

BOOK REVIEW

A REVIEW OF FOUR BOOKS
ABOUT THE COINS OF PALESTINE

by

Dr. Michael Krupp

Since the founding of the State of Israel a number of books, as well as a wealth of articles, have been written about numismatics. An important incentive to this research was the heightened interest in Jewish independence in Palestine during the period of the Second Temple, whose successor the modern State of Israel was considered to be. In the literature under review all authors point to the great significance of numismatics for historical scholarship, especially concerning periods for which written documentation is scarce, such as the Persian period after the Babylonian Exile, and the revolt of Bar Kochba, whose name and title were only known to us from coin inscriptions prior to the happy discovery of original documents in the Judean desert. A scientific study of all new findings with direct reference to the New Testament does not yet exist, but the numismatic research includes many hints which are a great help for the study of the New Testament.

Before reviewing the individual books in more detail, we present a short survey of the history of the ancient coins of Palestine with which all the books under review are dealing, and subsequently we show the distinctive figures of each of them. The material is to be divided into two large categories: a) Jewish coins; and b) coins of the cities of Palestine.

Jewish minting

Independent Jewish minting begins presumably with Alexander Yannay, who minted bilingual coins bearing the inscription "Of King Alexander" in Greek and Hebrew. The motifs are borrowed entirely from Seleucid minting, as is the case with practically all later Hasmonean coins, and include star, anchor, wheel, lily (as the emblem of Jerusalem), palm branch (distinguishing mark of the half-pruta piece) and above all the double cornucopia. Only in the last days of the strife between Antigonos and Herod did purely Jewish symbols make their appearance: the seven-branched candlestick, and the shewbread table from the Temple.

The first coins of Alexander bear a barbaric Hebrew square script, soon replaced by the ancient Hebrew script which subsequently became the only one used for all Hebrew inscriptions on Jewish coins. Except for the first coins of Alexander Yannay, all Hasmonean coins are undated. In a la-

ter phase of Alexander Yannay's minting, both the bilingual inscription and the royal title disappear from his coins, giving way to a new type which became the typical Hasmonean coin and was also in use during the time of Alexander Yannay's successors, Aristoboulos II and Hyrkanos II: within a wreath appears a Hebrew inscription, "Y(eh)onatan (or Yehochanan or Yehuda respectively) High Priest and the community of the Jews". On the reverse there is a double cornucopia. The background to this alteration of the text is presumably Alexander Yannay's dispute with the Pharisees, who were able to force concessions from him. Antigonos, the last of the Hasmoneans, was the first to mint bilingual coins again, on which he gave himself the title of king in Greek but that of High Priest in Hebrew.

With the victory of Herod the Great over Antigonos begin about 130 years of Herodian minting. Herod the Great minted copper coins of various denominations entirely in the Greek language, as did his sons and descendants. In the motifs he holds to the prototypes of Hasmonean minting, such as the anchor and cornucopia; in the use of new motifs he sought to take into consideration the Jewish ban on pictorial representation and not to hurt any religious feelings, so that he produced not portraits but neutral emblems such as the tripod, the censer, the shield, galley and helmet. More questionable is the representation of an eagle, similar to that which he had brought to the Temple court. After his death his kingdom was divided among his sons. Archelaos received Judea and Samaria. His coins show neutral emblems taken from his father's minting, but also consciously Jewish symbols such as vine and grape.

Antipas, well-known from the New Testament, proceeded in a similarly conservative manner when he became tetrarch of the regions of Galilee and Perea. His motifs are palm branch, olive branch and wreath. Philip II, who ruled over the territories with a preponderantly pagan population, was the first to mint coins with the portraits of Roman Caesars (Augustus and Tiberius) and with a representation of the temple of Augustus at Banias on the other side. His grandson, Agrippa I, who succeeded in re-uniting under one ruler the entire kingdom of Herod the Great, had not the slightest hesitation in minting his own portrait, the first portrait of a Jewish ruler preserved to us, and this only on his coins. But, just as in the case of Agrippa I, it is clearly discernible where he was in a position to mint coins bearing portraits and pagan symbols; namely, in areas where there was a predominantly pagan population. In the ancestral land of Judea he minted traditional coins which did not offend Jewish sensibilities; for example, a one pruta piece which shows on the one side three ears of corn (prototype for the modern Israeli one agora coin), and on the other side an umbrella as a sign of his kingship. This coin is today the most frequently found in Israel.

