

Frédérique Duyrat, Review of Haim Gitler, Catharine Lorber, Jean-Philippe Fontanille, *The Yehud Coinage: A Study and Die Classification of the Provincial Silver Coinage of Judah*, Jerusalem, 2023 (Numismatic studies and researches XII – the Israel Numismatic Society), 531 pages, *Numismatic Chronicle* forthcoming.

Haim Gitler, Catharine Lorber and Jean-Philippe Fontanille have produced a 532-page luxurious volume printed on heavy paper, with a spacious layout, lavishly illustrated in colour and with a generous number of photographic enlargements. This is the third book written by Haim Gitler and various authors on the coinages of the southern Levant in the Persian Period.¹

The reader might be disoriented when opening the book since it does not start with a clear definition of the Yehud Coinage. These small silver denominations, ill struck with poorly engraved and worn dies on flans made of good silver but mediocre fabrication, generally bore an Aramaic or Paleo-Hebraic legend reading *Yehud*. They were struck intermittently from the fourth century to the first half of the third century BC. The types are only discussed in chapter V,I while they structure the book and are extensively used in the preceding sections. Die studies are partially discussed in Chapter II while they are the main topic of Chapter VIII. The same happens with chronology (Chapters II and V). The chapters on hoards (IV) and coin circulation (hoards and coins from excavations, chapter IX) could have been merged. But beyond these remarks, the book provides a unique insight into a small but meaningful coinage.

A handful of coins were published when *A Treasury of Jewish Coins from the Persian Period to Bar Kokhba*, Jerusalem, 2001 appeared. There, Ya'akov Meshorer identified 35 Yehud types. The history of scholarship is therefore relatively short. The Menorah Coin Project represented a spectacular leap forward. The website founded by J.-P. Fontanille in 2002 is dedicated to classifying Judaean coins. It gathers approximately 13,000 Yehud coins through a detailed die study (<https://www.menorahcoinproject.com/>). The book published by Haim Gitler, Catharine Lorber, Jean-Philippe Fontanille and several collaborators presents an updated version of the die-study available on the website, and a complete revision of this coinage.

Chapter I provides the historical context of the period during which the Yehud coins were issued, and therefore closely relates to Chapter V that is dedicated to the chronology of these coins. The authors assume that the first issues date to the middle of the fourth century BC, the last coins being minted under the Ptolemies, at the beginning of the third century. These decades were particularly troubled since they saw revolts in Egypt under Persian rule, the conquest of the region by Alexander the Great and the wars of the Diadochi. Scholarship suggests that the local government, run by the Jewish elite on behalf of the Persian king, was maintained under the Ptolemies. The closure date of the Yehud mint is debated. The authors suggest linking it to the dispute between the high priest Onias II and Ptolemy III (246-222). The Yehud coinage is a unique case of a non-Ptolemaic coinage issued under Ptolemaic rule.

Chapter II is dedicated to the imaging method developed by J.-P. Fontanille to reconstruct Yehud coin types using a sample of 1,960 coins. The very poor quality of the coins required him to associate the images of several coins to reconstruct a type. Pages 22-23 give a clear idea of the technique used. The three plates on pp. 25-27 provide good pictures of the 44 types identified.

¹ Haim Gitler, Oren Tal, *The Coinage of Philistia of the Fifth and Fourth Centuries BC: A Study of the Earliest Coins of Palestine*, Milano : New York, 2006. Haim Gitler, Oren Tal, *The Nablus 1968 Hoard: A Study of Monetary Circulation in the Late Fourth and Early Third Centuries BCE Southern Levant*, New York, 2019.

Types 1 and 2 have designs close to those of Gaza and 'Philistian' weight standard.² Type 3 seems to be a hybrid copying Athenian tetradrachms' types with Aramaic YD standing for Yehud and *ain* that is the usual mintmark of Gaza. From Type 4, the legend switches to Paleo-Hebraic though the coins retain the Athenian types. These coins would be the first issued by a mint located in Judah. The Persian, Macedonian and Ptolemaic period seem to have used a similar number of dies, with respectively 61, 64 and 73 obverse dies (there is a useful table p. 32 showing the types and numbers of dies; life-size images of each type can be found on p. 100).

The delicate question of the weight standard is discussed in chapter III. With a vast majority of coins below 0.5g, and a poor standardisation of the flans, ascertaining the standard is not an easy task. For example, type 9 (Persian king / owl) is represented by 62 coins whose weights range from 0.32 to 0.65g (mean: 0.48g). The authors consider that this denomination is a Judahite *gerah*, a fraction of the Judahite sheqel of 9.6g. The book does not provide frequency tables, mode or median that would help the readers form their own opinion, but all weights are printed.

The section on hoards (Chapter IV) confirms what previous scholarship had already demonstrated: Yehud coins are only found in local hoards (nine so far), in very limited numbers. The Yehud coins in these hoards are beautifully and thoroughly illustrated, providing material for further studies. The authors rightly highlight the lack of clustering of these hoards around historical episodes like the Macedonian conquest.

