse die as the one found in Blaundos. (RPC online: <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/4/1497>.)

Pontos,³⁴ Antioch and Neapolis in Syria-Syria Palaestina,³⁵ and Alexandria in Egypt.³⁶ So, the type used on the reverse side of the Faustina II medallion is not an unusual one, either for Silandos or for a medallion in the general sense. It is a very common type used on regular imperial and provincial coins. On the other hand, Silandos is the only Lydian city currently known to have used that reverse type. However, it is interesting to note that, as stated below, none of these issues, neither the coins nor the medallions, carry the bust of Faustina II on the obverse side. While the reverse type seems rather common, the combination of the empress and that reverse type is at present peculiar to Silandos. It is not possible to say for certain why such a combination – Faustina on the obverse and two emperors on the reverse side – was preferred by this city nor what incident might have led to such a choice.³⁷ The apparent theme is the depiction of the empress with the co-emperors of the period. However, the primary reason for producing this medallion, as in the Roman coins bearing the same reverse type, must be related to the enthronement of the co-emperors. As stated above, this reverse type was used by the Roman mint in 161 and 162 CE. The period in office of the magistrate Attalianos is 163–165 CE. This Silandos medallion was probably struck in 163 CE. The other medallion struck by Silandos using the same reverse die confirms such an implication, since the reverse die used on that second medallion is much more worn than the Faustina medallion. On this basis, it is possible to suggest 164 or 165 CE for the second piece.

³⁴ RPC IV.3, nos. 3816, 4020, 4877–79, 5285–86, 5291–92, 5294, 10475.

³⁵ RPC IV.3, nos. 8534, 9597 (Antioch); no. 6350 (Neapolis).

³⁶ RPC IV.4, nos. 14423, 14425, 16384, 14471, 14475, 14481, 16247, 16385, 16530, 16850, 15020–21, 16379.

³⁷ It is known that while gold and silver Roman medallions were presented to high-class citizens, bronze medallions were more likely to have been given to soldiers and plebs (see Harl 1987, 32). However, the Silandos medallion does not carry military iconography. The most important event of the period to mark between 163 and 165 CE was L. Verus's journey to Ephesus and his marriage there to Lucilla, daughter of M. Aurelius; see Kienast 1990, 144–45.

It is worth mentioning here another issue with a similar iconography. It is again a rare medallion struck by Silandos, and it is in the name of Iulia Domna, wife of Septimius Severus (r. 193–211 CE).³⁸ It bears the name of the magistrate Helenos, son of Apollonidos, on the reverse side.³⁹ What makes this medallion interesting is that it bears the head of the empress on the obverse side and co-emperors Caracalla and Geta (who ruled jointly between 209 and 211 CE) clasping hands, wearing togas, and holding scrolls. Like the Faustina medallion, it combines the iconography of an empress and co-emperors. Perhaps it was struck, like the former, to mark the beginning of the new era when Geta became co-ruler. On the other hand, it might have been struck before this period as well because there are other coins from the mint of Rome dated before 209 CE that show Caracalla and Geta clasping hands, as on the Silandos medallion.⁴⁰ However, those dated after the enthronement of Geta are more numerous.⁴¹

Many coins bear the portrait of Faustina II, and they cannot all be listed here. Apart from those struck by imperial mints, 108 different cities used her portrait on their provincial coinage. The portrait of Faustina II was used frequently on medallions as well. There are ten issues struck by the mint of Rome.⁴² The provincial cities known to have struck medallions with the depiction of empress on the obverse side are Serdica in Thrace, Pergamon in Mysia, Hierocaesarea in Lydia, and Phocaea in Ionia.⁴³ The bust on the obverse of one of the Phocaea coins and the Hierocaesarea coin is positioned to the left.⁴⁴ In the remaining five medallions, the empress bust is facing right, as is the case in the Silandos medallion. But unlike the reverse die, a die link to any other obverses cannot be established. The obverse inscription of the Silandos medallion is CEBACTH ΦAVCTEINA. Other provincial issues have it as ΦAVCTEINA CEBACTH. Such a difference is based on the starting point of the legend and has no further significance.

