

Gaza coinage dated LIC : a reappraisal

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GAZA COINAGE DATED LIC – A REAPPRAISAL*

Plate 2

There are three rare coin types from Gaza on which the same date, LIC, has been read. The chronology of two of these types was discussed by G.F. Hill in the BMC volume on Palestine, which appeared in 1914;¹ the third type was first published in 1939, after its discovery in the excavations at Samaria.² The initial assumption in all three cases was that the date consists of a *iota* and a *sigma* and signifies «year 210». The Seleucid era (312 B.C.) was suggested as the starting point of the reckoning in two instances, while the Roman era of Gaza (61 B.C.) was proposed for the third. Thus two coins were dated 103/2 B.C. and the other 149/50 A.D.

None of these dates may be final. On two types – no. 6–7 in BMC and the coin from Samaria – the very reading LIC is uncertain. No. 6–7 in BMC has a head of Zeus on the obverse and a standing female figure on the reverse; the legend of the reverse consists of ΔΗΜΟΥ ΓΑΖΑΙΩΝ and ΙΕΡΑΣ (Plate 2, 1 A–B). As the photographs in BMC, pl. XV, clearly show, the date (placed in the lower right field of the reverse) could not have been properly read on either of the two specimens in the British Museum. This is also obvious from the catalogue, where the last numeral is indicated by dotted lines, showing that it is a restoration. In note 2 on p. lxx, Hill mentions a similar coin from Paris, where the date was also read by him as LIC; here too, the lower bar of the last digit is shown by a dotted line. All that could have been seen on this specimen were the letters LIT.

Hill interpreted the date as «year 210» of the Seleucid era and assigned the coin to 103/2 B.C. On the face of it, the dating seems most suitable. The legend ΔΗΜΟΥ ΓΑΖΑΙΩΝ, characteristic of Gaza issues from the second century B.C., points to the Hellenistic period;³ similar formulae are also found on contemporary coins of neighbouring Ascalon⁴ and elsewhere in the Seleucid kingdom.⁵ Since the

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¹ BMC Palestine, pp. lxx, 144, nos. 6–7 (pl. XV, 4–5), 9 (pls. XV, 7, XLI, 8).

² J. Baramki, Coins in the Palestine Archaeological Museum. III, Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine (QDAP) 8, 1939, p. 79, pl. XLI, 10; J.S. Kirkman, The Evidence of the Coins, in J.W. Crowfoot, G.M. Crowfoot, K.M. Kenyon, The Objects from Samaria (London 1957), pp. 53 and 66.

³ BMC Palestine, p. 143, nos. 1–5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 105 (no. 7, pl. XI, 13), liv–lv (pl. XL, 18).

⁵ BMC Galatia, etc., pp. 151–152, nos. 1–11.

Hellenistic period ends in Gaza around 98 B.C., with the capture of the city by the Hasmonean ruler Alexander Jannaeus,⁶ the coin would have been produced before this date. At the same time, it seems to be the latest of the Hellenistic issues of Gaza. It was struck on an ordinary flan, whereas all other coins of the city from the second century B.C. have a bevelled edge. The titles IEPA KAI AΣYΛOΣ («sacred and inviolable») appear here for the first time, thus further suggesting that the coin is later than the rest. The latest among the types with bevelled edge appears to have been the undated series showing a head of Zeus on the obverse and two cornucopiae, surrounded by the legend $\Delta\text{HMOY ΓAZAIΩN}$, on the reverse.⁷ Since production of this type began before the last decade of the second century B.C.,⁸ the placing of our coin at a slightly later date, in 103/2 B.C., seems to satisfy all the requirements.

There remains, however, one moot point. The attribution of the numerical value of 200 to a sign resembling a three-bar *sigma* does not go well with the period in question. At the end of the second century B.C. the numeral 200 was normally represented by a four-bar *sigma* (Σ),⁹ while the sign resembling three-bar *sigma* (C) meant *digamma*, i.e. the numeral 6.¹⁰ It is true that one finds a square three-bar *sigma* or even a rounded *sigma* in some coin legends from the second century B.C.,¹¹ but contemporary use of these forms of *sigma* as numbers has yet to be demonstrated. To claim an exception in our case is all the more difficult, given that the *sigma* in AΣY just above the date has four bars.

