A Judean First Revolt Prutah Overstrike

The act of minting silver coins by the Judeans, which was reserved by the Roman overlords themselves, along with the messages inscribed on these coins, signified that there was a declaration of Judean independence from the Roman Empire.

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There is no formal course of study to become a numismatic specialist other than the manner in which I approached learning the very wide and varied field of ancient coinage. There are lectures you can attend assuming you live in proximity to the American Numismatic Society, the Israel Numismatic Society, or other large organizations and museums with collections and numismatic specialists. You can join these large societies, and they issue yearly journals with papers from numismatic specialists from around the world which you can receive.[1] There are cities which have ancient and modern numismatic clubs which hold meetings for their members who are both amateur collector/specialists and professionals.

[1] The American Numismatic Society (http://www.numismatics.org/) and The Israel Numismatic Society (http://www.ins.org.il/) are two of the most respected numismatic organizations. Each has an Internet website which includes information and the yearly membership dues. They also list the publications available and papers that can be read online.

An additional opportunity to learn the field of ancient numismatics is to attend the large numismatic shows that occur worldwide where you can view a large and varied selection of ancient coins available in the marketplace. Many of these shows include auctions from the prestigious companies that specialize in ancient numismatics. These shows assist you in selecting an area of specialization by allowing you to view a large assortment of coins, to handle them, and to experience numismatics in a manner you are unable to appreciate from simply viewing catalogues and reference material. This is invaluable to be able to learn the difference in the grading of the condition of an ancient coin, from "poor" to "extra fine" and mint condition. You will also learn that not every dealer or institution grades coins in exactly the same manner and this can be subjective with the person doing the grading.

The final approach I want to mention, and this is the most important factor in my opinion, is to commit oneself to self-study. This requires that you purchase a substantial library of reference books to have at your disposal. Academic writings are not inexpensive so the amassing of a personal reference library is not a trivial undertaking. But, to fully understand what you are attempting to achieve, this is a necessary expenditure. The establishment of your reference library enables you to intelligently approach the final act in becoming a numismatic specialist, which is

the purchase of your own collection of coins from legitimate dealers and auction licensed auction houses.

One problem that you may be confronted with is that you may not live in proximity to the locations where there are the museums, numismatic organizations, clubs, dealers, or shows. However, it is possible to make professional contacts via email or social media and receiving sales and/or auction catalogues. There are publications which enable you to ask questions that someone who specializes in a specific area might answer for you. By doing all these things, you establish your circle of educated authorities and, if you are lucky, even a potential mentor.[2]

I have examined many thousands of ancient coins over the past forty years. My focus was on coinage that had been minted in the ancient land of Israel[3] and specifically coins that are related to the Bible and Jewish History. This may seem to be a narrow area, but it includes coins minted in the area of land controlled by many nations from the fifth century BCE through to the Crusader and Arabic periods. My interest does not include the period of time after the fourteenth century CE during which there are many ancient coins found in the land but which none

[2] I was lucky enough live in a location where I could meet people who are highly respected authorities in the field of ancient numismatics and to have someone whom I considered a mentor in the beginning my education in the field.

[3] The name "Israel" was not used as the name of the nation after the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians in the 8th BCE. The Kingdom of Judea, in the south, continued to exist and coins were first minted in Persian province of Judea, along with the neighboring provinces of Samaria and Philistia, in the 5th century BCE. They continued to be minted there after the conquest of Persian by Alexander the Great in 330 BCE.

were minted locally. Eventually I decided to specialize in a single mint, the city mint of Akko Ptolemais, modern day Acre/Akko in Israel.[4] Coins were minted at Akko, under authorization and privilege granted by the occupying national ruler, from 300 BCE under Alexander the Great through the Crusader Arabic period up to 1300 CE.

To thoroughly understand ancient coinage and why each one was minted, it is also necessary that the specialist become an historian to able to understand the different periods, rulers, and thr geography that constituted the national borders during the constantly changing past. I would examine hundreds of boxes of coins at shows looking for examples of my specialty as well as every auction catalogue I could acquire in my search for new examples of the mint of Akko.