His son, Agrippa II, who became king only over the pagan areas, went so far in his adaptation to Roman prototypes that he did not hesitate in the slightest to mint coins bearing the motifs of the *Judea capta* coins (see below), a clear dissociation from all Jewish endeavours to attain national freedom, which kept him on the throne for fifty years.

With the deposition and banishment of Archelaos in 6 A. D. Judea became a Roman province, administered by Roman procurators. Their coins, however, still belong to the Jewish minting, at least as an appendix, for their motifs consistently show respect for Jewish sensibilities and sometimes take up consciously Jewish symbols, such as palm tree, palm branch, olive branch, vine leaf, amphora and ears of corn. Only Pontius Pilate minted pagan symbols, the lituus and simpulum (augur's staff and cultic ladle).

The ancient Jewish minting reaches its peak at the time of the revolts against Rome. It is not only that the first silver coins appear then: these coins also represent the apogee of technical and artistic perfection; the motifs are purely and entirely Jewish and have in part been independently developed. The silver shekel shows three pomegranates (prototype for the one pound piece of the State of Israel) and a cup. The inscriptions refer to the Temple: "Shekel of Israel" and "Holy Jerusalem". The copper coins bear motifs of palms, baskets of fruit, lulav and ethrog (symbols of the Feast of Tabernacles) and vine leaf; the inscriptions contain dates reckoned according to the years of the war (as do those of the silver shekel) and texts which refer to the war: "For the freedom of Zion", "The fourth year of the salvation of Israel".

After the destruction of the Temple no more Jewish coins were minted in Palestine for over sixty years; the Roman provincial coins which appeared in Caesarea glorify the victory of Rome over Judea with the Greek translation of the *Judea capta* inscription of the imperial coins. They show Niké, the goddess of victory, bringing in Caesar's victory on a shield and resting on a palm, the symbol of Judea; or Judea, mourning, captive and bound, sitting on the ground under a Roman trophy.

The minting of the Bar Kochba revolt represents the conclusion and climax of ancient Jewish minting in Palestine. Almost all coins of this revolt are new impressions on Roman silver and copper coins already in circulation. The inscriptions and motifs express the aspirations of the revolt. The aim is to tolerate no pagan cult in the Temple court in Jerusalem, and to renew the Jewish cult. Thus most of the motifs clearly refer to the Temple, such as the Temple facade, Temple utensils, instruments of Temple music and typical fruits which were brought as offerings. The inscriptions show on one side the authority of the place of issue: "Jerusalem", "Eleazar the priest", or mostly "Shimon prince of Israel", and on the other side the date reckoned according to the years of the war, or the war slogan of the year in question: "Year one of the salvation of Israel", "Year two of the

freedom of Israel”, and “For the liberation of Jerusalem”. With the fall of Betar, the last stronghold of Bar Kochba, came the end of Jewish independence in their own land in antiquity, and with it that of Jewish minting.

Palestinian city coins

The second category of the coins of Palestinian antiquity comprises coins of the various cities of Palestine. This minting is, in the coastal cities, particularly in Gaza, as ancient as any minting in Palestine, and goes back to the fourth century B. C. There was a great boom in local coining at the end of the first and beginning of the second century A. D. when a large number of Palestinian cities received the right to mint currency. In the 130 years of the existence of the Roman colony Aelia Capitolina, which was built on the rubble of Jerusalem, there appeared more than 200 different coins. Similar quantities were produced by cities such as Caesarea, Akko and Shechem. In 268 A. D. an imperial decree put an end to local minting. The coins of the cities give us much information about the political status of the city, its important buildings or the cult practised in it.