Therefore, even if the reading LIC had been confirmed, the most likely meaning of it would have been «year 16».¹² It appears, however, that the date should really be read as LIF (year 13). That is what Hill actually saw on the coin from Paris and

⁶ C. Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researches in Palestine*, vol. II (London 1896), p. 247.

⁷ BMC Palestine, p. 143, nos. 1–3.

⁸ Coins of this type were found in the Hellenistic strata of Ashdod, the city destroyed by Hyrcanus I : A. Berman, *The Coins*, in M. Dothan, *Ashdod II–III*, Atiqot, Eng. ser. IX–X (Jerusalem 1971), p. 207, no. 7 (3 coins). Bronze issues of Gaza with the same reverse type and the portrait of a king named Antiochus were attributed to Antiochus VII (139–129 B.C.) : S. Ben-Dor, *Some New Seleucid Coins*, II, *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 80, 1948, pp. 62–63, fig. 2 (2).

⁹ E.T. Newell, *Late Seleucid Mints at Ake-Ptolemais and Damascus*, ANS NNM 84 (New York 1939), no. 106 ff; A. Spaer, *Ascalon: From Royal Mint to Autonomy*, in *Studies in Honor of Leo Mildenberg*, A. Houghton et al., eds. (Wetteren 1984), nos. 16–48 (Σ – $\Theta\Sigma$, 113/2 – 104/3 B.C.).

¹⁰ A. Houghton, *Coins of the Seleucid Empire from the Collection of Arthur Houghton* (New York 1983), 823 (Ascalon, 117/6 B.C.); SNG Fitzwilliam Museum, part VIII, 5794 (Sidon, 117/6 B.C.). For a similar *digamma* on Ptolemaic coins: SNG Cop. 611 (Ptolemy X Alexander, «year 6», 109/8 B.C.).

¹¹ C. Lambert, *Coins in the Palestine Museum*, QDAP 1, 1932, p. 70, pl. 37,1 (Ascalon, 147/6 B.C.); SNG ANS Palestine – South Arabia, 905 (Gaza, 148/7 B.C.).

¹² T.E. Mionnet, *Description de médailles antiques, grecques et romaines* (Paris 1806–1837), vol. V, p. 535 no. 109 («LIC pro IS, an 16»).

what can be discerned on a few other well preserved specimens (*Plate 2, 1 A–B*). *No. 1a* on *Plate 2* shows the enlarged reverse of one such coin.¹³ The date ΛΙΓ would imply a starting point for the reckoning some time in the last quarter of the second century B.C. The only alternative, which is to count the date from the Roman era of Gaza (61 B.C.), may be safely discarded, since, as we saw above, the legend of the coin would favour its assignment to the Hellenistic period. There are also a few coins with early dates referring to this era which are entirely different in style and the form of legends.¹⁴

This previously unattested dating system of Gaza may be of historical importance. We know of several cities within the Seleucid kingdom which also changed over to new systems of time-reckoning around this period. In all recorded instances, this change followed a grant of autonomy to the city, so that the year of the grant replaced the Seleucid era of 312 B.C. as the new starting point of time-reckoning.¹⁵ Thus the most likely origin of the era on our coin would be the grant of autonomy to Gaza by one of the late Seleucids. The absence from the coin of the actual word ΑΥΤΟΝΟΜΟΣ is not in itself problematic, for we have examples of some autonomous cities that never displayed this title on their coinage.¹⁶ The autonomy of Gaza is mentioned on an inscription from the time of Gordian III (238–244 A.D.);¹⁷ admittedly, the inscription is late and belongs to the period when it was normal for Eastern cities to have numerous, albeit largely meaningless titles. Nevertheless, the possibility that the inscription also refers to the actual status of the city in the Late Hellenistic period cannot be entirely excluded, especially since the titles ΙΕΡΑ ΚΑΙ ΑΣΥΛΟΣ, also mentioned there, are confirmed by the coin under discussion.

