ISRAEL NUMISMATIC JOURNAL



 $\frac{17}{2009-10}$

STUDIES IN HONOUR OF ARNOLD SPAER

Edited by: DAN BARAG AND BOAZ ZISSU



THE ISRAEL NUMISMATIC JOURNAL VOL. 17 JERUSALEM 2010

ISRAEL NUMISMATIC JOURNAL FOUNDED BY L. KADMAN

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The publication of this issue was made possible by the generous contribution of the Leo Mildenberg Memorial Bequest.

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ISSN 1565-4079

Distributed by Israel Exploration Society, P.O.B. 7041, Jerusalem 91070, Israel.

Page layout by Avraham Pladot Typesetting by Marzel A.S. — Jerusalem Printed by Old City Press, Jerusalem, Israel

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VOLUME 17

2009-10

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Bar Kokhba Coins from Herodium (Hebrew University Expedition)

ROI PORAT, EHUD NETZER, YAAKOV KALMAN, AND RACHEL CHACHY

HERODIUM, King Herod's palace-fortress, served as one of the headquarters of the Bar Kokhba administration during the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome (132–136 CE), even though it was already partly in ruins by then. Herodium was used not only as a fortress, but apparently also as a base for guerrilla fighting against the Roman units in the surrounding area. We know this not only from the accumulated archaeological data, but also from documents discovered in the Wadi Murabba^cat caves, which served as a retreat for refugees from Herodium and adjacent Judean villages at the end of the revolt. These documents mention the camp at Herodium (מתנה שיושב בהרדיס) and its commander Yeshua son of Galgula.¹

In excavations conducted at the palace-fortress by Father Virgilio Corbo (1962–1967), 837 coins restruck by the Bar Kokhba administration were discovered. Among these was a large hoard of 822 bronze coins, uncovered in the corner of Room 30 (Plan 1). This room was built by the rebels near the southern exedra of the palace courtyard.² The other fifteen coins were found in other parts of the palace-fortress, which also contained additional evidence of activity during the Bar Kokhba Revolt. These coins represent nearly all the types of bronze coins minted during the three years of the Bar Kokhba Revolt (except the large coins featuring an amphora).³ Based on the numismatic evidence, the Bar Kokhba administration may have operated a mint at Herodium.⁴

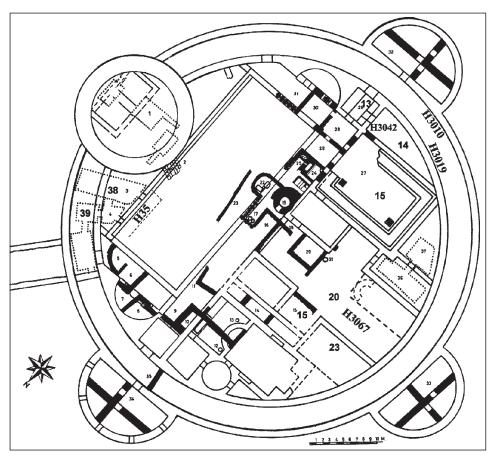
Corbo's excavations uncovered intensive activity by Jewish rebels throughout the palace-fortress during the two Jewish revolts against Rome, both in the original rooms and in the rooms built in the large courtyard. However, further investigation is needed to obtain a more complete picture of what happened at Herodium during the Bar Kokhba Revolt. Both technical and methodological constraints made it difficult for the excavators in the 1960s to obtain a broad, precise picture of the site during the Bar Kokhba Revolt; for example, due to

¹ J. T. Milik: Textes Hébreux et Araméens, in P. Benoit, J. T Milik, and R. de Vaux (eds.): *Les Grottes de Murabba^cât* (Discoveries in the Judean Desert, no. 2), Oxford, 1961, pp. 67–205.

 ² V. C. Corbo: L'Herodion di Giabal Fureidis, *Liber Annuus* 17 (1967), pp. 115–116, map 2; V. C. Corbo: *Herodion*, vol. 1: *Gli Edifici della Reggia-Fortezza*, Jerusalem, 1989, fig. 113.