Recently a First Revolt "Year 2" bronze *prutah* minted in 67/68 CE reentered the marketplace after having been in a private collection for a period of years. All that is now known about this coin was that it was originally purchased from a coin dealer in Israel as part of a large, personal collection.[5] The coin's design makes it easily recognizable as being a First Revolt *prutah* of "year two" which had been

[4] Akko was known by different names during ancient periods. It was known as Ake (Phoenician through Alexander the Great I in 300 BCE), Ptolemais (Ptolemaic period), Akko Ptolemais (Seleucid period), Ptolemais (Roman through Crusader period) and Akko (Muslim period).

[5] The coin under study was purchased, by the author from the Harlan Berk, Ltd. Gemini VI auction, No. 312, in January, 2010. The coin had been in the private collection of Stephen N. Gerson. In a private conversation through email, the author was informed by one of the Gemini Auction partners that when Gerson was asked for the information, he replied that the coin had originally been purchased in an Israeli marketplace, but the date was not remembered or recorded. It had been legally imported into the United States.

overstruck on a previously minted coin. The underlying coin has a serrated flan and has the characteristics of Seleucid bronze coins which had been minted at the city mint of Akko Ptolemais during the second and first centuries BCE (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. A first Jewish revolt bronze *prutah* of 67/68 CE, *TJC* No. 196-198. Size 16/17mm, weight 2.20g, thickness 1.72mm. Coin is overstruck on a previously minted serrate Seleucid bronze coin. Currently in the private collection of the author.

The bronze *prutah* (Fig. 2), the smallest denomination of coinage minted by the Judeans during the First Revolt, was minted in huge quantities. This particular variety of coin is not particularly rare. Many are found in a very fine condition. The legend on the obverse side of the *prutah* reads "year two" and the reverse side reads "the freedom of Zion," engraved in paleo-Hebrew script.



Fig. 2. A first Jewish revolt bronze *prutah* of 67/68 CE, *TJC* No. 196-198. Courtesy of David Hendin, "Amphora."

The Jewish revolt against Rome began in 66 CE and was significantly more than simply a local uprising. The revolt included related Hebrew populations of the Galilee and Golan regions. The Jews, in the revolt, minted their own coinage in both silver and bronze. Coins in circulation, which had originated in the Roman and Greek Imperial mints as well as the small local bronze coins minted by the Roman and Judeans, were melted down to provide new flans for the Judean mint. The act of minting silver coins by the Judeans, which was reserved by the Roman overlords themselves, along with the messages inscribed on these coins, signified that there was a declaration of Judean independence from the Roman Empire.

Judean coins were rarely overstruck on previously issued coins. The major exception to this were the coins of the Bar Kochba revolt of 132-135 CE during which all coins were minted by overstriking existing coins.[6] In the *IES* publication of the excavations at Masada (Meshorer 1989:101-119) there are a total of 1674 year two *prutot* and a total of 496 year three *prutot* that were found in the archaeological excavation. Not a single overstruck coin is listed in the inventory of over 2100 coins found in these excavation seasons.

At the time of researching my paper for the *Israel Numismatic Research* journal,[7] there were only five First Revolt overstruck coins previously published or

[6] Mildenberg 1984:23.
[7] *Israel Numismatic Research 6* (http://www.ins.org.il/?id=33).

listed in Internet catalogs. Through Internet searches and personal contacts, a number of other unique examples of First Revolt overstrikes came to my attention. Though there are likely other overstruck coins among the thousands of First Revolt bronze *prutot*, these coins are extremely rare. It is not known why these particular coins were selected for the overstrike process.[8]

1. Year three *prutah* (Kadman 1960:128, No. 26) that is overstruck on a bonze *prutah* of Roman Emperor Tiberius (procurator Pontius Pilate) 26-36 CE (*TJC* Nos. 333-335).

2. Year two *prutah* (Kadman 1960:126, No.17) overstruck on a bronze *prutah* of Agrippa I coin of 41/42 CE (*TJC*: 328, No.120).

3. Two year two *prutot* (*TJC*: 231 No. 200 and No. 200a). Both of these coins are overstrikes on bronze *prutot* of Agrippa I of 41/42 CE (*TJC*: 328, No.120).

4. Year two *prutah* (private collection) (Fig. 3) that is overstruck on a bronze prutah of Roman Emperor Claudius (procurator Antonius Felix) in 54 CE (*TJC* No. 340).

