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Autor(en): **Gitler, Haim / Kushnir-Stein, Alla**

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HAIM GITLER, ALLA KUSHNIR-STEIN

A LATE HELLENISTIC ANONYMOUS (?)
COIN FROM SOUTH PHOENICIA

Among coins found in the excavations at Dor – the site of the ancient south Phoenician city of Dora – there was a small, partly broken bronze coin¹ (*Fig. 1*). The reverse of the coin has an upright palm branch for the central design; in the right field there is a date introduced by the sign L. The opposite side, on which no letters could be discerned, shows the prow of a galley. Meshorer read the date as LZ(MΣ), and explained that he reconstructed the two missing digits through ‘comparison of the coin to similar ones in private collections’. He registered the find as ‘anonymous city coin’.



Fig. 1 The anonymous coin from the excavations at Dor (4 gm [broken]; axis 9 o'clock).

Several new specimens of the same type, in a better state of preservation, have recently come to light. The best-preserved coin is shown in *Fig. 2*. This coin might well have been struck with the same pair of dies as the one from the excavations. The date on the coin in *Fig. 2* can be read in full: LΣMΣ (year 247), thus confirming that Meshorer’s reconstruction was correct. Meshorer counted the date from the Seleucid era of 312 BC and arrived at 65/4 BC. This is an error of one year. Year 247 by the Seleucid era equals 66/5 BC.

The Seleucid era appears to be the only one which can be reasonably suggested. The four-bar form of the sigma (Σ) points to an early period. The sign L (‘year’) gradually disappeared from local coins during the early Roman period (1st century BC – 2nd century AD). As far as we were able to trace, the use of the sign L is last attested in the Palestinian area on the coins of Sebaste struck in 198/9 AD (LCKS, i.e. ‘year 226’)². Most of local cities switched even earlier to various abbreviations of ETOYC, or gave the date without any introductory sign or word.

¹ Y. MESHORER, Coins from Areas A and C, in: Excavations at Dor, Final Report, Areas A and C: The Finds, Qedem Reports 2 (Jerusalem, 1995), pp. 461–472, no. 79.

² Y. MESHORER, City-Coins of Eretz-Israel and the Decapolis in the Roman Period (Jerusalem, 1985), nos. 116–117.



Fig. 2 Specimen with clear date LS MΣ (highlighted on the right).
In the lower right field below the prow of the galley a dotted border is visible. IM Inv. No. 16452, 6.30 gm, axis 9 o'clock.

Two further specimens of the series are shown in *Fig. 3*. It looks as if they were struck from the same pair of dies, except, perhaps, the obverse of coin 3a. It may be of interest that the die-axis of all the specimens is uniformly 9 o'clock.

There appear to be some lines along the borders of the obverse of the coin 3a, of which little can be made as regards this specific exemplar. However, this opens the possibility that this side, too, bore a legend. The fact that the date on the reverse is partly off flan on three out of the four specimens indicates that the die was larger than the flans. It is fairly likely then that the die used to imprint the obverse was also larger than the flan. But, still, the possibility that the coin was issued anonymously cannot be entirely ruled out.



Fig. 3 Left: 6.57 gm, axis 9 o'clock; right: 6.03 gm, axis 9 o'clock³.

The attribution of the series to a specific locality presents a problem. The sign L is attested in the southern Levant only for the territories that were formerly in Ptolemaic possession, namely Phoenicia south of the river Eleutherus and Palestine⁴. Meshorer suggested that it was issued by a city, which would be then one of the cities in Phoenicia, since most of the Palestinian cities were captured by the Hasmoneans a few decades previously. The type of the prow of a galley was

³ We are grateful to David Hendin for providing the images and technical data of these coins.

⁴ H. SEYRIG, *Notes on Syrian Coins*. ANSNNM 119 (New York, 1950), p. 33.

indeed popular in Phoenicia and appears on coins and weights⁵. The discovery of the coin in Dor would also support a south Phoenician location⁶.

Another possibility would be that the coins were struck by a petty local ruler. The exact year of the minting, 66/5, is of notice, as it belongs to the very last years of the Seleucid monarchy. The kingdom was in the process of disintegration for several preceding decades, with the Seleucids gradually losing control over various entities, such as cities and ethnical groups. We hear from literary sources about local 'tyrants' and chieftains, acting independently of the central Seleucid authority. After Pompey had turned the Seleucid kingdom into a Roman province in 64 BC, he tried to restore some order by eliminating most of these petty rulers⁷.

But the year of our coins' emission is 66/5 BC, before the measures taken by Pompey. Notably, coins of Ptolemy the Ituraean, issued in the same year, are also dated by the Seleucid era⁸. Ptolemy dates his subsequent coins by the years of his rule, after having been, presumably, confirmed by Pompey with an official title of tetrarch⁹.

