

Jewish Coinage

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The Hebrews are the foundation of western civilization. The Abrahamic peoples of Asia, Africa, Europe and America share a common literate tradition stretching back 5000 years or more. Oddly enough, it was only in the last 25 years that we have sorted out the details of Judean coinage.

The Jews were captive in Babylon when coins were invented. Before that time, the shekel and minah were only weighed quantities of bullion metal. When the Hebrews returned to their homeland, they came into a world that was monetized on silver coinage. Having their eyes on heaven, with modest Earthly aspirations, the Jews had little need of coinage. After all, coins carried the graven images of pagan Greek gods.

Persian coins with the word "Ye-hu-da" first appeared about 350 BCE. However, the first truly Judeic coins were struck from 138 BCE by John Hyrcanus. These carry only the image of a lily and an anchor. The last Judean coins were issued in the year 135 of the current era during the failed Second Revolt of Simon Bar Kochbar.

In the late 1800s, Jewish scholars misattributed these Bar Kochbar coins, assigning them to the time of Simon Maccabees about 175 BCE. This misattribution was accepted by all scholars until the mid-1970s. The current authority is David Hendin whose book on Biblical coinage puts ancient Judeic money into a new perspective. His work rests on the research of Ya'akov Meshorer in the 1930s. Meshorer's opus, *The Bible in Numismatics (Matbe'ot he-Yehudim bi-yeme Bayit Sheni)*, published in Tel-Aviv in 1935, was the first complete catalogue of Judaic coinage.

The ancient Jews struck plentiful quantities of small bronze. Today, you can find them in average condition for five to twenty dollars. However, the beautiful and rare silver coins of the Bar Kochbar Revolt usually carry price tags in the thousands of dollars.