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The Coins from Naṣr ed-Din, near Tiberias

Danny Syon[1]

The coins found in the excavation at Naṣr ed-Din tell of two peaks of settlement at the site: in the second century BCE and in the second century CE. The coins suggest that the site became Jewish in the first century BCE, was reduced or abandoned in the first century CE and revived in the second century CE, still as a Jewish village. The numismatic evidence does not support the identification of the site with Bet Ma'on, mentioned by Josephus and in the Talmud; however, one must consider that the site is large and the data presented here pertain only to the limited area that was excavated.

Keywords: numismatics, coins, Galilee

Introduction

The excavation at Naṣr ed-Din (see Avshalom-Gorni, Leibner and Ben Nahum, this volume) yielded 66 coins, 56 of which were identifiable. Most coins were worn from much use and poorly preserved. The chronological range of the identified coins (see *Catalogue*; Fig. 1) spans the second century BCE and the third century CE. The two Islamic coins found probably represent stray finds dropped by passers-by. The largest group dates from the second century CE—apparently the floruit of the site (Fig. 2).

The Coins

Most coins are of types often found in Galilee, some very common. Represented are the Seleucid dynasty, the Hasmoneans, the Herodians and Rome, the latter mostly through provincial coins (city coins; Fig. 3). The coin of Judah Aristobulos (105–104 BCE; Cat. No. 13) is rare but joins 38 other coins of this ruler found in Galilee, suggesting a sizeable Jewish presence in the region before the campaigns of Alexander Yanai (Jannaeus) in the 80s BCE. These campaigns are commonly considered as marking the attachment of Galilee to the Hasmonean state, i.e., the beginning of the Jewish settlement there (Syon 2015:161–165).

[1] Dr. Danny Syon, Israel Antiquities Authority.

Fig. 1. Selected coins.

Nabatean coins are rare in Galilee (Syon 2015:192–193); the one found in the excavation (Cat. No. 21) joins three others found in Tiberias.

The Roman provincial coins derive from 11 different cities (Fig. 4); most from nearby Tiberias, followed by Ẓippori. Coins of these cities are the most common in the Jewish settlements of Galilee in the second century CE, possibly also since these cities were under a Jewish council at the time (Syon 2015:204–206). Coins of Tyre are commonly found all over Palestine, and coins of the neighboring Decapolis cities of Hippos, Gadara and Skythopolis are regularly found in the region.

The coin of Petra (Cat. No. 50) is the only Roman provincial coin from the third century CE, daing far later than all the others. Coins of Petra, as well as coins of Aelia Capitolina (Jerusalem; Cat. No. 45), are rarely found in rural Galilee (Syon 2015:207–209, 224).

Silver coins as single finds and not as part of a hoard are not commonly found in excavations. The three silver coins (Cat. Nos. 2, 51, 52) perhaps indicate a prosperous settlement during the second century BCE and the second century CE.

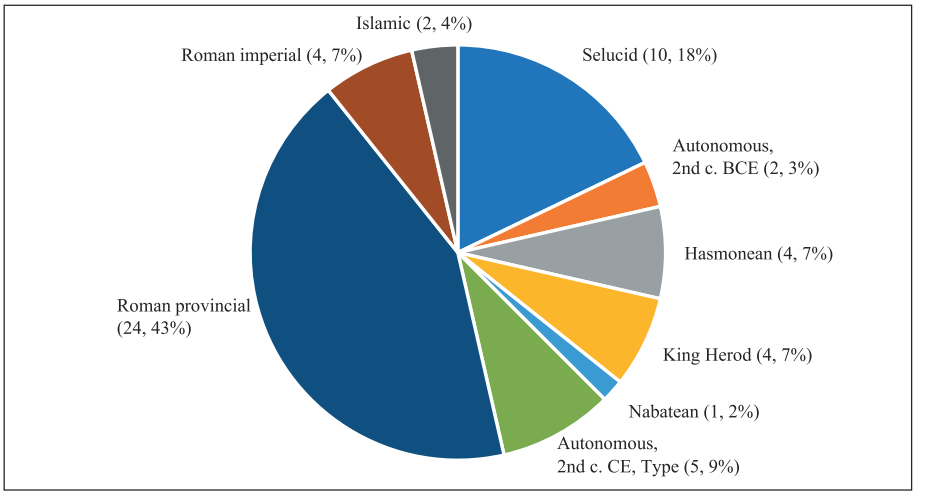

Fig. 2. Distribution of coins according to minting authority.