Recent Hebrew works on numismatics

After this survey of the theme treated in the four books, the individual reviews can limit themselves to the most important distinguishing features of each. This review deals only with books written in Hebrew. A number of publications have appeared in English, which are mentioned here. The Israel Numismatic Association has since 1956 published the *Corpus Nummorum Palestinensium*, in which the following volumes have appeared to date: Aelia Capitolina (1956), Caesarea Maritima (1957); The Jewish War (1960) and Akko Ptolemais (1961) — all by L. Kadman. Further publications of the Association are a volume by A. Kindler, Tiberias (in Hebrew and English, 1961) and the following collections of articles: “Recent Studies and Discoveries on Ancient Jewish and Syrian Coins” (1954); “The Dating and Meaning of Ancient Jewish Coins and Symbols” (1958); and “Joseph Meyslan — Essays in Jewish Numismatics” (1968). Particularly important for the history of the coins of the Bar Kochba war is the report (in Italian) by the late director of the Franciscans’ collection of coins in Jerusalem: Augusto Spijkerman, *Herodion III, Catalogo delle Monete* (1972).

1. ARIE KINDLER: *THESAURUS OF JUDEAN COINS*. Jerusalem 1958.¹

The book does not seek to be a scientific textbook. It has set itself the aim of dealing with only a small number (46) of coins, representing,

¹ Hebrew title: אוצר מטבעות ארץ ישראל. English title: Thesaurus of Judean coins, from the 4th century B. C. to the 3rd century A. D. 48 pages of Hebrew text, 15 pages of English summary, 63 plates.

however, all basic types of Jewish coins and Roman coins which reflect Jewish history in Palestine, as well as city coins (24). In this the author seeks to let both the historical and the artistic message of the coins be heard. In a 19-page introduction he gives a survey of the history of ancient Jewish coins and of the coins of the cities of Palestine. In an appendix to the illustrations he gives an exact description of each coin illustrated. In the case of the city coins, each city is represented by a particularly characteristic coin. They are arranged geographically: Judea, the southern coast, Samaria, Galilee and Decapolis.

The great value of this book is the intentional limitation of its scope to the basic essentials, which affords the layman a preliminary survey of this field. Particularly beautiful is the way the coins are reproduced. On each page there appears only one side of a coin, highly magnified (13 cm. diameter) in an excellent photograph by the well-known Jerusalem photographer Alfred Bernheim. An English summary makes the book also available to the reader with no knowledge of Hebrew.

*Arie Kindler is director of the only numismatic museum in Israel,
the Kadman Museum in Tel Aviv.*

2. L. KADMAN / A. KINDLER: *THE COINS OF PALESTINE THROUGHOUT THE AGES* – From antiquity till the present day. Introduction to Numismatics. Tel Aviv, 1963.²

This book also makes no claim to be a scientific study. In the words of the author, it is intended for the large number of Israelis who, by chance, on excursions, at work on the land or on building sites, find coins and thus begin to become interested in the history of Palestinian coins. It seeks to be a first introduction into the sphere of Palestinian numismatics and is an indispensable aid to the identification, conservation and arrangement of such coins as are found in Israel every day or can be acquired from occasional dealers. The book consists of five sections.

Section 1 gives an introduction to numismatics in general, paying particular attention to the Near Eastern region. It deals with the significance of numismatics as a scientific aid to history and gives a survey of the monetary system and the main differences between Greek, Persian, Hellenistic and Roman coins.

Section 2 is dedicated entirely to the coins minted in Palestine and gives a survey ranging from the beginning of minting in the Persian period to the coins of the State of Israel. It includes the coins of the Persian province of Jehud, the Jewish coins according to their periods, the Hellenistic

² Hebrew title: **המטבע בישראל ובעמים**. English title: *Coins in Palestine throughout the ages*. 144 pages, 25 plates.

provincial and city coins in Palestine, the Roman city coins, the Nabatean coins, the Byzantine and Arab coins, the coins of the Crusaders in Palestine, the coins of the Mandate period and finally the coins of the State of Israel from 1948 to 1962.

Section 3 deals with the practical part of Palestinian numismatics. It gives advice on the acquisition of coins and the assembly and conservation of collections, describes methods of forging and gives guidance on how to avoid buying forged coins etc.