³ A. Spijkerman: *Herodion*, vol. 3: *Catalogo delle Monete*, Jerusalem, 1972.

⁴ B. Zissu and H. Eshel: The Geographical Distribution of Coins of the Bar Kokhba War, *INJ* 14 (2002), pp. 157–167.



Plan 1: Floor plan of the palace-fortress during the two revolts, including the loci where Bar Kokhba coins were found (after Corbo 1967, map 2).

difficulties in differentiating between the remains from the two revolts, Corbo attached to his reports only one combined plan showing both phases.⁵ Therefore, it is important to present the new finds from the Bar Kokhba phase, which together with those of Corbo may contribute to a more complete and more comprehensive picture.

Five coins restruck by the Bar Kokhba administration are presented here; all of them were discovered in the Hebrew University excavations (headed by Ehud Netzer) in 1973–1975 and 2007–2009.⁶

⁵ Corbo, L'Herodion di Giabal Fureidis (n. 2 above), map 2; see also same map in Corbo, *Herodion* (n. 2 above), pl. 3.

⁶ The complete assemblage of coins exposed by the Hebrew University expedition at Herodium will be published by Nili Achipaz.

COIN 1

Coin 1, a bronze coin from the first year of the Bar Kokhba Revolt, was found during Netzer and Arzi's excavations of the underground tunnel system of Herodium in 1973–1975.⁷ The coin is decorated with a palm tree and a bunch of grapes and has the inscription אלעזר הכהן (Fig. 1). It was found in the large fill that had accumulated, due to erosion, in the stairway leading down from the main courtyard into the "Intermediate Cistern" of the palace-fortress (Locus H35; Plan 1).

This stairway was erected during the Bar Kokhba Revolt to provide access to the underground complex constructed by the rebels.⁸ While the stairway was being dug in the fill under the courtyard, a small water facility (a closed cistern) was partially destroyed. It had apparently been connected to the water cistern in the adjacent Room 38, located north of and next to the Eastern Round Tower.⁹ This cistern was installed inside a cellar room, initially entered by a door from Room 39, to its north,¹⁰ either in a late phase of the original building (perhaps even in the time of the Procurators) or during the Jewish War. The damaged water facility may have served as a settling tank for the water funneled into the cistern. (Hypothetically, it could also have been part of a third ritual bath from the Jewish War, in addition to the two in the courtyard.) Cistern 38, which Corbo discovered totally empty, had been blocked during the Second Revolt, according to its excavator.¹¹ This blockage was probably related to the construction of the aforementioned stairway into the underground complex.¹²

COINS 2 AND 3

Two bronze coins were discovered in 2007 south of the synagogue, in the round corridor that surrounded the palace-fortress (Plan 1; Photo 1). One belongs to the undated type and bears a palm tree and a vine leaf (Fig. 2); the other is from the first year of the revolt and has a *lulav* and harp (Fig. 3). This area, untouched by Corbo, is covered by massive debris, including large building stones that fell from the round walls. The coins were located inside layers of earth, beneath the fallen stones, at an elevation identical to the original second-story floor. The layer that included Coin 2, which was uncovered right below the fallen stones, also contained fragments of painted plaster (fresco) and decorated stucco, apparently

⁷ E. Netzer and S. Arzi: Herodium Tunnels, *Qadmoniot* 18 (1985), pp. 33–38 (Hebrew).
⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Corbo, L'Herodion di Giabal Fureidis (n. 2 above), pp. 95–97, map 1.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 97.

¹¹ Corbo, *Herodion* (n. 2 above), figs. 53–54.

¹² Corbo, L'Herodion di Giabal Fureidis (n. 2 above), pp. 75–76.

