

A Ring from Gadara

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A SILVER ring, acquired some ten years ago in Jerusalem,¹ is said to originate from Umm Qeis near the Yarmuq River in Transjordan. This site is identified with ancient Gadara, one of the largest cities of the Decapolis. The ring is composed of two elements. The ring itself, 26 mm. in diameter, octagonal in outline and rounded inside, widens towards the central bezel; the edges are decorated with broad and narrow incisions. The second element is a thin coin-shaped silver disk, 11 mm. in diameter, fitting precisely within the bezel. This disk revolves on two pivots, one broken off, a device which enabled the wearer to display either side at will (Pl. 25:C).

The significance of this ring lies in the designs appearing on either side of the disk. Both designs are incised in intaglio, thus making the disk a seal which could create relief impressions on soft materials such as clay or wax. One face shows a tetrastyle temple with a triangular pediment; within, Zeus is seated on a throne to the left, holding a sceptre in one hand and apparently a small figure of Nike in the other (Pl. 25:D). The identification as a Nike is assumed, since due to its miniscule size, it cannot be precisely distinguished (see below). The second face depicts another tetrastyle temple, whose Syrian pediment has a central arch; the Three Graces appear within, while two tiny altars flank the temple (Pl. 25:E). The configuration of Three Graces *within a temple* is not found on the coins of Gadara, but the grouping without a temple is popular there. On the other hand, a temple in this style is known from other Gadarene coins, but with different deities. This may point to the possibility of the existence of a coin with the specific configuration appearing on our ring.

Even if the provenance were unknown, we would tend to associate this ring with Gadara due to the fact that its two designs resemble motifs on coins of this city. An identical Zeus, seated on a throne within a tetrastyle temple, is one of the most popular designs on Gadarene coins of the times of the Roman Emperors Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Lucius Verus, Commodus, Caracalla, Elagabalus and Gordianus III, 160–240 C.E.² Zeus is invariably represented in this fashion on Gadarene coins, holding a sceptre and a small Nike (Pl. 25:F, a coin of Caracalla).

As noted above, the second face shows the Three Graces within a temple of a different style. The only city in the entire region to depict the Three Graces on its coins

¹ The ring is in a private collection in Jerusalem, and is published here with the kind permission of the owner.

² M. Rosenberger: *The Coinage of Eastern Palestine*, Jerusalem, 1978, pp. 41–49; Y. Meshorer: *A Hoard of Coins from Migdal, 'Atiqot 11* (English series) (1976), p.63, Nos. 85–88.

is Gadara. This design is popular on Gadarene coins from the times of Elagabalus and Gordian, 218-240 C.E. (Pl. 25:G, a coin of Elagabalus). It even served as the mint mark of the city on the Roman provincial silver tetrachms struck at Gadara under Caracalla and Macrinus, 215-218 C.E.³ (Pl. 25:H, a tetrachm of Caracalla with the Three Graces in a wreath between the eagle's legs).

Gadara must have been the centre of the cult of the Three Graces, which was particularly popular there during the third century C.E. The cult is widely known in Asia Minor at this period, whereas in our region, its appearance is unique. This interesting ring apparently belonged to a citizen of Gadara, who lived there during the first half of the third century C.E.

³ A.R. Bellinger: *The Syrian Tetrachms of Caracalla and Macrinus (Numismatic Studies 3)*, New York, 1940, pp. 90-91.



A

B

COIN OF JEROBOAM?

A-B: Actual size and enlargments. A, obverse; B, reverse.



C: Gadara ring; disk revolving on two pivots.



D: First disk face and impression.

E: Second disk face and impression.



F. Coin of Caracalla.



G. Coin of Elagabalus.



H: Tetrachm of Caracalla.

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