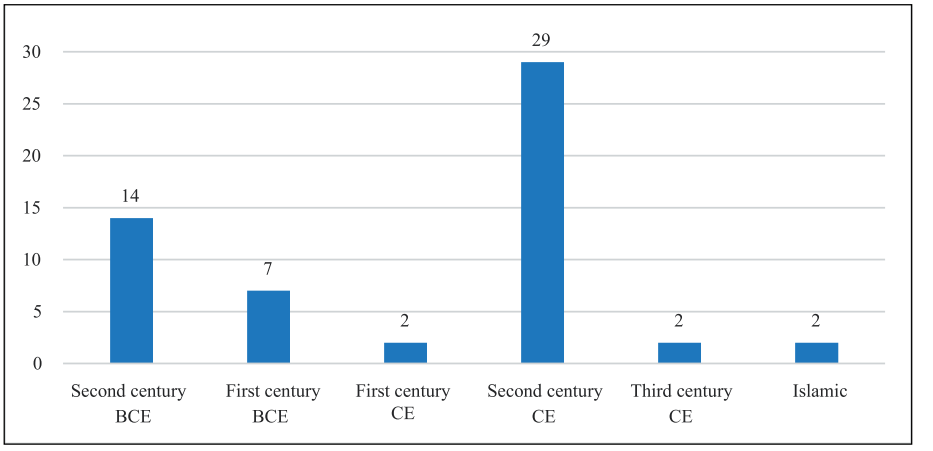

Fig. 3. Chronological distribution of the coins.

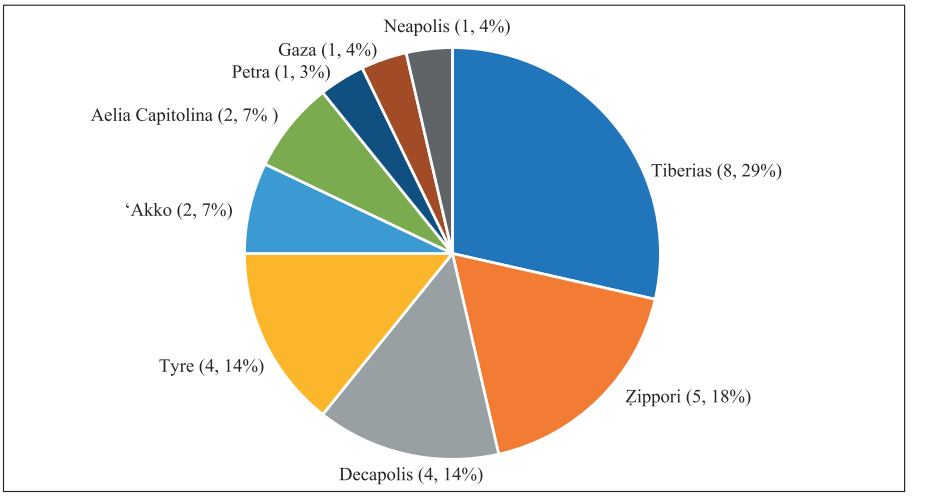

Fig. 4. Distribution of Roman provincial coins according to mint.