The exact year in which the new dating system could have been introduced remains unclear. The date ΛΙΓ implies that it was at least thirteen years before the capture of the city by Alexander Jannaeus c. 98 B.C. The starting point of the reckoning would thus fall in or before 110 B.C. and, given the likelihood of its connection with the grant of autonomy, the occurrence would be the earliest known so far for the Palestine area.¹⁸ Such an early date for the grant would be consistent with the absence from the coin of the title ΑΥΤΟΝΟΜΟΣ, since this title seems

¹³ M. Rosenberger, who first published the coin (*City-Coins of Palestine II*, p. 52 no. 36), read the date as ΛΙΓ. See also D.C. Baramki, *The Coin Collection of the American University of Beirut Museum. Palestine and Phoenicia* (Beirut 1974), pl. IX, 12.

¹⁴ *Plate 00, 2A–5B*. These coins are discussed below.

¹⁵ New systems of time-reckoning were introduced by Tyre (126/5 B.C.), Sidon (111/10 B.C.), Seleucia (109/8 B.C.), Ascalon (104/3 B.C.), Tripolis (between 105 and 95 B.C.) and, probably, Acco-Ptolemais (end of the second – beginning of the first century B.C.).

¹⁶ *BMC Phoenicia*, p. 158 f. (Sidon), p. 233 f. (Tyre).

¹⁷ R. Cagnat, *Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes I*, 387.

¹⁸ Ascalon became autonomous in 104/3 B.C.: E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (revised and edited by G. Vermes, F. Millar and M. Black), vol. II (Edinburgh 1979), 106. If the autonomy of Acco-Ptolemais dated to the Hellenistic period, it would be posterior to 107/6 B.C.: V. Kontorini, *L'autonomie de Ptolémaïs-Akko de Phénicie*, *RN* 1979, 38.

to have come into fashion only after its adoption by Seleucia in Syria, which was granted autonomy in 109/8 B.C. and first used the title on coins in 106/5 B.C. It would also reveal that towards the end of the second century B.C. the city of Gaza was of much greater importance than has been surmised hitherto.¹⁹

The second coin from Gaza where the reading LIC is in doubt is the coin found at Samaria. This specimen has a head of Zeus on the obverse and an eagle standing on thunderbolt on the reverse; the name of the city appears in the abbreviated form, ΓΑ, to the left of the eagle (*Plate 2,5 B*). The date is in the upper right field of the reverse and, as may be seen from the photograph, only its first digit, a *iota* (10), has been fully preserved; the larger part of the second digit is off flan and what remains of it allows for the reconstruction of the date as either LIЄ or LIC, or LIΘ. There happens to be a coin of Gaza with the clearly readable date LIΘ (year 19, 43/2 B.C., *Plate 2,5 A*), which in all other respects seems identical to the specimen found at Samaria; what is particularly noteworthy is that, besides the general similarity of the designs and legends, the symbol of the city, *mem*, is shown on both coins in the same retrograde manner (⚡ instead of ⚡). The reading of the date as LIΘ on the coin found at Samaria is, therefore, preferable to that of LIC.

The remaining type (no. 9 in BMC) has a head of Tyche on the obverse and a large *mem* (⚡) as the central design on the reverse; the name of the city is given, as in the previous case, by two letters, ΓΑ (*Plate 2,4*). The reading of the date LIC on this type is certain. However, there is considerable doubt about the year 149/50 A.D. to which the coin has been assigned. The date was suggested by Hill because of the existence of a smaller coin with the same obverse and reverse designs but dated LES (year 66, 5/6 A.D.; *Plate 2,6*).²⁰ Since the date of this smaller coin could only refer to the era of 61 B.C., Hill assumed the same for no. 9; counting year 210 from 61 B.C. resulted in the attribution to 149/50 A.D., i.e. to the time of Antoninus Pius.

As the question mark in the catalogue testifies,²¹ Hill was not entirely satisfied with the date he had proposed. The reasons for this are clear. Firstly, the date implies too large a time gap (of about a century and a half) between the smaller coin struck in 5/6 A.D. and the issue under discussion. Secondly, no. 9 in BMC appears an oddity in the context of Gaza issues under Antoninus Pius. For example, on coins of Antoninus Pius: 1) The head of Tyche is always on the reverse; 2) The goddess is veiled; 3) Dates stand alone, without any introductory sign or word; 4) The name of the city is written in full, ΓΑΖΑ; 5) The *alpha* has a straight cross bar.²² In contrast, on no. 9 in BMC: 1) The head of Tyche is on the obverse; 2) She wears no veil; 3) The date is introduced by the sign L; 4) The name of the

¹⁹ U. Rappaport, *Gaza and Ascalon in the Persian and Hellenistic Periods in Relation to their Coins*, IEJ 20, 1970, 75–80.

