

# Two Groups of Coins from the Bar Kokhba War from Ein Gedi

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As part of a cave survey of the cliffs overlooking the western shores of the Dead Sea, we explored the area north of Ein Gedi in 2002 and 2004.<sup>1</sup> In two of the caves situated near Ein Gedi, we found coins from the Bar Kokhba period. In the first cave were discovered 11 bronze coins restruck by the Bar Kokhba administration, and a hoard of nine silver coins, including three restruck by the rebels, was discovered in the second cave. The details of these finds are given below.

## I. BRONZE COINS FROM THE HAR YSHAI CAVE

The Har Yshai cave is situated in a cliff facing the Ein Gedi field school, and borders the northern banks of Nahal David (map ref. 18730\09765). Near the entrance to the cave are remains of agricultural terraces, testifying to the fact that the place was within the irrigated area around Ein Gedi. The 2.5 m. square opening of the Har Yshai cave faces east and is about ten meters above the base of the cliff that overlooks the terraces. It had already been surveyed by G. Hadas in 1989 and had revealed pottery from the early Roman period.<sup>2</sup>

In the beginning of November 2002, a survey of the cave using a metal detector yielded 10 coins (Nos. 1–10).<sup>3</sup> In light of the survey results, it was decided to excavate the cave.<sup>4</sup> The excavations yielded two Greek papyrus documents,<sup>5</sup> a dozen arrow-heads with remains of their shafts, their front section wooden and the rest made of reeds, fragments of pottery vessels, parts of two glass vessels and a stone vessel, as well as remains of fabric and leather.

The 11 bronze coins which were found in the cave were all restruck by the rebels. Nine of the coins are of common types, with a vine leaf on the obverse and

<sup>1</sup> This survey is a joint project of the Archaeological Institute of Bar-Ilan University and the Cave Research Center of the Hebrew University and is supported by the Dead Sea Regional Research and Development Center.

<sup>2</sup> Gideon Hadas of Ein Gedi recorded the cave as number 77/25 on his survey map. The terraces below were recorded as site 77/24.

<sup>3</sup> This survey was prompted by the finding of an arrow-head below the cave, at the base of the cliff on 31 October, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> The cave was excavated on 10–13 November (Israeli Antiquities Authority's dig license G-93/2002 and Nature Parks Authorities license 676/02). All the dirt removed from the cave was sifted through a grid of 0.5×0.5 cm.

<sup>5</sup> The two Greek documents were deciphered by Dr. N. Cohen, and will be published in *Scripta Classica Israelica* 35 (2006).

a palm tree on the reverse. The other two are coins of small denomination, with a grape cluster on the obverse and a palm tree on the reverse. Eight coins (Nos. 1–3, 6–10) were hidden in the western part of the cave. It seems that these had been kept in a leather purse that had completely disintegrated, except for portions which were still preserved alongside the hoard, and as a result were found stuck together. On top of these, was found another coin (No. 5). Two coins (No. 4 and No. 11) were found in the eastern section of the cave. The eleven coins can be divided into two groups: five are of the common series from the second year of the revolt and six are of the undated series minted during the third year of the revolt, four of the medium denomination and two of the small denomination. Coin No. 10 bears the legend "El'azar the Priest". This coin was restruck over a coin that had a countermark of the Legio Sexta Ferrata.