Thus, the question of the provenance remains open. If a specimen with clearly read legend on the obverse turns up, it will, of course, tell us where the series comes from. But if the coins were issued anonymously, the only way to establish their origin would be through their discoveries in excavations. A single coin from the excavations at Dor gives us a hint, but more such finds from controlled excavations will be needed before the enigma of these coins can finally be resolved.

⁵ Coins: BMC Phoenicia (Berytus, Dora, Sidon, Tripolis). Weights: D. HENDIN, *Ancient Scale weights* (New York, 2007), no. 287; J. ELAYI – A.G. ELAYI, *Recherches sur les poids Phéniciens, Transeuphratène*, Suppl. 5 (Paris, 1997), nos. 392, 394, 396, 411; M. DUNAND – R. DURU Oumm El-'Amed (Paris, 1962), p. 175, pl. LXVIII.1; B. LIFSHITZ, *Bleigewichte aus Palästina und Syrien*, *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 92, 1976, pp. 168-187, no. 31; E. GALILI – D. SYON – G. FINKIELSZTEJN – V. SUSSMAN – G. STIEBEL, *Late Ptolemaic Bronze Coins, Weights and Bronze Artifacts from a Wreck off 'Atlit, Israel. 'Atiqot* (forthcoming).

⁶ It is widely accepted that bronze coinage was issued mainly for local use; therefore it usually circulated within a short distance from the issuing entity. See T.B. JONES, *A Numismatic Riddle: The So-Called Greek Imperials*, *Proc. American Philosophical Society* 107, 1963, pp. 313-324; R. ASHTON, *The Coins of the Macedonian Kings, Lysimachos and Eupolemos in the Museums of Fethiye and Afyon*, in: A. BURNETT – U. WARTENBERG – R. WITSCHONKE (eds.), *Coins of Macedonia and Rome: Essays in Honour of Charles Hersh* (London, 1998), pp. 44-46. For instance, the excavations at Sagalassos in Turkey yielded 85 Greek autonomous and imperial coins; 39 were from the mint of Sagalassos itself (c. 46%) and 18 were from Perge, the nearest seaport (c. 21%). See S. SCHEERS, *Coins found during 1994 and 1995*, in: M. WAELKENS, J. POBLOME (eds.), *Sagalassos IV. Report on the Survey and Excavation Campaigns of 1994 and 1995*, *Acta archaeologica Lovaniensia monographiae* 9 (Leuven, 1997), p. 338.

⁷ STRABO, XVI 2.18 (C 755); JOSEPHUS, AJ XIV 38-39.

⁸ D. HERMAN, *The Coins of the Ituraeans*, *Israel Numismatic Research* 1, 2006, pp. 58-60.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-62.

Abstract

Among coins found in the excavations at Dor there was a small, partly broken bronze coin, previously unpublished. The coin bears a date on its reverse but appears to have been issued anonymously. Several better preserved specimens of the same coin have recently come to light. They confirm Meshorer's reconstruction of the date as 'year 247' but Meshorer's Julian date for the coin is to be corrected by one year.

The coin seems to originate in south Phoenicia, but the exact place of its manufacture can possibly be established only by further discoveries in controlled excavations.

Zusammenfassung

Bei den Ausgrabungen in Dor kam eine kleine Bronzemünze mit ausgebrochenem Rand zutage. Das Stück gehört einem bisher unedierten Typ an. Auf der Rückseite kommt ein Datum vor, doch scheint es sich um eine anonyme Prägung zu handeln. Kürzlich sind einige besser erhaltene Exemplare bekannt geworden. Diese bestätigen das von Meshorer rekonstruierte Datum, das "Jahr 247", wobei Meshorers julianische Datierung der Münze allerdings um ein Jahr nach oben korrigiert werden muss.

Der Münztyp ist am ehesten in Süd-Phönizien anzusiedeln, doch wird eine genauere Zuweisung erst durch weitere Funde aus kontrollierten Ausgrabungen möglich sein.

Haim Gitler
The Israel Museum
P.O. Box 71117
IL-Jerusalem 91710
gitler@imj.org.il

Alla Kushnir-Stein
Classical Studies
Tel-Aviv University
IL-Tel-Aviv 69978
steinal@post.tau.ac.il

Key to Figures 1–3

Fig. 1 After Y. MESHORER, Coins from Areas A and C, in: Excavations at Dor, Final Report, Areas A and C: The Finds, Qedem Reports 2, Jerusalem 1995, pp. 461–472, no. 79.

Fig. 2 Israel Museum Collection, Inventory No. 16452.

Fig. 3 David Hendin Collection.