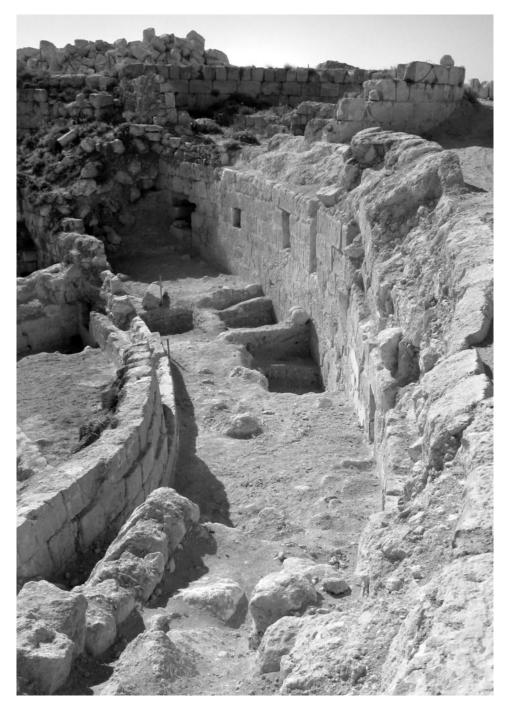


Photo 1: Excavations in the space (Loci H3010, H3019) between the surrounding walls on the western side (originally a series of corridors), facing east.

originating from the higher stories. The original circular building had five stories of corridors.

Coin 3 was discovered among thin layers of gray and reddish soil, probably originally from the floors of the upper stories, that had accumulated prior to the collapse of the big stones (Locus H3019). The debris probably accumulated on the floors of the upper stories during the two revolts and then collapsed as the result of construction activity during the Second Revolt. In some cases, these uncommon processes caused "reversed stratigraphy" and confusion in the order of the layers here. Thus, coins of the Jewish War were found in the gray layer covering a layer where a Bar Kokhba coin (Coin 3) was discovered. This suggests that the dismantling of many of the original ceilings (throughout the palace-fortress and the underground tunnels) by the Bar Kokhba rebels in order to obtain wooden beams to reinforce the tunnels in the fill of the artificial mountain, caused the collapse of many floors and ceilings all over the huge structure.

COIN 4

A bronze coin belonging to the undated type with a lyre and a *lulav* (Fig. 4) was found in 2009 in the eastern section of Room 14 (unexcavated by Corbo),¹³ south of the synagogue (Room 15, the Herodian tricilinium; Plan 1). It was found in a layer covered by massive debris of building stones. The work concentrated on an area near the original opening between Room 14 and Room 13 to its east (north of the southern tower) and the original entrance to the triclinium. The opening to the east passes through two adjacent walls; The eastern one of which was added in the Herodian period for an unknown reason. The original floor of Room 14 was covered by a destruction layer comprising pottery and burnt wooden logs dated to the Jewish War. This latter layer was covered by debris about one meter thick, accumulated in a later period when the area was deserted. Higher up, a thin, densely packed layer of light-colored clay was uncovered. This layer continued through the opening into Room 13. Coin 4 was found just above this layer, together with pottery and other items (Locus H3042; Plan 1). Further evidence of activity dated to the Bar Kokhba Revolt was discovered by Corbo in Room 13 (Locus 29): an ash layer containing several coins from the revolt.¹⁴ On top of this "Bar Kokhba layer" was massive debris, evidence of the destruction of the structure during the crushing of the rebellion. It seems that when the synagogue was installed (or re-installed) during the Bar Kokhba Revolt, the original opening between Room 14 and the synagogue was blocked in order to retain all the layers

¹³ Ibid., p. 110, map 1.

¹⁴ Spijkerman (n. 3 above), p. 21, n. 102; Corbo, L'Herodion di Giabal Fureidis (n. 2 above), pp. 109, 115–116.

accumulated during the revolt.¹⁵ In contrast to Room 14, the synagogue during this time was above the original floor level of the triclinium. It is as yet unclear, however, whether the benches along the southern wall of the synagogue extended to the east, in front of this door.¹⁶