### Catalogue (Fig. 1)

1. Æ; 20 mm.; 11.83 gr.; axis 12 (field No. 9).  
*Obv.*: seven-branch palm tree; inscription: שמעון.  
*Rev.*: Vine leaf (trifoliate); inscription: שב לחר ישראל.  
Spijkerman 1972, p. 48, Nos. 279–287; Mildenberg 1984, p. 315, No. 76.
2. Æ; 23 mm.; 10.99 gr.; axis 12 (field No. 7).  
*Obv.*: seven-branch palm tree; inscription: שמעון.  
*Rev.*: Vine leaf (trifoliate); inscription: [שב] לחר ישראל.  
Similar to No. 1.
3. Æ; 25 mm.; 11.03 gr.; axis 12 (field No. 8).  
*Obv.*: seven-branch palm tree; inscription: שמע.  
*Rev.*: Vine leaf (trifoliate); inscription: שב לחר ישראל.  
Mildenberg 1984, p. 313, No. 67.
4. Æ; 26 mm.; 9.68 gr.; axis 12 (field No. 13).  
*Obv.*: seven-branch palm tree; inscription: שמע;  
traces of original legend inside a rectangle not legible.  
*Rev.*: Vine leaf (trifoliate); inscription: [שב] לחר ישראל.  
Mildenberg 1984, p. 311, No. 56.
5. Æ; 27 mm.; 11.76 gr.; axis 12 (field No. 14).  
*Obv.*: seven-branch palm tree; inscription: שמע.  
*Rev.*: Vine leaf (trifoliate); inscription: שב לחר ישראל.  
Mildenberg 1984, p. 312, No. 61.
6. Æ; 22 mm.; 10.29 gr.; axis 12 (field No. 4).  
*Obv.*: seven-branch palm tree; inscription: [ש]מעון.  
*Rev.*: Vine leaf (five-foliate); inscription: לחרו(ת)ירו(ש)לם.  
Mildenberg 1984, p. 320, No. 103.
7. Æ; 24 mm.; 11.58 gr.; axis 12 (field No. 5).  
*Obv.*: seven-branch palm tree; inscription: שמעון.  
*Rev.*: Vine leaf (five-foliate); inscription: לחר[ר]ות [יר]ושלם.  
Mildenberg 1984, p. 326, No. 140.
8. Æ; 22 mm.; 8.80 gr.; axis 12; hole in the side of the coin (field No. 6).  
*Obv.*: seven-branch palm tree; inscription: שמעון.  
*Rev.*: Vine leaf (five-foliate); inscription: [לחרות] ירוש[לם].  
Mildenberg 1984, p. 320, No. 102.
9. Æ; 21 mm.; 10.19 gr.; axis 12 (field No. 10).  
*Obv.*: seven-branch palm tree, evidence of filing on the edges of the coin;  
inscription: שמעון.  
*Rev.*: Vine leaf (five-foliate); inscription: לחר[רות] ירוש[לם].  
Similar to No. 8.
10. Æ; 18 mm.; 6.60 gr.; axis 12 (field No. 11).  
*Obv.*: seven-branch palm tree; inscription: א[ל]עז[ר] הכהן. Under the secondary inscription is a rectangle countermark LVIF, short for Legio Sexta Ferrata.  
*Rev.*: Grape cluster, evidence of filing; inscription: [לחר]ות [ירושלם].  
Mildenberg 1984, pp. 331–2, No. 155; for the original countermark see Howgego 1985, pp. 250–1, No. 726; Barag 1967, Pl. XI, Nos. 25–6.
11. Æ; 20 mm.; 4.80 gr.; axis 12 (field No. 15).  
*Obv.*: seven-branch palm tree; inscription: שמעון.  
*Rev.*: Grape cluster; inscription: לחרות ירושל (ם).  
Mildenberg 1984, p. 333, No. 159.

On a few of the coins, it is possible to discern evidence of filing before the coins were restruck. Coin No. 10 was restruck over a coin with a countermark of the Legio Sexta Ferrata, which seems to have been originally minted in Antioch.<sup>6</sup>

Another bronze coin of the palm tree/vine leaf type was found in a small cave west of the Ein Gedi field school (N.T. 18738/09779). Its details are as follows:

Æ; 26 mm.; 12.05 gr.; axis 6 (Fig. 1:12)

*Obv.*: seven-branch palm tree; inscription: שע

<sup>6</sup> Barag suggested that coins with these countermarks were originally from the Antioch mint; see D. Barag: The Countermarks of the Legio Decima Fretensis (Preliminary Report), in A. Kindler (ed.), *International Numismatic Convention, Jerusalem 1963, The Pattern of the Monetary Development in Phoenicia and Palestine in Antiquity*, Jerusalem-Tel-Aviv, 1967, p. 121, No. 20, Pl. XI. Howgego describes twelve countermarks of this type, eleven are on coins from the Antioch mint and one on a coin of Agrippa II; see C. J. Howgego: *Greek Imperial Countermarks*, London, 1985, p. 250, No. 726.