CATALOGUE[i]

Cat. No.	Locus	Basket	Weight (g)	Diam. (mm)	Axis	Obverse	Reverse	Date	Mint	Reference	Notes	IAA No.
Antiochus IV (175–164 BCE)												
1	130	1303	2.62	14	↑	Head of king r., radiate. To left, 𐤀	ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ [ΑΝΤΙΟΧΟΥ] Figure facing holding long scepter in l.		ʻAkko	*SC* II/I:92, No. 1479	Serrated edge	82844
Alexander I Balas, silver *drachm*												
2*	226	1612	2.93	17	↑	Diademed head of king r.	[ΒΑΣΙΛ]ΕΩΣ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔ[ΡΟΥ] Eagle to l. on ship's ram. To left: 𐤀, to right, date ϹΞΡ; beneath, 𐤁	147/6 BCE	Tyre	*SC* II/I:241, No. 1837(2)		82845
Demetrius II? (145–138 BCE)												
3	160	1224	2.57	12	↑	Diademed head of king r.	[ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΔΗΜ]ΗΤΡ[ΙΟΥ] Palm tree with fruit; date Θ[ΞΡ]	144/3? BCE	Tyre	*SC* II/I:304, No. 1970(3)		82846
Seleucid (Second Century BCE)												
4	W258	1905	6.25	20	↑	Traces of head r.	[---] Stern of galley. Central cavity		Tyre?	Cf. *SC* II/I:19, No. 1323(3)		82856
5	138	1471	0.79	11	↑	Traces of head r. Central cavity	[---] Apollo seated on omphalos		Antioch	Cf. *SC* II/I:96, No. 1490		82855
6	W262	1963	2.35	14	↑	Head of king r.	[---] Palm tree with fruit. To r. part of date: ΞΡ		Tyre			82848
7	238	1713	2.79	13		Same	[---] Traces of palm tree? Central cavity		Tyre?			82851
8	111	1065	2.46	15	↑	Same	Same		Tyre			82854
9	225	1676	1.91	13	↑	Same	Same		Tyre			82850
10	235	1776	2.11	13		Same	Same		Tyre			82853
Seleucid or Autonomous (c. 145–98 BCE)												
11	162	1214	1.24	12	↑	Head of king r.	Palm tree with fruit		Tyre			82849
12	166	1250	1.45	13		Same	Traces of palm tree?		Tyre?			82852

[i] Coins marked with an asterisk appear in Fig. 1.

Catalogue (cont.)

Cat. No.	Locus	Basket	Weight (g)	Diam. (mm)	Axis	Obverse	Reverse	Date	Mint	Reference	Notes	IAA No.
Hasmoneans												
Judah Aristobulos (105–104 BCE)												
13	216	1797	2.45	14	↗	In wreath: יהוד/ה כהן ג[ד]/ול/ וחב/הי	Joined cornucopias with pomegranate between the horns		Jerusalem	*TJC*:217, Group U		82857
Alexander Yanai (104–76 BCE)												
14*	183	1324	2.19	14		ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩ[Σ ΑΛΕΞ] ΑΝΔΡΟΥ Anchor	Eight-pointed star with remains of an inscription between rays		Jerusalem	*TJC*:209, Group K		82858
15	175	1447	1.37	14		Same	Same		Same	Same		82860
16	249	1784	0.93	14		Same	Same		Same		Part of the die is off flan	82861
Herodians												
Herod (37–4 BCE)												
17	185	1312	0.98	13	↓	HPW [BACI] Anchor	Joined cornucopias with caduceus between the horns		Jerusalem	*TJC*:222, No. 59		82862
18	122	1121	1.62	14	↘	Same	Same		Same	Same		82859
19*	185	1307	1.02	13	↑	Traces of a cornucopia within border of dots	[---]ΡωΔ[---] Eagle r.; to l., pellet		Jerusalem	*TJC*:223, No. 65		82863
20*	211	1591	1.14	13		HP BA Cross	Anchor within circle		Jerusalem	*TJC*:222, No. 54 (obv.); 223, No. 61 (rev.)	Hybrid type	82864
Nabatean												
Malichus II (40–70 CE)												
21	185	1378	2.46	17	↑	Head of king r.	Traces of joined cornucopias with Nabatean inscription in between the horns		Petra	Barkay 2019:121, No. 212		82871

CATALOGUE (cont.)