[8] During a visit to the marketplace in the Old City of Jerusalem in November 2011, I found 2 additional coins which are potential overstrikes. One coin appears to have serrations as do coins in Fig. 1 and Fig.4 which could make it a third Seleucid overstrike. The other coin is quite small for the type but is the size and weight is in the range of the coins minted in the Hashmonim, Herodian, and Procurator periods. For a discussion of "irregular issues" of Judean coins, see Hendin and Bower (2011).



Fig. 3. The underlying coin, overstruck as a First Revolt *prutah* of "year two" is *TJC* No. 340, minted during the reign of the Roman Emperor Claudius in 54 CE (procurator Antonius Felix). This overstruck coin is on the Internet site of the Menorah Coin Project, http//www.minorahcoinproject.org/H661v.htm and permission to use the photograph was given by J.P.Fontanille.

A second unpublished First Revolt *prutah* of "Year 2" which appears to be overstruck on a previously minted serrated coin was recently discovered in the marketplace of the Old City of Jerusalem by the author. This coin (Fig. 4) is poorly struck on what appears to be a flan that was hammered to flatten it to its current diameter of 17mm. The weight of the coin is 2.85g. The flan still exhibits a small degree of the serration from the original coin, likely a small Seleucid bronze of Akko Ptolemais.



Fig. 4. A first Jewish revolt bronze *prutah* of 67/68 CE, *TJC* No. 196-198. Size 17mm, weight 2.85g. Coin is overstruck on a previously minted serrate Seleucid bronze coin. Currently in the private collection of the author.

The First Revolt *prutah* of "year two" (Fig. 1) under study displays an obviously serrated flan, a feature consistent with the mint of Akko Ptolemais as the origin of the underlying coin. The flan of this coin is 16x17mm in diameter, a size which is within the normal size range for a First Revolt *prutah,* though small. The coin design did not fully fit onto the coin. The flan size is slightly light in weight for this issue, and the coin has a weight of the 2.20 grams. This is in the low weight range for the issue, but it is within the range of coins found. The thickness of the coin, 1.72 mm, is significantly thinner from being hammered than that of other First Revolt *prutot*. The increase to the diameter of the coin was necessary so that it would be capable of accepting the die of the First Revolt *prutah* of "year two."[9] A study performed by David Hendin (Hendin 2009) in the *AJN* shows how the size and weight of ancient Judean bronze coin varieties varied greatly without affecting the monetary value of the coinage while in use.

Serrated flans are a feature that is found in Seleucid bronze coins minted during the reigns of Seleucus IV, Antiochus IV, Demetrius I, and Antiochus VI at the city mint of Akko Ptolemais as well as in other mint issues. The coins of the Akko Ptolemais mint, especially those of Antiochus IV, are found in very large numbers in Israel including the West Bank area. The fabric of the coins and quality of the

[9] The studies performed were of my personal collection as well as the study of the Israel Antiquities Authority's serrated Seleucid coins found in excavations in Israel.

minting helps enable identification as Akko Ptolemais rather than from other Seleucid mints issues.

The serrated coins minted during the reign of Seleucus IV, though they are found in Israel and the West Bank in substantial numbers, are too large and heavy to be considered candidates for the First Revolt *prutah* of "year two" under study.[10] Antiochus IV "Epiphanes" succeeded his brother Seleucus IV in 175 BCE. Antiochus IV, the Antiochus of the rebellion of the Hasmonian Judeans against the Greek-speaking Syrians, minted the greatest number and coin types in Akko Ptolemais than that of any of the other rulers. Included in the coins he minted are four types of small serrated bronze coins.[11]

Of the four coin varieties minted in the reign of Antiochus IV are two coin types that are of the size and weight which makes them good candidates for being the underlying coin of the First Revolt *prutah* (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6). Coins of 13x14mm have been found, in my study, to have weights in the range of the First Revolt *prutah* under study.

[10] *SC II*:317, No. 1332. Hoover 2009:121, No. 592.
[11] *SC II*:320, No. 1477, No. 1478, No. 1479 and No. 1482. Hoover 2009:140, No. 686. Hoover 2009:144, No. 725 and No. 726.



Fig. 5. Coin of Antiochus IV. *CS II* No. 1478, Hoover 2009:145, No. 727. Scarcity Rare2. Denomination D. Courtesy of David Hendin, "Amphora.".



Fig. 6. Coin of Antiochus IV. *CS II* No. 1479, Hoover 2009:144 No. 726. Scarcity Common. Denomination D. Courtesy of David Hendin, "Amphora."

