

The Yehud Coinage
A Study and Die Classification
of the Provincial Silver
Coinage of Judah

Haim Gitler

Catharine Lorber

Jean-Philippe Fontanille



Numismatic Studies and Researches XII
The Israel Numismatic Society

Haim Gitler, born in Mexico, received his PhD in numismatics from Nicolaus Copernicus University, Torun, in 2011. He has worked in the Israel Museum since 1987 where he is currently the Tamar and Teddy Kollek Chief Curator of Archaeology (since 2013), as well as Curator of Numismatics (since 1994). Gitler taught numismatics at the Rehovot campus of the Hebrew University (1996–1998) and at Tel Aviv University (2010–2014). He is the President of the Israel Numismatic Society, and in 2006 he founded the journal *Israel Numismatic Research*. His most significant previous contributions are *The Coinage of Philistia of the Fifth and Fourth Centuries BC* and *The Nablus 1968 Hoard: A Study of Monetary Circulation in the Late Fourth and Early Third Centuries BCE* in collaboration with Oren Tal; *The Silver Coinage of Septimius Severus and His Family 193–211 AD* with Matthew Ponting; *Faces of Power: Roman Gold Coins from the Victor A. Adda Collection*, edited with Gil Gambash; and *White Gold: Studies in Early Electrum Coinage*, edited by Peter van Alfen and Ute Wartenberg.

Catharine Lorber, born in Berkeley, California, holds a BA in Classical Greek from UCLA. She spent nearly 40 years as a cataloguer in commercial numismatics, from the early 1970s until her retirement in 2009. As an independent researcher she specialized in the publication of coin hoards as well as studies pertaining to North Greek, Thessalian, Judean, Seleucid, and Ptolemaic coinages. Since 2000 she has published more than 80 papers and book chapters treating these and related topics. Her most important previous contributions are in the Seleucid field, in collaboration with Arthur Houghton: *Seleucid Coins: A Comprehensive Catalogue* (Part I, 2002; Part II, 2008, with Oliver Hoover as a third coauthor) and the *Ptolemaic Coinage: Coins of the Ptolemaic Empire* (Part I, 2018; Part II, 2023). Her book credits also include *Amphipolis: The Civic Coinage in Silver and Gold* (1990).

Jean-Philippe Fontanille, born in France, worked in Paris as a composer and a professional guitarist specializing in rock, blues, and jazz for almost 20 years. Some of his compositions can be heard as a musical background in his videos dedicated to numismatics (see the channel Fontanille Coins on YouTube). Fontanille is an independent numismatist known for his research on Judean/Biblical coins. He is coauthor of the books *The Coins of Herod* with Donald T. Ariel, *The Coinage of Herod Antipas* with Aaron Kogon, and *The Coins of Pontius Pilate* with Sheldon L. Gosline. His numerous works and articles have been published in English, French, and German in various magazines and numismatic reviews in the United States, Canada, France, Israel, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, and New Zealand. Jean-Philippe is also the creator of the website *Menorah Coin Project* (<http://www.ins.org.il/52/Menorah-Coin-Project>), which is dedicated to the die classification of more than 13,000 coins and is now part of the Israel Numismatic Society's website.

This volume presents a die study of the provincial silver coinage of Judah in the late Persian, Macedonian, and early Hellenistic periods. Our primary goal is to share the intimate knowledge we gained of this coinage: the correct descriptions of the coins and their designs and inscriptions; the number of obverse and reverse dies identified for each of the 44 recorded types; and the probable sequence of the issues as deduced from iconographic associations and die links.

Our monograph offers our analysis of the data. Besides exploring various physical aspects of the coinage, we attempt to place the coinage in its historical context and to define its role in the economy of the ancient province of Judah.

The Yehud Coinage
A Study and Die Classification
of the Provincial Silver
Coinage of Judah

Haim Gitler

Catharine Lorber

Jean-Philippe Fontanille



JERUSALEM · 2023

Numismatic Studies and Researches Volume XII
Published by the Israel Numismatic Society

The Yehud Coinage
A Study and Die Classification of the Provincial Silver Coinage of Judah
Haim Gitler, Catharine Lorber, and Jean-Philippe Fontanille

This book was made possible by:

David and Vered Aaron
Richard and Kim Beleson Philanthropic Fund
George Blumenthal
Alfredo Brener and family
David Hendin
David and Jemima Jeselsohn
Jeselsohn Epigraphic Center for Jewish History
Álvaro Saieh
Neil Schechter
Abraham D. Sofaer through the Koret Foundation