No other Roman provincial issue, neither medallion nor regular coin, is known to have been struck by Silandos with a bust of Faustina II on the obverse. However, there are three different coins of the city bearing the portrait of Lucilla, the wife of Lucius Verus. The reverse inscription of these coins is ΛΟVKΙΑΛΛΑ CEBACTH. None of them is a medallion. The reverse type of the first is the cult statue of Kore of Sardis standing and facing. It only carries the name of the city (CΙΑΝΑΔΕΩΝ).⁴⁵ The reverse iconography of the other two series depicts Zeus Lydios standing and facing left.⁴⁶ These coins also bear the name of

³⁸ For this rare medallion, see Önder 2014, no. 324. For the other known specimen, see MMD 20 (10 Oct. 2006) lot. 209; Hochard 2020, no. 2255.

³⁹ Münsterberg 1985, 149; *LAGM* II, 1062.

⁴⁰ For these issues see *RIC* IV.1, no. 61 (202 CE); no. 40 (203–208 CE). There is another issue depicting Caracalla and Geta clasping right hands, crowned by Apollo(?). However, it is dated between ca. 202 and 210 CE, see *RIC* IV.1, no. 459.

⁴¹ See *RIC* IV.1, no. 508 (210–231 CE); no. 73 (209–201 CE); no. 86 (210–212 CE); no. 155 (210 CE); no. 184 (210–212 CE).

⁴² See Gnechchi 1912, 33–34, nos. 36–45. For the medallions with the portrait of Faustina II on the reverse, see Gnechchi 1912, 33–34, nos. 1–4; 1.

⁴³ *RPC* IV.1, no. 7389 (Serdica); *RPC* IV.2, no. 3219 (Pergamon); *RPC* IV.2, no. 11395 (Hierocaesarea); *RPC* IV.2, nos. 968, 1085, 2940, 3310 (Phocaea).

⁴⁴ *RPC* IV.2, no. 11395 (Hierocaesarea); no. 2940 (Phocaea).

⁴⁵ *RPC* IV.2, no. 1440.

⁴⁶ *RPC* IV.2, nos. 9952, 17404.

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Attalianos, the archon of Silandos. The reverse inscription of the first coin is ΕΠΙ C ΑΤΤΑΛΙΑ ΚΙΑΝΔΕ, while the second reads [ΕΠΙ C?] ΑΤΤΑΛΙΑ ΚΙΑΝ. The result of the Faustina II obverse-depiction coin found in the 2019 excavations indicates that during Attalianos's period of office, coins with the portraits of both empresses were struck by the Silandos mint.

Silandos is one of the most prolific mints for the production of Roman medallions. Despite the fact that it only minted provincial coinage during the reign of four emperors from the 1st c. CE to 3rd c. CE, there are now 11 different known medallions.⁴⁷ The Faustina medallion is a significant specimen not only because it has never been published or appeared in an auction, but also because it bears a unique combination of obverse and reverse types. This piece, to conclude, most probably was struck to celebrate the enthronement of co-emperors M. Aurelius and L. Verus in the early phase of Attalianos's service. Regarding its findspot, the specimen from Blaundos should not be considered a ritual deposit as it was not found directly inside the wall or its nogging, or between blocks. It is also hard to explain why we found this piece in Blaundos. The fact that it was found in a Byzantine-period workshop also makes it difficult to establish its original context. Considering the fact that medallions were presented to members of local elites, perhaps it was given to such a person living in Blaundos. This movement of the medallion is most likely explained as the result of some relationship between two nearby cities.

Catalogue

Reign: Marcus Aurelius

Province: Asia, Conventus of Sardis

City: Silandos

Magistrate: Sta. Attalianos (first archon)

Dating: 163–165 CE

Obverse: CEBACTH ΦΑΥΚΤΕΙΝΑ. Draped bust of Faustina II, r.

Reverse: ΕΠΙ CΤΑ ΑΤΤΑΛΙΑΝΟV ΑΡΧΟΝ ΚΙΑΝΔΕΩΝ. Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus standing facing each other, each wearing a toga, clasping their right hands and holding scrolls in their left hands

Metal: AE

Diameter: 45 mm

Weight: 49.36 gm

Inv. no.: BL'19-880.440-16 (Main Street/Byzantine structure)

⁴⁷ Out of these eleven medallions, nine were struck during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, one during the reign of Septimius Severus, and the other during the reign of Severus Alexander. For these issues, see *RPC* IV.2, nos. 1492–93 (Hochard 2020, nos. 2240, 2244); nos. 1495–97 (Hochard 2020, nos. 2248, 2250, 2279); no. 1501; no. 9954 (Hochard, no. 2243); nos. 11553–54 (M. Aurelius); *RPC* VI, no. 4451 (temporary) (S. Alexander); Önder 2014, no. 324 (S. Severus).

Competing interests: The author(s) declare none.

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