The other two Antiochus IV coin types that are serrated are too large and heavy (Fig. 7) or exhibit a barbaric minting quality[12] and are not viable candidates for the overstrike.



[12] *SC II*:320, No. 1482

Fig. 7. Coin of Antiochus IV. *SC II* No. 1477, Hoover 2009:140, No. 686. Scarcity Rare1-2. Denomination C. Size 15mm, weight 3.68g. Currently in the private collection of the author.

The First Revolt *prutah*, hammered flat to 16x17mm in diameter, maintains its original serrated flan shape.[13] The coin has a weight of 2.20 grams. The two Antiochus IV bronze coins[14] that I believe are candidates for the underlying coin also exhibit a high quality minting. The serrated flan would be maintained after being hammered flat, a feature I do not believe the other two Antiochus IV coins would exhibit.

There is an additional serrated coin minted in Akko Ptolemais under Demetrius I (Fig. 8),[15] but the quality of the minting, the size, and the weight of this coin type would make it a poor candidate for the hammering and the overstrike.



Fig. 8. Coin of Demetrius I. *SC II* #1679, Hoover 2009:169, No. 838.

[13] The second example of a serrated bronze overstruck during the First Revolt, recently found by the author in the Old City of Jerusalem, has only a limited amount of the serrations surviving the hammering and overstrike process in 67/68 CE.
[14] *SC II*:320, No. 1478 and No. 1479. Hoover 2009:144, No. 725 and No. 726.
[15] *SC II*:324, No. 1679. Hoover 2009:169, No. 838.

Scarcity Scarce. Denomination C. Courtesy of David Hendin, "Amphora."

Coins minted in Akko Ptolemais under the rule of Antiochus VI, though of higher quality, are quite rare.[16] They are less likely to be good candidates for the underlying coin due to their size and minting quality or their relative scarcity.

A serrated overstrike is identified from the Bar Kochba War (CE 135).[17] Though all coinage minted in the Bar Kochba War are overstruck on pre-existing coinage, there is only a single coin published,[18] a small bronze, which exhibits the serrated flan type. An unpublished Bar Kochba medium bronze type with a serrated flan, overstruck on a probable Seleucus IV of Antioch,[19] has been brought to my attention.[20]

The underlying coin type for the First Revolt *prutah* of "year two" under study appears to have a high probability that it is either *SC II* No. 1478 (Fig 5) or *SC II* No. 1479 (Fig. 6). Coin type *SC II* No. 1479 is found throughout Israel in a much greater quantity than any of the other Seleucid coin candidate. The reuse of a coin

[16] *SC II*, No. 2023, No. 2024 and No. 2025. Hoover 2009:206-207, No. 1046, No. 1052 and No. 1054.
[17] *SC II:*215
[18] Mildenberg 1984:89 and Plate Q.
[19] The mint attribution for these serrated coins of Seleucus IV was changed to Antioch by Oliver Hoover in *SC II.* These coins, exhibiting a specific mint mark, were previously listed in Houghton and Spaer: 1998 as being minted in Akko Ptolemais.
[20] Donald Ariel, e-mail message to author, May 1, 2011.

of Antiochus IV during the First Revolt would be consistent with the large amount of small bronze coins that continued to be in circulations for centuries.[21]

This First Revolt *prutah* (Fig. 1), and the additional *prutah* that has recently been identified by the author (Fig. 4), are the first serrated Seleucid bronze First Revolt overstrikes to be published. If the underlying coins are Antiochus IV serrated bronzes of Akko Ptolemais, then there is a dual historical significance to these coins, whether the reuse of the underlying coin was intended or not. The dual significance is that the original coin is from the revolt of the Maccabees against the Seleucid Greeks in the second century BCE, a successful revolt which became the story of Hanukkah. These coins were then reused and were overstruck during the First Revolt against Rome in 67/8 CE, a revolt which was still being fought. These two Judean revolt scenarios make these two coins even more intriguing.

[21] Bijovsky 2000-2:202.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AJN *American Journal of Numismatics*
INJ *Israel Numismatic Journal*
INR *Israel Numismatic Research*

SCII *Seleucid Coins: A Comprehensive Catalogue. Part II. Seleucus IV through Antiouchus XII*

TJC *A Treasury of Jewish Coins from the Persian Period to Bar Kochba*