

# Israel Exploration Journal

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VOLUME 16

NUMBER 4

1966

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## A New Type of YHD Coin

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A SMALL silver coin has recently been put on display in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Its description is as follows (Pl. 25A-B):

*Obverse:* a bird with outspread wings, head facing right and tail spread. The inscription YHD (in the ancient Hebrew script) appears on the upper right.

*Reverse:* a lily. Diam. 8.5 mm; weight 0.3502 gr.<sup>1</sup>

### THE LEGEND

*Yebud* was the current name of the province of Judah during the fifth and fourth centuries B. C.; it is to be assumed, therefore, that this coin was struck in this period, apparently in Jerusalem. It belongs to a class of small coins bearing the YHD inscription, which in their patterns are similar to the coins of Athens. Though the evidence is not conclusive, we are inclined to be of the opinion that the coins were struck by the autonomous authority of the province. For if the Persian authorities had commissioned the coinage, they could have afforded to produce larger denominations; however, only small coins of this type have been found so far, except for one which does not belong to this group, its legend being in Aramaic.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The coin has kindly been lent by Mr. H. Bessin of Ottawa, Canada, to the Israel Museum. The author is grateful for this opportunity to bring it to public notice.

<sup>2</sup> G. Hill: *British Museum Catalogue of Greek Coins, Palestine*, London, 1914, Pl. XIX, 29.

## THE LILY

In relating the present coin to others of its kind, we discern a remarkable epigraphical similarity to those bearing an owl, as well as a similarity in weight. In other words its denomination is identical with that of other YHD coins, the difference being in the design. The three-leaf flower is similar to the tiny plant left of the owl in the ordinary YHD coins. In both instances, we believe the flower to represent a lily.<sup>3</sup> The present is not the place to deal with the historic importance of this flower. There is no doubt, in any case, that the lily has a special significance within the context of Hebrew culture and of ancient Israel. Professor J. Feliks in his *Plant World of the Bible* cites many passages from Jewish and other sources underlining the importance of the lilies of this country in olden times (pp. 234-238). The flower was also an important source of perfume, which was certainly used for sacred purposes.

Professor Feliks also cites many Mishnaic and Talmudic references to the *shoshan* or *shoshana* which was not only abundant, but famous for its fragrance and beauty. Though not found in profusion in Israel today, we may assume that it was once common in all parts of the country.

There is another point which is relevant. In his volumes on *Greek Coin Types*<sup>4</sup> L. Anson gives only two examples of coins bearing lily designs, both struck, according to him, in Jerusalem. The first, of Antiochus VII, was most probably minted in this city; and this was certainly the case with the coin of Alexander Jannaeus. Other specimens also emanate from Jerusalem: another coin of Jannaeus,<sup>5</sup> one of John Hyrcanus II,<sup>6</sup> and an additional Seleucid coin, dating, apparently, to the reign of Antiochus VIII.<sup>7</sup> A coin bearing the shape of three lilies was struck in Jerusalem or Caesarea by the Roman procurator Valerius Gratus in 17/18 A. D.<sup>8</sup> The lily appears, as mentioned above, on the YHD coins already known. There it does not, however, stand out because of its tiny size (Pl. 25C). The flower left of the owl on the YHD coins, parallels the olive branch to the left of the owl on the coins of Athens. Similarly the legend YHD replaces the AΘE on the drachmas.

<sup>3</sup> Most botanists consulted by the author are inclined to regard this species as the *lilium candidum*. See J. Feliks: *Plant World of the Bible*, Tel Aviv, 1957, p. 235 (Hebrew).

<sup>4</sup> L. Anson: *Greek Coin Types* III, London, 1912, Table 25, Nos. 1406/7.

<sup>5</sup> A. Reifenberg: *Coins of the Jews*, Jerusalem, 1948, No. 17.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 12 (wrongly attributed to Hyrcanus I).

<sup>7</sup> M. E. Babelon: *Rois de Syrie*, Paris, 1890, Pl. XXXV, No. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Reifenberg, *op. cit.* (above, n. 5), No. 125.

## THE FALCON

The bird with outspread wings on the obverse of the coin has been identified by ornithologists as the *falco sacer*, the hunting falcon. In ancient times all species of the falcons were highly regarded. The Egyptians held it in great esteem, and embalmed falcons are common in Egyptian graves. However, the symbolic significance of the bird on our coin is not clear, nor does the ancient belief in its magic powers offer any clue. A bird of similar type stands on the hand of the god in his chariot on the imperial Persian coin struck in the province of Judah.<sup>9</sup> Although the diminutive size of the bird has prevented any final and definitive opinion, this representation has up to the present been described as a falcon.<sup>10</sup> The heraldic form of the falcon is copied from contemporary coins of Asia Minor, which depict other birds, e. g. eagles, in a similar fashion.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 3.

<sup>10</sup> M. Narkis: *Coins of the Jews*, Jerusalem, 1939, p. 86 (Hebrew).



A: Obverse.



B: Reverse.



C: Coin showing lily behind owl.

NEW YHD COIN