Section 4 puts at the disposal of the beginner in the sphere of numismatics all the information necessary for the identification of coins found in Palestine. It contains an index of all rulers who could appear on Palestinian coins, in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Arabic and modern languages. It gives all alphabets which appear on Palestinian coins, with the numerical values of the different letters, an index of all abbreviations, with their meanings, a list of all Hebrew inscriptions which occur, with an attempt at their paleographical classification, a list of all Greek, Latin, Nabatean and Arabic inscriptions with explanations. At the end of this section is a detailed lexicon which explains and describes all technical terms, place names and personalities of Palestinian numismatics. In the text of the book the names and expressions explained are marked with an asterisk.

Section 5 consists of 25 plates illustrating all the spheres treated in the book with 480 photographs of coins. A short explanation accompanies the examples.

The book is indispensable for the beginner in Jewish and Palestinian numismatics and gives a short and pithy introduction to all basic aspects of the subject. There is no English summary.

L. Kadman is founder of the Israel Numismatic Association and author of all hitherto published volumes of the Corpus Nummorum Palaestinensum.

3. YA'AQOV MESHORER: *JEWISH COINS OF THE SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD* – Tel Aviv, 1966.³

This is by far the most important book about Jewish numismatics which has appeared since the foundation of the State of Israel. As it has also appeared in English, it no longer belongs strictly within the scope of *Immanuel*, but it is so important that it should at least be mentioned and its most important innovations and findings passed on. The book has in a very short time become a standard work about Jewish numismatics, displacing

³ Hebrew title: *מטבעות היהודים בימי בית שני*. 135 pages, 32 plates. The English edition appeared in Tel Aviv in 1967; 184 pages, 32 plates.

all other works previously in use. Meshorer's book is particularly rich in his own findings and rearrangements, which are not, however, universally accepted. A further great advantage is the description of many new types of coins which have recently been discovered, frequently by the author himself, in the many public and private collections at home and abroad.

To the history of the Hasmonean coins, Meshorer brings absolutely new ideas, which are also the most controversial aspect of his book. He disputes all minting by Hyrkanos I and Aristoboulos I and has the Hasmonean minting begin in the reign of Alexander Yannay. In the case of Herod's coins, Meshorer places the coins bearing the date "Year 3" in the year 37 B. C., that is, the year of the victory over Antigonos; Herod thus seeks to show that he had already been placed on the throne by the Romans in the year 40 B. C. In the case of the coins of Philip II, Meshorer proves that the first dated coins of the year 19-20 A. D. at the same time document the year of the foundation of the city of Tiberias, a historical fact which is only to be established through these coins.

Meshorer points to basic new discoveries in connection with the Bar Kochba war. A find of Roman denarii together with Bar Kochba coins which were hidden during the war and which also contained an Aelia Capitolina coin proves that the foundation of the pagan city Aelia Capitolina was the cause of the Bar Kochba war and not, as was hitherto usually assumed, one of its consequences.

Excellent reproductions of 246 coins from collections in Israel and abroad on 32 plates in the book conclude this volume, which is indispensable for every lover of Jewish coins. An exact explanation of all examples is appended. In the English edition an index has been added.

Ya'aqov Meshorer is senior lecturer in Jewish numismatics at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and adviser to the Israel Museum and to numerous other collections.

4. ARIE KINDLER: *THE COINS OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL* - Catalogue of the Bank of Israel collection. Jerusalem, 1971.⁴

David Horowitz, representative of the Bank of Israel, has written a foreword in which he explains the reasons for beginning the collection and the function of this catalogue. As did many other national banks, the Bank of Israel also decided to begin a collection of coins, the function of which should be to acquire the Jewish coins of antiquity in the consciousness that the minting of the State of Israel is directly descended from that of the

⁴ Hebrew title: *מטבעות ארץ ישראל. אוסף בנק ישראל. קטלוג*. 140 pages, with 414 reproductions in the actual size and numerous enlargements.

ancient, independent Israel. Even the symbols of the Israeli coins are taken from those of the ancient Jewish minting. As the collection is almost complete in the sphere of Jewish coins, this catalogue can also be regarded as a textbook in this field.