Cat. No.	Locus	Basket	Weight (g)	Diam. (mm)	Axis	Obverse	Reverse	Date	Mint	Reference	Notes	IAA No.
Autonomous												
Autonomous Tyre												
22	227	1611	2.70	14	↑	Head r.	Palm tree with fruit. Details obliterated	125–98 BCE	Tyre	Cf. Syon 2008:300, Table 1		82847
23*	233	1671	3.97	15	↑	Head of Tyche r., veiled, wearing turreted crown. To l., palm branch	ΙΕΡΑϒ̶ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙϹ Palm tree; date ZM–C	121/2 CE	Tyre	*BMC Phoen.*:266, No. 348		82869
24*	104	1020	1.30	14	↑	Head of Tyche r., veiled, wearing turreted crown	ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛḘẆϹ Palm tree. To l. unclear symbol	2nd c. CE?	Tyre		Imitation?	82870
25	225	1594	0.91	13	↑	Same	[---] Palm tree	Same	Tyre		Very crude; possibly an imitation	82867
26	249	1961	0.47	11		Same	[---] Same	Same	Tyre?		Very crude; possibly an imitation	82868
Roman Provincial												
Trajan (98–117 CE)												
27	164	1305	13.85	22	↑	Head of emperor r.	Wreath with illegible inscription		Ẓippori	*CHL*:68, No. 1	Very worn	82874
28	253	1804	8.16	23	↑	Same	Palm tree flanked by the inscription: ΣΕΠ-ΦΟ/ΡΗ-ΝΩΝ		Ẓippori	*CHL*:68, No. 2	Very worn	82872
29	233	1654	7.51	23	↑	Same	Same		Ẓippori	Same	Very worn	82873

CATALOGUE (cont.)

Cat. No.	Locus	Basket	Weight (g)	Diam. (mm)	Axis	Obverse	Reverse	Date	Mint	Reference	Notes	IAA No.
Trajan or Hadrian (98–138 CE)												
30	225	1711	8.86	25		Traces of bust r. Countermark: thunderbolt(?) in rectangular punch	Completely worn		ʻAkko		For a similar countermark on a coin of ʻAkko, see Howgego 1985:195, No. 474	82893
31	183	1425	4.52	18		Traces of bust r.	Completely worn		Tiberias? Ẓippori?			82876
Hadrian (117–138 CE)												
32	225	1677	7.15	24	↑	[IMP] TRAI HADR[IANO CAES] Bust of emperor r.	DIVOS [C]LAUDI Foundation ceremony of the colony with founder behind ox and cow. In background, four legionary standards		ʻAkko	*CHL*:11, Nos. 137, 138	Very worn	82896
33	Surface	1540	9.91	24	↑	[AYT TPA AΔPIANW KAIC CEB] Bust of emperor r.	[TIBEP... KΛA]YΔ Tetrastyle temple with pediment; within, Zeus seated on throne r. holding a scepter. Below: ET AP	120 CE	Tiberias	*CHL*:71, No. 10	Very worn	82889
34	253	1803	12.61	25	↑	Same	Same	Same	Tiberias	Same	Very worn	82892
35	166	1245	9.09	22	↑	Same; worn countermark	TIBE[---] Same	Same	Tiberias	Same	Very worn	82888
36	183	1426	7.95	24	↑	Same	Same	Same	Tiberias	Same	Very worn	82890
37	121	1181	6.69	23	↑	Same? Countermark: profile with pointed beard	Same	Same	Tiberias	Same		82891

CATALOGUE (cont.)