To establish the chronology of such a small coinage is inevitably challenging (Chapter V). The authors have provided all the information available to narrow down the dates of issue: imagery, die-links, inscriptions and palaeography, style, archaeological context and hoards. The appearance of rulers' heads – a very early occurrence – is one of the most striking features of these coinages. The Persian king's head is a standard representation, as are the joint portraits of Ptolemy I and Berenice I and Ptolemy II and Arsinoe, the *Theoi Adelphoi*. The chronology of the Ptolemaic coinages is used as a *terminus post quem* to date the Yehud coins imitating these types. The authors suggest that representations of a beardless male head in the Macedonian fashion should be identified as a portrait of Alexander and dated shortly after 333/2.³ This is not a light statement since, were it confirmed, this would make them the first coins to feature a portrait of the Macedonian king (p. 103). Furthermore, they would be lifetime portraits while we know that Alexander had granted the right to represent his image to a very limited number of artists (Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 37.8, on engraved gems). He never had his portrait struck on his own coinage and the tiny image on the Yehud coins lacks the characteristics later associated with Alexander's portraits (no *anastole* for instance). Therefore, the identification of Alexander seems doubtful. Could such a portrait represent one of the Antigonids? In that case, this type should be dated later in the fourth century. The end of the Yehud coinage may date to the reign of Ptolemy III, but bronze had already started replacing small silver fractions in Judah at the beginning of the third century.

The much-needed chapter on iconography is placed in sixth position in the book. It brings a wide documentation to identify and interpret the variety of types appearing on the Yehud coinage. Multiple influences from Persia to Greece, including Egypt are a feature shared with Philistian and Samaritan coinages. The chapter is largely dedicated to the Yahwist cult with interesting insights into the loose application of the Commandments.

² Haim Gitler, Oren Tal, *The Coinage of Philistia of the Fifth and Fourth Centuries BC: A Study of the Earliest Coins of Palestine*, Milano : New York, 2006 (Collezioni numismatiche (Edizioni Ennerre) ; 6).

³ Type 19 and again on Type 35 under the Ptolemies.

André Lemaire has contributed a chapter (VII) on palaeography, bringing other chronological landmarks related to the language and the scripts' shape. A remarkable section is dedicated to graffiti, barely visible on such tiny denominations. They seem to display the initials of personal names, maybe the coin owners.

The extreme care taken to examine these coins, as well as the imaging techniques used, have allowed the authors to dedicate a chapter (VIII) to the art of the engravers. They identify masters (outside of Judah?) and less talented (local?) artisans. Despite the small diameter of most coins, they have reconstituted the degradation sequences of some of the dies. Several series were damaged by die-clashes: no flan was placed between the dies at the time of the strike and one of the dies impressed the other (see p. 232-233), creating a new pattern visible on following issues.

Chapter IX comes back to coin circulation. Only 60 coins from Judah (all illustrated) have been found in controlled excavations, despite the intensive archaeological activity of Israel. They were found within the borders of Judah, as were most of the coin hoards. The distribution of Yehud stamp impressions covers broadly the same area. In this chapter, Yoav Fahri makes a plea in favour of the controlled use of metal detectors by archaeologists. Without this device, a large part of the monetary evidence is lost.

Questions of quantification have been entrusted to François de Callataÿ, who contributes Chapter X. 1,931 coins were struck with 208 obverse dies and 283 reverse dies. The unusual discrepancy between the obverse and reverse numbers is due to a large number of coins being struck with blank obverse dies. The average ratio of coins per obverse die is high - 8.84 – for such small silver denominations. The number of singletons – obverse dies represented by only one coin – is also high (36%). Combined with the fact that many dies remained in use while seriously damaged and that the ratio of die-clashes increases for smaller denominations, it leads Callataÿ to the conclusion that the average die productivity of a reverse die of small denominations was not very different from that of an obverse die. The high ratio of singletons also points towards the early breakage of dies. He then extrapolates a total production for these issues. In the same chapter, François de Callataÿ and Catharine Lorber dedicate three pages to the purpose of such coinages. Despite their number, their value was low. They conclude that they may have been used to pay lower members of Judah's administration, such as guards in strongholds such as Khirbet Qeiyafah.

The last chapter (XI) gathers the authors' conclusions on the Yehud mint. They see it as the mint of the provincial administration of Judah, located in or near Jerusalem. If Ramat Rahel, south of Jerusalem, was indeed the administrative centre of the Persian period, no Yehud coins were found there and the excavations show a decline in the early Hellenistic period. The Yehud coinage combined an iconography related to imperial power, the Yahwist cult and images borrowed from other cultures. But Paleo-Hebraic legends, sometimes Judahite authority names, anchor the coinage in Judah's administration. The limited size of the coinage and the agricultural nature of the economy are in favour of intermittent issues, explaining the inconsistency of the quality of dies. The XRF analyses show high levels of silver, averaging c.97% from the Persian to the Ptolemaic period, with very little lead. The authors consider that the Yehud mint recycled the metal of foreign coins to strike its own coinage.

The last chapter (XII) is dedicated to the economic role of the Yehud coinage. This small production was always limited to one denomination at a time, in contrast to the Samarian and Philistian mints that issued a range of denominations. Based on Callataÿ's quantification, the authors propose an estimate of the number of staff that could have been paid with these issues. However, these coins were not the only salary available: food allowances, grants of land and

other benefits supplemented a silver salary. Other coins, from the Philistian mints as well as dome shaped coins (Edomite?) were also available in Judah. These separate issues of limited impact might have been triggered by specific events: a request from the imperial administration, benefactions from the Persian king, etc. The book ends with connexion tables (dies) and annexes dedicated to SEM EDS analyses of four early Yehud coins.

In total, Haim Gitler, Catharine Lorber, Jean-Philippe Fontanille and their collaborators provide a useful, clear, beautifully illustrated book. This masterful overview will become the reference on the Yehud coinage for decades to come.