

## Foreword

From the time they were introduced some 2,600 years ago, coins have been an integral part of daily life. Before their appearance, people weighed out metal on scales in order to pay for goods; and then, with the introduction of coins, standardized pieces of metal of fixed denominations and weights replaced this earlier practice. This innovation first appeared in western Asia Minor, in the ancient kingdom of Lydia, toward the end of the seventh century BCE and it was then rapidly adopted throughout the Greek world.

The inhabitants of the ancient land of Israel began using coins in the mid-fifth century BCE. At that time, the Near East was under Persian (Achaemenid) rule, which lasted two centuries, from 538 until 332 BCE. This was a crucial period in the history of the region, which belonged to the southern part of the Fifth Persian Satrapy and was called "Beyond the River" (*'Abar Naharâ*). The period itself witnessed a profound transformation in the economic, political, and cultural life of the region's inhabitants, and the people of Philistia on the southern coast of Israel were the first in the region to use coins, beginning with foreign coinage and then local issues.

Though small in size, coins are hugely important historical documents, providing direct, tangible evidence of events and individuals otherwise known only from ancient literary sources or not known at all. Deciphering the language of coins enables us to retrace the development of cities and states and uncover the aims and aspirations of rulers. And their designs and inscriptions provide a wealth of information about the societies that minted coins and the people who used them.

*Münze und Macht im antiken Israel* at the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, focuses mainly of Jewish coins minted in ancient Israel from *circa* 400 BCE until 135 CE, namely from the Second Temple Period and until the end of the Bar Kokhba War. The Israel Museum holds the world's largest and finest collection of these coins, and we are proud to share them with our colleagues and their visitors in Vienna during this our Museum's Fiftieth Anniversary year.

The coins in this display were in use during such momentous times as the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity; the wars of the Maccabees (Hasmoneans) with the Seleucid Syrian kings; the building, expansion, and eventual destruction of the Jerusalem Temple; the birth and ascent of Christianity; and the emergence of Rabbinic Judaism.

While Greeks and Romans glorified their gods and their rulers by depicting them on their coins, Jews in ancient Israel shunned graven images and developed a language of symbols unique to their region. Among the coins on view are those of the brave Maccabees and of Herod the Great, master builder and king of ancient Israel at the time when Jesus was born. There are also coins minted under Pontius Pilate, Roman governor of Palestine, who sentenced Jesus to death, as well as those struck under Herod Antipas, one of Herod's sons, who ruled the Galilee and adjacent lands from 4 BCE until 34 CE and was referred to by Jesus as "that fox" (Luke 13:32).

Coins of the Jewish War (66-70/73 CE) and of the Bar Kokhba War (132 - 135 CE) are especially moving, since they were created by free and independent Jewish governments under siege by Rome.

Thus, more than any of the other coins on display, they are purely Jewish, and the slogans appearing on them reflect nothing less than the earliest slogans of Zionism, such as “Jerusalem the Holy,” “for the freedom of Zion,” “for the redemption of Zion,” “for the redemption of Israel,” and “for the freedom of Jerusalem.”

Roman provincial coins struck at such local cities as Caesarea Maritima and Aelia Capitolina (the name given by the Emperor Hadrian to Jerusalem) reveal the increasing Roman influence on the land in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE. These coins also often reflect realistic features of these cities – their gates, walls, public places, buildings, and municipal organization, as well as religious beliefs and even forms of entertainment and intellectual pursuit.

The coins of the ancient land of Israel are something to enjoy in a leisurely way, as a fascinating avocation, or as a lifelong profession. As coin collector and our Museum’s friend David Hendin has noted about the coins of this region, “Each coin has been protected by the parched climate for some 2,000 years and then brought to light and given new life, not as a coin of the realm, but as a key to the mind. The doors this key can open are limited only by your imagination.” And the stories that these small objects, created for the most mundane of economic uses, can offer a wondrous glimpse into the rich history of a time that could not have more meaning for modern Western civilization.

We are grateful to Sabine Haag, Michael Alram and Klaus Vondrovec of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, for providing us with the opportunity to share these precious coins with their Museum’s public. We are also indebted to Anne Lykke, and the Department for Numismatic Studies as well as to the Department of Geography and Regional Research at Vienna University for their valuable input. Finally I would like to thank Haim Gitler, Chief Curator of Archaeology and Curator of Numismatics at the Israel Museum, and Yaniv Schauer, Associate Curator of Numismatics, for their central contributions to this fine presentation.

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