Cat. No.	Locus	Basket	Weight (g)	Diam. (mm)	Axis	Obverse	Reverse	Date	Mint	Reference	Notes	IAA No.
38*	108	1009	2.57	13	↑	Traces of bust r.	Galley to l. Above, TIBE/(K)ΛA, below: [LA]P	Same	Tiberias	Cf. *CHL*:71, No. 13		82875
39	253	1924	4.37	18	↑	[AY TPA AΔPI] ANω[KAIC CEB] Bust of emperor r.	[---] Nike facing	Same	Tiberias	Cf. *CHL*:71, No. 12	Very worn	82866
40	121	1069	5.02	18	↑	Same	Same	Same	Tiberias	Same		82885
Antoninus Pius (138–161 CE)												
41	164	1306	6.11	21	↑	[…]KAI[..]ANT–WNINOC[EY] Bust of emperor r.	ΔIO[KAI IЄP ACY]AYTO Hera holding patera		Ẓippori	*CHL*:68, No. 8		82886
42	249	1798	10.74	25	↑	AYT KAI•ANT–ωNINωC [CЄB] Bust of emperor r., laureate	ΔIOKAI IЄP ACY AYTO Tetrastyle temple with central arch; within, figure holding a scepter		Ẓippori	*CHL*:68, No. 6		82880
43*	225	1693	10.73	22	↑	[AYTO]KP ANTWNI[NO-CEB EYCE] Traces of bust of emperor r.	[NYC]AE CYP Dionysos facing, head r. chlamis over shoulder, holding scepter in l. and thyrsos in r.; panther at his feet		Skythopolis	Cf. *CHL*:183, No. 15		82883
44	225	1675	6.00	23	↓	[---] Traces of bust r.	[---] Head of Tyche r., veiled, wearing turreted crown		Gaza	Cf. *CHL*:117, Nos. 81–100		82884
45	225	1694	8.22	22	↑	[IMP CAES HAD ANTONINVS AVG PP] Bust of emperor r.	[M ANT AVRELIV-S CAES VERVS COL AEL CAP] Bust of Marcus Aurelius r.	138 CE	Aelia Capitolina	Cf. *CHL*:81, No. 12	Very worn	82879

CATALOGUE (cont.)

Cat. No.	Locus	Basket	Weight (g)	Diam. (mm)	Axis	Obverse	Reverse	Date	Mint	Reference	Notes	IAA No.
Marcus Aurelius (161–180 CE)												
46*	160	1201	12.27	24	↑	AYT KAIC M AYR-ANTωNEINOC Bust of emperor r., laureate	ΓΑΔΑ- PЄΩN•ΔKC Laureate head of Herakles r.	160/1 CE	Gadara	*CHL*:165, No. 37		82878
47	W218	1955	8.94	21	↑	[---] Bust of emperor r.	[---] Tyche standing l., holding wreath. To left, ЄT		Neapolis	Cf. *CHL*:52, No. 44		82882
Lucius Verus (161–166 CE)												
48	E12	1071	9.03	23	↑	Bust of emperor r.	Dionysos l., leaning on scepter and holding thyrsos in r. hand		Skythopolis	Cf. *CHL*:184, No. 20		82881
Second Century CE												
49	266	1954	5.81	24	↑	Traces of bust r.; worn	Horse l.; behind, Tyche		Hippos	Cf. *CHL*:175, No. 11		82877
Julia Domna (193–217 CE)												
50	128	1124	4.91	23	↑	Bust of empress r.	Distyle temple with pediment; within, figure leaning on altar, holding sacred stone in r. and a trophy(?) or cornucopia(?) in l.	c. 217 CE	Petra	*CHL*:193, No. 36		82887
Roman Imperial **Vespasian (69–79 CE), silver *denarius***												
51*	Surface	1830	3.03	19	↓	[IMP CAESAR VE]SPA-SIANVS AVG Bust of emperor r.	PON MAX TRP COS VI Pax standing l. holding branch	75 CE	Rome	*RIC* II/1[rev.]:114, No. 772		82894

CATALOGUE (cont.)