Book design: Ronit Gitler-Kamil
Text editor: Susan Holzman
Printed by A.R. Printing Ltd., Tel Aviv
Image processing: Alexscan, Tel Aviv

ISBN: 978-965-598-229-9
© The authors and The Israel Numismatic Society, Jerusalem 2023
All rights reserved

Website: www.ins.org.il

Jacket photo:
From top to bottom: Type 7 O1/R1 and Type 17 O1/R1, David and Jemima Jeselsohn collection;
Type 14 O1/R2, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

TABLE OF CONTENTS

VII	Preface
1	Introduction
7	I. Historical Background
21	II. Methodology and Classification
41	III. Metrology
56	with contribution by David L. Weisburd and Haim Gitler
75	IV. Hoards
100	V. Chronology
125	VI. Iconography
189	VII. Palaeography of the Yehud Coinage
	André Lemaire
201	VIII. Artistic and Technical Observations
275	IX. Archaeological Provenances and Circulation of the Yehud Coins
305	with contribution by Yoav Farhi
307	X. The Yehud Coinage: An Essay on Quantification
	François de Callatay

335	XI. The Yehud Mint
347	XII. The Economic Role of the Yehud Coinage
359	Connection Tables 1–81, Types 1–44
443	Catalogue of the 44 Yehud Types
455	Concordance Table <i>TJC</i> and the Updated Corpus of the Coinage of Judah
457	Appendix 1 Non-destructive metallurgical characterization of Types 2 and 3 Yehud rb' <i>sheqels</i> (drachms) from the Israel Museum collection Dana Ashkenazi and Haim Gitler
475	Appendix 2 Source Data for the 1960 Yehud Coins in the Current Study
479	Abbreviations
481	Bibliography
513	General Index
518	Index of Numismatic Topics
527	Iconographic Index
530	Index of Toponyms Cited for Finds of Coins, Inscriptions, and Artistic Comparanda
532	Index of Modern Scholars

PREFACE

This volume presents a die study of the provincial silver coinage of Judah, undertaken and completed by Jean-Philippe Fontanille, with commentary by Haim Gitler and Catharine Lorber. Our primary goal is to share the intimate knowledge we gained of this coinage: correct descriptions of the coins and their designs and inscriptions; the number of obverse and reverse dies identified for each issue; and the probable sequence of the issues (here termed “types”) as deduced from iconographic associations and die links.

The die study was published in preliminary visual form on the website *Menorah Coin Project*, created by Fontanille, and now maintained by the Israel Numismatic Society.¹ The *Menorah Coin Project* presents the underlying data of the die study, i.e., the coins examined by Fontanille, including a few that could be classified by type, but whose dies could not be identified.² All the dies are illustrated in the connection tables at the back of this volume, sometimes using composite images created by Fontanille, and the examples of each die combination are listed on the connection tables. These connection tables illustrate an updated version of the *Menorah Coin Project* die-link study. The most recent and reliable figures for each Yehud coin type are those presented in Chapter VIII, which include specimens added to the corpus in the final stages of our work.

Our monograph offers our analysis of the data. Besides exploring various physical aspects of the coinage, we attempt to place the coinage in its historical context and to define its role in the economy of ancient Judah.

In the Introduction we review the fascinating history of scholarship of Yehud coins. For more than a century only a single coin was known, a drachm in the British Museum depicting a deity identified by some scholars as the god of the Hebrews. It was classified as a Philisto-Arabian coin until the 1930s when Yehud *minimae* began to be discovered and published, allowing for a comparison of the legends and a proposed reattribution of the British Museum drachm to Judah.

1 <http://www.ins.org.il/52/Menorah-Coin-Project>

2 The coins whose dies could not be identified are not included on the connection tables and thus the total number of examples for each coin type listed in these tables is sometimes lower than the recorded specimens in the *Menorah Coin Project*.

Chapter I surveys the geopolitical history of the Near East from the late fifth century BCE through the early Ptolemaic period, a time span which encompasses the Yehud coinage. The purpose of the chapter is to establish the context in which the provincial administration of Judah functioned and to note events which may have had some connection with the coinage.