²⁰ BMC Palestine, p. lxx, pl. XLI,7; A.M. Burnett, M. Amandry and P.P. Ripollès, *RPC* I, no. 4895.

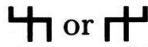
²¹ BMC Palestine, p. 144, no. 9.

²² Baramki (note 13), p. 63 no. 22, pl. X,5 (ΘC, 148/9 A.D.); Rosenberger (note 13), p. 58 no. 74 (AIC, 150/51 A.D.). Rosenberger (*ibid*, p. 58, no. 73) cites a coin with the portrait of Antoninus Pius on the obverse and the head of Tyche on the reverse dated IC, but the actual date on the specimen seems to be ΓC (Israel Museum, no. 2443).

city is indicated by two letters, ΓΑ; 5) The *alpha* has a broken cross bar. Clearly, coins with so many pronounced differences could have hardly been struck side by side.

A re-attribution of the coin to year 210 of the Seleucid era, i.e. 103/2 B.C., also fails to satisfy. This way, the coin would be contemporary with no. 6–7 in BMC (the type with ΔΗΜΟΥ ΓΑΖΑΙΩΝ and ΙΕΡΑΣΥ) which is entirely different in style and employs a different dating system. Besides, as has been argued earlier, the sign resembling a three-bar *sigma* could have hardly meant «number 200» at the end of the second century B.C. Finally, the date would again imply too large a time gap between the two coins with Tyche/*mem* types.

The remaining possibility would be to interpret the second digit of the date not as a *sigma* but as a *digamma*, i.e. a number 6. The meaning of LIC would then be «year 16»; counting this date from the era of 61 B.C. would result in the attribution of the coin to 46/5 B.C.²³ With this, all our pieces of evidence seem to fall into harmony. A comparison with the coin dated LIΘ (year 19, 43/2 B.C.) shows similarities such as the indication of the name of the city by two letters, ΓΑ, and the peculiar form of the sign L, the lower bar of which is extended far right so as to underline the numerals. Further support for the date of 46/5 B.C. would come from its greater proximity to 5/6 A.D., the year of the small coin with the same combination of obverse and reverse types. With the reading of the date as «year 16» and the attribution of the type to 46/5 B.C., there are thus no remaining known coins from Gaza dated «year 210».

The discussion may now be concluded by a short summary of the early Roman coinage of Gaza. Four types have been traced so far: two of «year 10» (52/1 B.C.), one of «year 16» (46/5 B.C.) and one of «year 19» (43/2 B.C.). Some well preserved specimens of all four types are illustrated on *Plate 00* (nos. 2A–5B). Features common to all coins of the group are the sign L with an extended lower bar underlining the numerals and the symbol of Gaza, *mem* (shown as ) . The name of the city is written in full, ΓΑΖΑ, on the earliest coins dated «year 10»; the abbreviated form, ΓΑ, is used on later emissions.

This coin-group appears to be the only material evidence about Gaza during the initial period of Roman domination. Literary sources indicate that Gaza was detached from the Hasmonean kingdom and restored as a city by the Romans in the late 60s B.C.²⁴ However, there is little information on developments thereafter. The silence of literary sources was taken by some scholars as a sign that a successful revival of civic life in Gaza was not achieved for a long time.²⁵ The coins struck between 52/1 and 43/2 B.C. show that, on the contrary, the city began to function properly as a *polis* within a decade of its formal restoration.

²³ Suggested already by Mionnet (note 12), no. 108; see also F. de Saulcy, *Numismatique de la Terre Sainte* (Paris 1874), 210, 213.

²⁴ Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* I 7.7 <156>; *Antiquitates Judaicae* XIV 4.4 <76>.

²⁵ C.A.M. Glucker, *The City of Gaza in the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, BAR Int. Series 325 (Oxford 1987), 39; Rappaport (note 19), 80.