In the introduction, the author describes his task as follows: to arrange the collection before him in chronological order, particularly in the section most strongly represented in the collection, namely that of the Bar Kochba coins. The collection contains examples from all fields of ancient Jewish numismatics, and in addition a collection of *Judea capta* coins which were minted outside Palestine, and a representative collection of coins of the cities which does not, however, include all cities which minted coins and which shows only one example from each city. The book itself does not seek to be a scientific textbook: it is intended for a wide range of readers. As the numismatic section is kept short, reference is made to the other standard works of Hill (British Museum 1914), Narkis (Hebrew 1936), Reifenberg (English and Hebrew 1940) and Meshorer (English and Hebrew 1966, reviewed above).

Every section of Jewish coins is provided with an introduction, which presents the historical situation and the numismatic problems of the time. This is followed by the coins of the collection, which are illustrated full size on the margin of the page with a full description beside the illustration. It is no wonder if certain rare coins are lacking in this collection, but it is inexcusable when some of the most common coins are missing, such as coins nos. 13, 14 and 218 of the Meshorer catalogue. On the other hand, the condition of some of the most common coins represented is so bad that it is not worth reproducing them. The duplication of certain coins is all the more disturbing in that the commentary on the examples is word for word identical. The readings are sometimes incorrect; there is also a series of inexactitudes or printing errors in the book.

The minting of the Hasmonean's begins, in Kindler's opinion, in the reign of Hyrkanos I, to whom he attributes one of the Yehochanan coins with an inscription in ancient Hebrew of a particularly ancient appearance (Meshorer 26). He thinks that the Hasmoneans began minting in 110 B. C., according to a guess of Baruch Kanael.⁵ As all the coins but one are undated, the author has to decide on a chronological sequence according to paleography.

The show-piece of the collection, and also of the description in the catalogue and chronological arrangement by the author, is the collection of coins of the Bar Kochba war. These coins not only show a rich variety of denominations, owing to the fact that Bar Kochba over-stamped current coins,

⁵ Ancient Jewish Coins and their Historical Importance. In: *The Biblical Archaeologist*, 1963.

but also in the short space of three years that the revolt lasted they show an abundance of different stamps rivalled by no other epoch of Jewish minting. By means of an arrangement of these stamps, divided according to groups of denominations, and by means of the presentation of all the combinations which appear, Kindler succeeds in dating the individual coins to the nearest three or six months.

He uses a group of medium-sized bronze coins to illustrate how a motif which has appeared on the front of the coin can reach the back by the end of its development. He proves that the inscription, "For the liberation of Jerusalem" belongs in the third year of the Bar Kochba revolt.

The catalogue following this detailed research contains, apart from some superfluous doublets, numerous coins which would appear to be doublets, because they are represented only once in all other works, including Meshorer. But all the others have overlooked the fact that these coins show variations in the forms of the letters which, as Kindler has impressively shown, are to be assigned to the various epochs of the Bar Kochba minting.

After the imperial coins and the provincial coins minted outside Palestine with the theme *Judea capta*, which appear in a great variety of motifs, the collection also contains three coins of Hadrian, which depict the goddess of victory and probably refer to the victory over Judea. The first two could have been minted before the Bar Kochba revolt, the last one after it.

The last section of the book consists of the coins of the cities, one per page, with one example each from Aelia Capitolina, Ashkelon, Dor, Neapolis, Nisa-Skythopolis, Gaza, Baniyas, Zipori, Caesarea (two pages) and Rafiah. This section must be mentioned as particularly successful, as it deals with the most important cities and contains well preserved and typical examples; the introduction gives a short history of the minting of the city with the main epochs of the minting, beginning and end, dating of the coins, and the main motifs.

As this book serves mainly local interests, it is not likely that a translation into a foreign language will be considered. But, at least for the part of the collection which describes and arranges the Bar Kochba coins, this would be most desirable.

Described by Michael Krupp