With Chapter II we shift our focus to the die study and its results. The minute size of most Yehud coins and the tendency of the mint to use damaged or eroded dies required the development of special techniques to identify and illustrate the dies. These techniques are described at the beginning of the chapter. It continues with a classification of the 44 types of the Yehud coinage. It is largely identical to the classification of the *Menorah Coin Project*, but includes some changes necessitated by discoveries made in the final stages of our work. We explain the rationale behind the sequence of issues and introduce one of our major conclusions, that the Yehud series began with several issues of drachms with Aramaic legends (Types 1–3) which were not minted in Judah proper, but by a Philistian mint executing a commission from the provincial administration of Judah. The next drachm issue (Type 4) has a Paleo-Hebrew legend and we believe it to be the first Yehud coin struck in Judah. The opening of a mint in Judah resulted almost immediately in a specialization in tiny coins more suitable for the agrarian economy of the province. Thereafter the Yehud mint produced only very small denominations.

Chapter III attempts to define the weight standard and denomination of each of the Yehud types. The metrology proved to be more complicated than assumed in earlier literature. The earliest drachms were struck on the Phoenician standard. The earliest of the *minimae* conformed to a standard which resembles the Persic standard, but which we suspect was an indigenous Judahite standard with roots in the Iron Age. The Attic standard was adopted temporarily during the Persian period and again permanently after the Macedonian conquest. Through a combination of changes of weight standard and changes of denomination, the weights of the coins generally declined over time. A statistical overview by David L. Weisburd provides scientific confirmation of our impression of weight decline over time.

Chapter IV reviews the nine known hoards in which Yehud coins have been found. Most of the hoards contain only a few Yehud coin types and appear to have been formed over relatively short periods of time. Their overlapping contents are consistent with the sequence of issues proposed for the Yehud coinage.

In Chapter V we address the chronology of the coinage and establish a number of fixed points. We believe the main series of Yehud coins—the small denominations struck in Judah proper—commenced around the middle of the fourth century BCE. In the latter half of the chapter we attempt to relate specific coin varieties to historical events known from ancient literary sources. For interludes when literary sources are lacking, the coinage itself, as a primary source, suggests historical interpretations. A most significant development is the temporary replacement of Paleo-Hebrew legends with blundered Greek or Greek-like letters. Some of the dies bear an abbreviated form of the royal title *basileus* (king). We infer that in or

after 306 the Antigonid kings, who then controlled the southern Levant, interfered in or abolished the provincial administration of Judah and sought to impose direct royal control. The next group of issues restores Paleo-Hebrew legends and features designs related to Judahite cult and identity. We hypothesize that Antigonid entanglements abroad allowed for a reconstitution of the provincial administration of Judah, perhaps with aspirations to greater autonomy.

Chapter VI offers an analysis of the coin designs. The British Museum drachm, with its possible depiction of the Hebrew deity, has inspired a vast literature with many varied interpretations. A large part of Chapter VI is devoted to the controversial iconography of the British Museum drachm, and also to the facing female bust of Type 2, which may represent a female consort of Yahweh, or else a pagan goddess, either of which would seem problematic on an official coin issue of Judah in the fourth century BCE. Otherwise the designs of the Yehud coinage do not require extensive discussion. Arguably the most historically significant is a beardless male head of Greek style, which we believe to be the first numismatic representation of Alexander the Great.

In Chapter VII André Lemaire provides authoritative commentary on the Aramaic and Paleo-Hebrew palaeography of the coin inscriptions. His observations on Aramaic letter forms were decisive in establishing the relative chronology of the earliest Yehud drachms (Types 1–3).

Chapter VIII homes in on the results of the die study, while also updating them. The individual Yehud coin types are passed in review, with die counts and discussion of the quality of the dies, any peculiarities of the strike, and die links to other Yehud coin types. For each Yehud coin type, images of the specimens illustrated on the *Menorah Coin Project* are appended, along with any additional specimens that came to our attention after closure of the die study, and the new total of specimens is recorded.

The circulation of the Yehud coinage is addressed in Chapter IX. We list 60 Yehud coins from controlled archaeological excavations and their distribution shows that they circulated only within the boundaries of Judah. The evidence presently available points to concentrations in the western Keilah district and around Jerusalem, but scarcely any Yehud coinage from Ramat Raḥel—a pattern that differs from the distribution of amphora handles stamped by the provincial administration of Judah. The distribution of coins may, however, be biased by inconsistent use of metal detectors and sifting, as described in Yoav Farhi’s appendix to this chapter. In order to complete the monetary landscape of Judah in the Persian period, we also treat archaeologically provenanced coins of other Palestinian mints, mainly Philistian coins.

