

A note on the Nablus Hoard

Autor(en): **Spaer, Arnold**

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ARNOLD SPAER

A NOTE ON THE NABLUS HOARD

It is very sad to write a contribution to the Memorial volume for Silvia. Like all her friends I have still not overcome the shock of her sudden and much too early death. She was not only an outstanding numismatist, willing to help all who were interested in solving problems, but also a great researcher, able to attribute previously unknown coins.

As an example of her help I wish to present the identification of the coins which have become known as the Nablus Hoard.

After the Six Day War and the occupation by Israel of what is now known as the West Bank in 1967, numerous antiquities appeared on the Jerusalem market. Apparently, the main reason was that areas which had been no man's land on the original border between Israel and the Jordanian-occupied part of Palestine became accessible and inhabitants realized that there was a good market for antiquities in Israel.

Two hoards came on the market in about 1968. One of them, known as the Samaria Hoard, included 334 coins and was found in a pottery container. This hoard was fully published by Ya'akov Meshorer and Shraga Qedar¹. In their publication mention is made of another hoard called the Nablus Hoard, which allegedly also included some jewelry but which was sold in several lots in the Jerusalem antiquities market without a container.

There have been suggestions that the Nablus Hoard was part of the Samaria Hoard and that both these hoards originated with the finds in the Wadi ed Daliyeh in the Jordan Valley that have been attributed to refugees from the persecutions of Alexander the Great when he conquered Samaria. It is submitted that none of these suggestions is correct. The find spot of the Samaria Hoard, though it was found as a unit, has not been named; its burial is to be dated to 354 BC².

The Nablus Hoard on the other hand was apparently buried in 338/7 BC. According to dealers connected with the find it was found in the village of Jinsafut along the Qalqilyah – Nablus Road, whilst according to other information it was found near Kutsra north of Shiloh.

It transpired that about 25 of the minor coins contained in the hoard had been bought earlier by two Jewish Jerusalem dealers who had sold them to the Numismatic Department of the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris.

The author did not have the means to buy the other coins of the hoard and Silvia, acting on behalf of Bank Leu, at once came to the rescue and enabled us to buy most of the remainder of the hoard. The numerous Athenian tetradrachms, apparently minted in Egypt, were not bought by Silvia or the author but were disposed of over time to unknown buyers. These included 62 Athenian tetradrachms which were weighed by us.

¹ Y. MESHORER / S. QEDAR, *The coinage of Samaria in the fourth century BCE* (Jerusalem, 1991).

² *Op. cit.*

The coins bought included 93 Tyrian didrachms, a coin of Amisus, two of Sinope, and approximately 737 minor silver coins of a hitherto unpublished kind.

Neither Silvia nor I could identify the many minor issues in the hoard. By their types we suspected that they might be Cilician oboli. However, enquiries with the late Edoardo Levante and many others yielded no results.

Silvia with her unusual ability photographed the coins acquired. We prepared a card index of them which we arranged and rearranged many times on the basis of various assumptions as to the identity of the coins. We also nagged many leading numismatists on the question of identifying them. All to no avail.

The dramatic solution came when, during a visit to the writer's house, Professor F.M. Cross of Harvard University read an inscription appearing above the galley on a Sidonian type obol as "Shamrayin", the Aramaic name of the province Samaria.

Many of the other oboli could then be identified as having Aramaic inscriptions. It appeared that these coins were Persian period issues struck for the Persian province of Samaria. In the same period coins were produced for the Persian province of Yahad (YHD) which are considered to be the first issues of Jewish coins.

It has been suggested that the Nablus Hoard is connected with the destruction of Samaria by Alexander the Great and what was found in the Wadi ed Daliyeh had been left there by the refugees from the destruction³. This would put the burial of the Nablus Hoard to about the same time as the burial of the Samaria Hoard⁴.

We believe this is not so. The end of the Nablus Hoard can be established quite exactly as falling in 338/7 BC.

The reasons for this conclusion are the following:

The hoard includes:

an obol of Artaxerxes II Ochus, 359-338 BC, dated to the year 20 (339/8 BC) and a coin of Adramelek of Byblos, 348-332 BC⁵.

Furthermore, at least 14 of the didrachms of Tyre are dated to the year 10 (probably 339/8 BC). These coins are in a very fresh state. No coins of this type of a later date were apparently found. On the other hand the Wadi ed Daliyeh coins included an issue dated to the year 15, dated by Cross to circa 333 BC⁶.

No coins which can be dated to later than 338 BC were apparently contained in the Nablus Hoard. It seems accordingly a safe assumption that this was the approximate date of burial.

The Hoard contained a number of coins of Bagabatus dated to the year 14. It seems not unreasonable to assume that this is a regnal year of Artaxerxes III

³ See MESHORER / QEDAR (above, n. 1), p. 65.

⁴ MESHORER / QEDAR (above, n. 1).

⁵ J.W. BETLYON, *The Coinage and Mints of Phoenicia. The Pre-Alexandrine Period* (Chico, CA, 1982), p. 121.

⁶ F.M. CROSS, *The Discovery of the Samaria Papyri*, *Biblical Archaeology* vol. 26, Dec. 1963, pp. 110-121.

(346/5 BC), which would not contradict the above conclusion as to the date of burial of the Nablus Hoard.

Some of the coins bought by Leu were later sold to the American Numismatic Society⁷ and the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford⁸.

I must confess that Silvia was prevented by her work and I by my engagements as a lawyer from doing our duty and preparing a publication of the Nablus Hoard after the identification of its contents. This she would of course have co-authored with me and others. The publication is now at long last being prepared with the assistance of Dr. Robert Deutsch, a leading Israeli numismatist.

It is very sad that we will not have the advice of Silvia for this publication. But of course, her name will appear and will serve as another memorial to her outstanding scientific career.

Zusammenfassung

Der Autor kommentiert den um 1968 auf den Markt gekommenen und ursprünglich hunderte von Silbermünzen umfassenden Hort von Nablus. Er stellt diesen dem als Hort von Samaria bekannten Schatzfund gegenüber, welcher etwa gleichzeitig aufgetaucht war, 334 Münzen umfasste und 354 v. Chr. vergraben wurde. Anders als ursprünglich vermutet handelt es sich um zwei Horte, von denen jener von Nablus etwas später, um 338/337 v. Chr., zu datieren ist. Bemerkenswert ist eine Reihe von Obolen, welche dank der aramäischen Legende „Shamrayin“ als Emissionen der persischen Provinz Samaria identifiziert werden können.

Arnold Spaer
Spaer, Sitton, Henig
8, King David street
Jerusalem 94101
Israel

⁷ ANS Annual report 1969, p. 10.

⁸ C.M. KRAAY, Recent Acquisitions, Ashmolean Museum Oxford, Annual Report 1970, p. 41.