Catalogue of coins illustrated on plate 2.

All the coins are bronze. The photographs are by Ze'ev Radovan.

- 1A c. 100 B.C.; 17.2 mm, 5.6 gm, ↑. Israel Museum, Jerusalem (no. 2404). BMC Palestine, p. 144, nos. 6–7, pl. XV, 4–5; M. Rosenberger, *City-Coins of Palestine*, vol. II (Jerusalem 1975), p. 52, no. 36 (this coin).

Obv. Laureate head of Zeus r.; border of dots.

Rev. Female figure, wearing kalathos and long chiton, standing l., holding in r. phiale, in l. cornucopiae; around, from l. below ΔΗΜΟΝ [ΓΑΖ]ΑΙΩΝ; across the field, ΙΕΡΑΣΕΩ (the last two letters in a monogram); in lower l. Π; in lower r. ΛΙΓ; border of dots.

- 1a Reverse of 1A, enlarged (3x).

- 1B 17 mm, 7.17 gm, ↑. Hebrew University, Jerusalem (no. 2208).

Obv. Same as no. 1A.

Rev. Same as no. 1A.

- 2A 52/1 B.C.; 21 mm, 11.5 gm, ↑. Hebrew University, Jerusalem (no. 2509). Rosenberger, *City-Coins*, p. 51, no. 31.

Obv. Laureate head of Zeus (?) r.

Rev. Apollo standing l., resting his l. elbow on a column, holding in r. hand an unidentified object; across the field above ΓΑΖΑ; in lower l. ΛΙ and Π; border of dots.

- 2B 20 mm, 8.8 gm, ↑. Hebrew University, Jerusalem (no. 5565).

Obv. Same as no. 2A.

Rev. Same as no. 2A.

- 2C 20 mm, 9.95 gm, ↑. Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Jerusalem.

Obv. Same as no. 2A.

Rev. Same as no. 2A.

- 3A 52/1 B.C.; 18 mm, 5.21 gm, ↑. Hebrew University, Jerusalem (no. 5597). M. Rosenberger, *The Rosenberger Israel Collection*, vol. I (Jerusalem 1972), p. 35, no. 11 (drawing).

Obv. Veiled head of Tyche r.; border of dots.
Rev. Eagle standing on thunderbolt l.; across the field, above ΓΑ ΖΑ, in lower l. **Ϟ**; in the field r. **ΛΙ**; border of dots.

3B 21 mm, 6.8 gm, ↗ Israel Museum, Jerusalem (no. 2360).

Obv. Same as no. 3A.

Rev. Same as no. 3A.

4 46/5 B.C.; 23 mm, 11.82 gm, ↑. Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Jerusalem. BMC Palestine, pp. lxx, 144, no. 9, pls. XV,7; XLI,8.

Obv. Head of Tyche r.; border of dots.

Rev. Large *mem* (**Ϟ**); in upper r. ΓΑ; in lower l. **ΛΙC**.

5A 43/2 B.C.; 16 mm, 4.435 gm, ↘. Hebrew University, Jerusalem, (no. 5501). M. Rosenberger, City-Coins, p. 52, no. 37 (drawing, with some errors).

Obv. Laureate head of Zeus r.; border of dots.

Rev. Eagle standing on thunderbolt l.; in the field l. [Γ]Α, **Ϟ** below; in the field r. **ΛΙΘ**; border of dots.

5B 43/2 B.C. (?); 17 mm, 4.92 gm, ↑. Found in Samaria; presently in the Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem (no. C1881). J. Baramki, Coins in the Palestine Archaeological Museum, III, QDAP 8, 1939, p. 79, pl. XLI,10.

Obv. Same as no. 5A.

Rev. Same as no. 5A but the date is partly off flan.

6 5/6 A.D.; 18 mm, 5.56 gm, ↗ Hebrew University, Jerusalem (no. 5440). BMC Palestine, p. lxx, pl. XLI,7.

Obv. Head of Tyche r.; to l. Γ; to r. Α; border of dots.

Rev. *Mem* (**Ϟ**) between two ears of corn; **ΛΕC** below; border of dots.

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1A



1B



1a



2A



2B



2C



3A



3B



4



5A



6



5B