In Chapter X François de Callataÿ compares the Yehud die study with many hundreds of other published die studies of Greek coinages, showing where it ranks according to various criteria. He draws attention to the peculiarities of the Yehud coinage as they emerge through this comparison, especially the

concentration on small denominations but also other features of the sample with implications for the use of statistics in numismatics. Callataÿ estimates both the volume of the coinage and its aggregate value in order to establish parameters for considering its function. Unsurprisingly, the volume and value of the Yehud coinage were inadequate for military finance in the traditional sense of fielding an army and we suggest that its purpose may have been for the pay of employees of the provincial administration of Judah.

Chapter XI considers questions related to the mint of the Yehud coinage. Although archaeological evidence of several kinds points to Ramat Raḥel as the seat of the provincial administration, at least in the Persian period, nothing suggests that the Yehud mint was located there. Jerusalem seems a more plausible location, but few Yehud coins of the Macedonian or Ptolemaic periods support the assumption, and this suggests that the circulation pattern may reflect the function of the coinage rather than its point of origin. As for the operation of the mint, we hypothesize that in the first decades of its activity the best dies were obtained from sources outside Judah, then imitated locally. The silver content of the Yehud coinage matches the highest degree of purity attainable by the refining methods of the time, and we believe the Yehud mint melted existing Greek coinage as a source of bullion. Other aspects of coin production were probably also managed on site: the casting of silver rods, the slicing of planchets from these rods, and the striking of the coins.

Chapter XII attempts to assess the economic role of the Yehud coinage. It begins by emphasizing one of the oddities of the Yehud coinage, the fact that only one denomination was minted at any given time (with extremely limited exceptions). In line with the common assumption of numismatists that ancient polities normally struck coinage for the purpose of making state payments, we propose that the Yehud coinage served as the daily pay of the least well remunerated employees of the provincial administration of Judah. Comparison with rate of pay in Ptolemaic Egypt suggests that these employees could have been low-level military men, i.e., guards and perhaps police. An estimate of annual pay compared to Callataÿ's estimate of total production points to a small payroll of only 50 to 100 employees, but other forms of remuneration, for example food allowances, allow for the possibility of somewhat greater numbers of employees. The low pay of a small number of employees of the provincial administration seems unlikely to have played an important role in the monetized sector of Judah's economy, especially when we take account of other kinds of coinage in circulation (imported Greek and Phoenician coins, coinages of other Palestinian mints, and eventually the royal currencies of Alexander and of the Ptolemies). A comparison of the values of several different samples suggests that imported and royal coinages accounted for most of the value of money in circulation.

We are proud and grateful that five colleagues with special expertise agreed to contribute sections or chapters to our book. In addition to the contributions mentioned above, by David L. Weisburd, André Lemaire, Yoav Farhi, and François de Callataÿ, Dana Ashkenazi contributed an appendix explaining the

process by which silver was refined in antiquity and the reasons why alloys were sometimes debased. Against this background she reports her observations from non-destructive metallurgical analyses of two of the earliest Yehud coins (our Types 2 and 3) and of a *rb' sheqel* (drachm) of Ashdod.

The RTI (Reflectance Transformation Imaging) digital images which enable us to propose the reading of the graffiti in two specimens of the Edom 2020 hoard were taken and processed by Michael Maggen. The multi-focal digital light microscope (LM) (HIROX RH-2000) with high intensity LED lighting images were photographed by Maayan Cohen.

We are also indebted to Donald T. Ariel for reviewing our manuscript and offering his comments and to the series Editorial Board. Susan Holzman provided eloquent editing which improved the lucidity of the text, Slava Pirsky prepared the specialized distribution maps in Chapter IX, and Mati Johananoff reviewed the page proofs of our book and suggested needed corrections. Ronit Gitler-Kamil skillfully mastered the pagination of the text and elegantly designed the book overcoming the difficult challenge of integrating very numerous figures and tables with our text. To our many last-minute additions and corrections she responded with patience and creativity.

We are very grateful to all our collaborators.

We hope this book will give rise to much discussion and debate within numismatic circles. This is all for the best, as in the words of the Book of Proverbs (27:17), “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the wit of his friends.”

Haim Gitler

Catharine Lorber

Jean-Philippe Fontanille