COIN 5

A bronze coin from the second year of the Bar Kokhba Revolt, of the type with a palm tree and vine leaf (Fig. 5), was found in the western branch of the cross-shaped dwelling unit on the western side of the villa within the round frame (north of the Byzantine chapel; Plan 1).¹⁷ The coin was found on top of debris and fill of

soil and stones from the two revolts (Locus H3067), on top of which the chapel was built.¹⁸ The activity at the end of the Bar Kokhba Revolt apparently took place above these layers of debris and fill, as they are about 2.5 m higher than the courtyard: here Coin 5 was found, as was a complete stone vessel of the "measuring cup" type. However, in earlier stages of the revolt the living surface was about 0.5 m lower, as we can see from the threshold of the door built into the room (Locus 15) constructed by the rebels during the Bar Kokhba Revolt.¹⁹ One meter west of that door is a gap in the wall, apparently made by Bar Kokhba's men at the end of the revolt to give them access to Room 23.²⁰ The bottom of this gap is approximately 1 m lower than the entrance to Room 15, evidence of changes in floor levels during the revolt (Photo 2).



Photo 2: On the right, an opening created during the Bar Kokhba Revolt, leading from the cross-shaped unit to Locus 15, with a Byzantine doorway above, facing north. On the left, an opening into Locus 23, created during the Bar Kokhba Revolt.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 100–101, map 2.

¹⁵ Corbo, *Herodion* (n. 2 above), fig. 112.

¹⁶ Corbo, L'Herodion di Giabal Fureidis (n. 2 above), pp. 101–103.

¹⁷ Ibid., map 1, zone 20.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 98-101.

²⁰ Ibid., map 1.

CATALOGUE (Figs. 1-5)²¹

- Æ; 18 mm; 5.16 gr.; axis 6; 132/3 CE (L.H35; B.473) *Obv.*: Seven-branched palm tree; inscription: אלע/זר הכ/הן *Rev.*: Cluster of grapes; inscription: שנת אחת לגאלת ישר]אל Mildenberg 1984, p. 328, no. 149.
- Æ; 25 mm; 9.64 gr.; axis 6; 134/5 CE (L.H3010; B.6003) *Obv.:* Seven-branched palm tree; inscription: שמ/עון *Rev.:* Vine leaf (five-foliate); inscription: [לחרו]ת ירושל[ם] Mildenberg 1984, p. 327, no. 142.
- Æ; 23 mm; 10.35 gr.; axis 12; 132/3 CE (L.H3019; B.6072) *Obv.: Lulav* surrounded by a wreath; inscription: שמעון נשיא ישראל *Rev.*: Harp with five cords; inscription: ש[נת] אחת לגאלת ישראל Spijkerman 1972, p. 26, no. 25; Mildenberg 1984, p. 301, no. 20.
- 4. Æ; 22mm; 12.39 gr.; axis 1; 134/5 CE (L.H3042; B.6180) *Obv.:* Lyre with wooden sound box and three cords; inscription: שמע/ון *Rev.: Lulav* surrounded by a wreath; inscription: לחר[ות ירו]שלם Spijkerman 1972, p. 58, no. 438; Mildenberg 1984, p. 301, no. 20.
- 5. Æ; 26 mm; 12.39 gr.; axis 6; 133/4 CE (L.H3067; B.6267) *Obv.*: Seven-branched palm tree; inscription: שמ/עון *Rev.*: Vine leaf (trifoliate); inscription: (ש ב לחר ישראל (= ש ב לחר ישראל) Mildenberg 1984, p. 317, no. 90.

SUMMARY

We still have a long way to go before we have a complete picture of Herodium during the Bar Kokhba Revolt. All the archaeological data at hand, as well as new information being discovered in the current excavations, must be carefully assembled and studied. This presentation of additional coins from the Second Jewish Revolt in their stratigraphic context will certainly contribute to the study of Herodium between 132 and 136 CE.

CATALOGUE REFERENCES

Mildenberg 1984 = L. Mildenberg: *The Coinage of the Bar Kokhba War* (Typos VI), Aarau, Frankfurt, and Salzburg, 1984.

Spijkerman 1972 = A. Spijkerman: *Herodion*, vol. 3: *Catalogo delle Monete*, Jerusalem, 1972.

²¹ The five coins were photographed by Boaz Zissu; the plate was prepared by Uri Davidovich. Both deserve our thanks.













Figs. 1–5. Bar Kokhba coins from Herodium