Cat. No.	Locus	Basket	Weight (g)	Diam. (mm)	Axis	Obverse	Reverse	Date	Mint	Reference	Notes	IAA No.
Trajan (98–117 CE), silver *tetradrachm*												
52*	112	1032	14.04	25	↓	AYTOKP KAIC NЄP TRAIA-NOC CEB ΓЄPM Head of emperor r.	ΔHMAPX Є YΠAT B Eagle l. with wings spread, standing on wheat stalk, wreath in beak	99–98 CE	Antioch	Prieur and Prieur 2000: No. 1490		82895
Trajan, *quadrans*												
53	121	1092	2.16	15	↓	[---] Head of Hercules r.	Boar. Below, *SC*		Rome	*RIC* II/1:294, No. 702	Very worn	82865
Maximianus Herculius (285–295 CE)												
54	247	1829	3.92	21	↘	IMP CM A MAXIMIANVS PF AVG Bust of emperor r.	IOVI ET HERCV CONSER AVGG Hercules receiving Victory on globe from Jupiter. In field, U/Δ. In ex., XXI		Antioch	*RIC* V/II:294, No. 622		82897
Islamic **Abbasid (Eighth Century CE)**												
55	166	1203	1.85	18	↘	Traces of Arabic inscription: ضرب...	Traces of Arabic inscription: محمد...		Ramla or Tiberias	Cf. *SNAT* 1993:14, No. 80		82898
Ez-Zahir Ghazi (Ayyubid)												
56	121	1178	3.00	22	↗	[ضر]–ب \ [الم]لك الظاهر \ [بحلب]– سنه	تسع – [ثمانين] \ الامام الناصر \ وحمس – [مايه]	1193/4 CE	Ḥalab	Cf. Balog 1980:213, No. 661		82899

Summary and Discussion: The Coins in Context and Site Identification

The coins point to two periods of prosperity at the settlement: the second century BCE, evidenced by 12 Seleucid and Autonomous coins, and the second century CE (Fig. 3). Unfortunately, in many of the loci in which coins were found, the coins were of a wide chronological range that could not be meaningfully compared with the pottery in the same locus. Therefore, the following relates to the entire excavated area and not to individual structures.

The latest datable second-century BCE coin (Cat. No. 22) was minted in 125–98 BCE. The first century BCE is represented by eight coins of the Hasmoneans and King Herod. This, and the lack of other first-century BCE coins, strongly indicate a Jewish settlement at the site, no later than the early first century BCE, and perhaps as early as the days of Judah Aristobulos (105–104 BCE). This might be indicative of the replacement of a gentile population by a Jewish one in the Hasmonean period, as part of the Jewish settlement process of the Galilee at this time, discussed lately in the literature (Leibner 2021; Syon 2021).

The numismatic evidence does not support the identification of the site with Bet Ma‘on (contra Avshalom-Gorni, Leibner and Ben Nahum, this volume), as the coin finds dating from the periods when Bet Ma‘on is mentioned in the literature—the first and third–fourth centuries CE—are meager, or absent. The following points should be noted:

(1) The complete absence of the later coins of Alexander Yanai (*TJC*, Group L), coins of Agrippa I and the Roman governors—all very common in first-century Galilee (Syon 2015:174–177)—is remarkable. Also surprising is the absence of coins of Agrippa II, minted in large numbers in Tiberias in the last quarter of the first century CE. This absence ostensibly points to the shrinking of the site or its abandonment in the late first century BCE and the first century CE. However, Josephus (*Life* 12) explicitly mentions Bet Ma‘on as a village involved in the First Jewish Revolt in the first century CE.

(2) From the end of the Mishnaic and the beginning of the Talmudic periods (the third century CE), only two coins were found, one from the beginning of the century and one from its end (Cat. Nos. 50, 54, respectively). No coins of the fourth century were found. This is at variance with the mentions of Bet Ma‘on in the Talmud and the *midrashim*, referring to it as a village (see Avshalom-Gorni, Leibner and Ben Nahum, this volume). In contrast, the second century CE—the period of the Mishna—is exceptionally well-represented by the coins, although Bet Ma‘on is not mentioned in the Mishnah (with the caveat that some of its mentions in the Talmud may well refer to the time of the Mishnah).

In spite of these conclusions, one must consider that Naṣr ed-Din is a large site, and the data presented here pertain only to the limited area that was excavated. The survey conducted at the site previously by Leibner (2009:286–296) showed that the site was settled in the Early Roman and Byzantine periods, for which coins are near absent or absent, although the Early Roman period is well-represented in the pottery and glass finds from the excavation (see Katsnelson, this volume).

The absence of fourth-century CE coins is notable, supporting the survey conclusions. Fourth-century coins are the most ubiquitous coin finds anywhere, and had any part of the site been settled in this century, current coins would be expected to be found even in areas uninhabited at the time. Likewise, no Ottoman coins turned up, although part of the site was inhabited at the time.

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