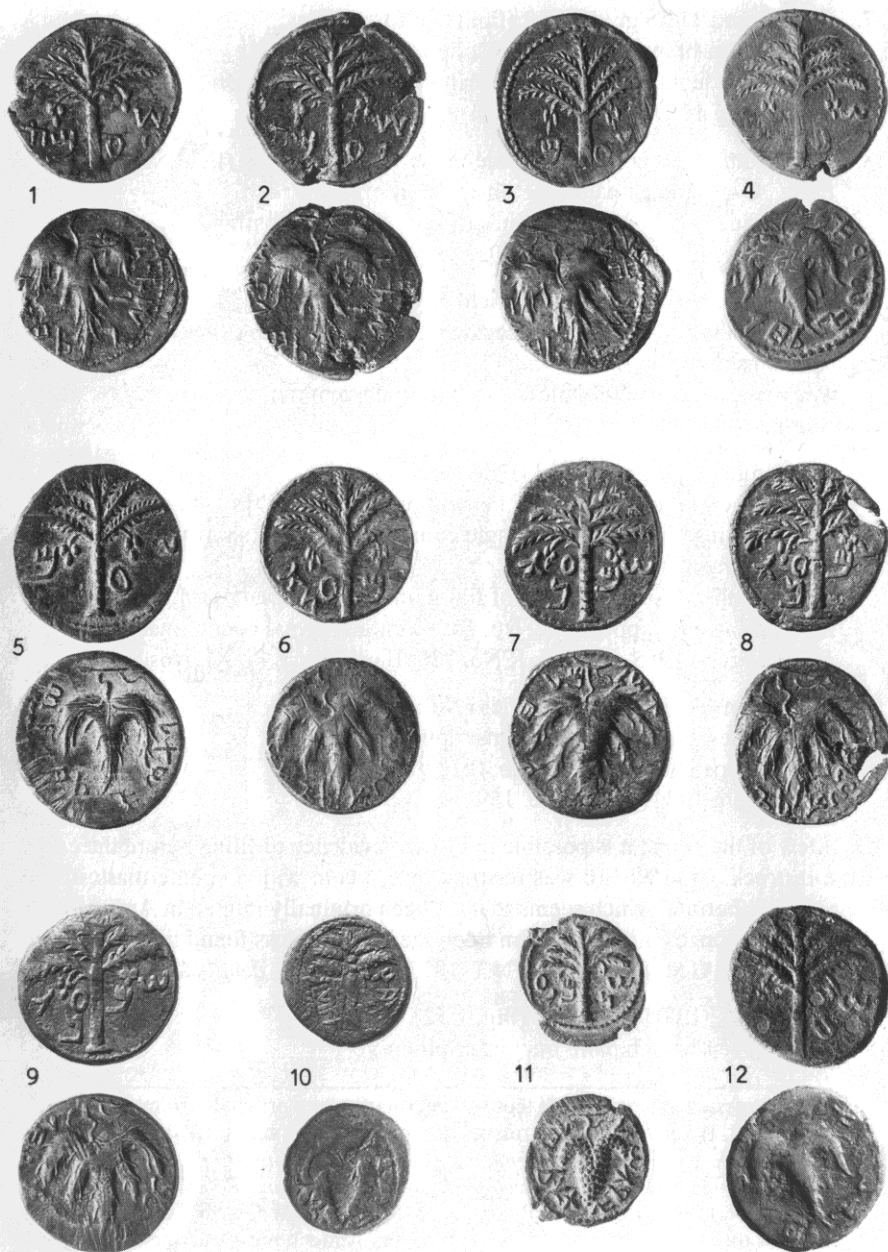


Fig. 1. Bronze coins from the Har Yshai Cave.

Rev.; Vine leaf (trifoliate); inscription: [שב] לח ישראל  
Mildenberg 1984, p. 310, No. 51

## II. SILVER COINS FROM THE ZABAR CAVE

The Zabar Cave (map ref. 18742/09786) has a small opening hidden behind a few boulders. It is about 300 m. higher and to the north of the Ein Gedi field school, less than one km. northeast of the Har Yshai Cave. The Zabar Cave is located on the northern edge of a cliff, about 170 m. long, which contains a number of caves. On its southern edge is a spring beside which two pools and several agricultural terraces were built. The cave is 6 m. long, the first part a low tunnel of approx. 2 m. long, 1 m. wide and 0.5 m. high. The continuation of the cave widens into a cavity of about 2.5 m. in width and 1 m. in height. In the center of the cave, under a large stone which seems to have been placed there on purpose, at a depth of about 20 cm., was a hoard of nine silver coins which were apparently wrapped in a purse of cloth, which had almost completely disintegrated over time except for a few remains.<sup>7</sup> The coins were found against each other, covered by a layer of green weathering. There were no other finds in the cave. Three of the coins, a tetradrachm and two denarii, were restruck by the Bar Kokhba administration, all three undated and thus dating from the third year of the revolt. The other six coins are Roman denarii which had not been restruck. They include a denarius of Vespasian, a denarius of Nerva, a denarius of Trajan, two drachmae of the Provincia Arabia minted in Bostra during Trajan's reign, and a denarius of Hadrian.

### Catalogue (Fig. 2)

1. AR; 27 mm.; 14.72 gr.; axis 1.  
*Obv.*: Tetrastyle façade of the Temple with fluted columns; rosette above the architrave; inscription: שמעון.  
 Traces of a wing of an eagle is discernible under the temple façade.  
*Rev.*: The four species; inscription: לחרות ירושלם. Traces of the emperor's head of the original minting are still discernible.  
 Mildenberg 1984, p. 141, Nos. 46–47.
2. AR; 19 mm.; 3.14 gr.; axis 1.  
*Obv.*: Grape cluster; inscription: [שמעון].  
 The letters –VI CENS from the original minting are still visible.  
*Rev.*: Lulav surrounded by a wreath; inscription: לח[ו]ת ירושלם.  
 The letters –MIT from the original minting are still visible, from the

<sup>7</sup> The cave and the coins were found by Ro'İ Porat, Ro'İ Zabar and Jonathan Uriel.



Fig. 2. Silver coins from the Zabar Cave.

abbreviation of the name Domitian DOMIT. From what is visible on the obverse, it seems that this denarius was first struck in 92/3 C.E. when Domitian was consul for the 16th time.

Mildenberg 1984, p. 261, No. 171.

3.  $\mathcal{A}$ ; 19 mm.; 2.59 gr.; axis 6.

*Obv.*: Grape cluster; inscription: שמעון.

*Rev.*: Lyre with wooden sound box; inscription: לחרות ירושלם.

Mildenberg, 1984, pp. 264–5, No. 181.

4.  $\mathcal{A}$ ; 19 mm.; 2.59 gr.; axis 1.

*Obv.*: Head of Vespasian, laureate, facing right;  
inscription: IMP CAESAR VESPASIAN[VS A]VG.

*Rev.*: Pax seated left, right hand holding leaf, left hand on lap;  
inscription: PO[T] M[AX] TR P COS VI; to the left appears a graffito of three letters: *IYLI* or *πλι*, apparently the beginning of a personal name (Fig. 3).<sup>8</sup>

RPC II, p. 30, No. 161, Pl. 4: 20.



Fig. 3. Coin No. 4 from the Zabar Cave.

5.  $\mathcal{A}$ ; 18 mm.; 3.28 gr.; axis 6; year 97 C.E.

*Obv.*: Head of Nerva, laureate, facing right;  
inscription: IMP NERVA CAES AVG PM TR P COS III PP.

*Rev.*: Three cultic vessels; inscription: COS III PATER PATRIA.

RPC II, p. 5, Nos. 33–5, Pl. 1: 18.

6.  $\mathcal{A}$ ; 19 mm.; 2.82 gr.; axis 6; dated between 112–117 C.E.

*Obv.*: Head of Trajan, laureate, facing right;  
inscription: IMP TRAIANO AVG GER DAC P M TR P COS VI P P.

*Rev.*: Trajan (statue) on horse standing left, right forefoot raised, holding long spear in right hand and sword in left hand;  
inscription: S. P. Q. R. OPTIMO PRINCIPI.

RPC II, p. 93, Nos. 445–6, Pl. 16: 18.

<sup>8</sup> We wish to thank Haim Gitler for noticing the graffito.

7. *AR*; 17 mm.; 2.97 gr.; axis 6; dated 112 C.E.  
*Obv.*: Head of Trajan, laureate, facing right;  
 inscription: AYTOKP KAIC NEP [TPAIAN CEB ΓEP]M ΔAK.  
*Rev.*: Arab woman, draped, standing facing front to left of camel;  
 inscription: ΔΗΜΑΡΧ[ΕΞΙΗ ΥΠΙΑΤς].  
 Meshorer 1981, No. 1156.
8. *AR*; 17 mm.; 3.04 gr.; axis 6; dated to 113/4 C.E.  
*Obv.*: Head of Trajan, laureate, facing right;  
 inscription: AYTOKP KAIC NEP TPAIAN ΔAK[ΓΕΡM] ΔAK.  
*Rev.*: Arab woman, draped, standing facing front to left of camel;  
 inscription: ΗΔΗΜΑΡΧ .ΕΞΙΗ. ΥΠΙΑ[Τς].  
 Meshorer 1981, No. 1157.
9. *AR*; 20 mm.; 3.42 gr.; axis 6; dated 112 C.E.  
*Obv.*: Head of Hadrian, laureate, facing right;  
 inscription: HADRIANVS AVGVS TVS P P.  
*Rev.*: Pudicitia seated left, holding right hand before face, left hand on lap;  
 inscription: COS III.  
 RPC II, p. 301, Nos. 491–5, Pl. 56: 9.

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