

Gaza or Yehud

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E.T. Newell in 1938 published an obol which he described as having on the obverse a «Head of Athena to right wearing ear-ring and crested Attic helmet adorned with floral design and olive leaves», and, on the reverse, «Owl to right. On left, olive spray. On right, traces of Aramaic (?) inscription. In field to r. of owl, *lotus bud*» on the rev.¹ He identified it as a «Palestinian imitation of Athenian coins» and dated it to the early 4th century BC.

This coin was republished by Meshorer² who, however, changed the description of the flower at the feet of the owl from «a lotus bud» to a «lily blossom» but retained the attribution as a Palestinian issue.

A second specimen of this type recently appeared for sale,³ described as an issue of Gaza and following Meshorer, identified the plant on the reverse as a lily.

A third specimen of this type was recently acquired in Jerusalem (*fig.*); it weighs 0.69 g and has a die axis of 6.00. There are no traces of an Aramaic inscription; but as the right side of the reverse flan is quite narrow, an inscription may have been on the die but is off the flan.

It is proposed here that these coins should be reassigned from a «Palestinian mint» or «Gaza» to the Yehud series. On Yehud coins a lily is a not an uncommon symbol. Indeed there is a series where it appears as the main type on the obverse. As far as the author is aware the lily does not appear on coins of Gaza, nor on any other identified Philisto-Arabian issue.

In the chronological sequence, we first have the well-known series of Yehud coins with the Athena head on the obverse and on the reverse the owl with the ethnic 'Yehud' in various forms next to it.⁴ Then comes the group to which the present coin belongs, with the lily symbol in the place of the ethnic. This is followed by the apparently anepigraphic type with the lily as the main obverse type and the owl on the reverse which was first published by Mildenberg in his study of Yehud coins⁵ and later republished by Meshorer.⁶

The present reattribution is proposed with a certain reserve, but it would not be shaken even if a new specimen appeared to bear both the Yehud ethnic and the lily symbol. On the contrary, this – yet imaginary – new type would be a confirmation of the proposed sequence.

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- 1 E.T. Newell, *Miscellanea Numismatica: Cyrene to India*, NNM 82 (New York 1938), p. 54, 26.
- 2 SNG ANS Part 6, 27.
- 3 *Münzen und Medaillen FPL* 602, November/December 1996, 95.
- 4 Y. Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage Vol. I* (Dix Hills, 1982), p. 115, 2–4; L. Mildenberg, *Yehud. A Preliminary Study of the Provincial Coinage of Judaea, Essays in Honor of Margaret Thompson* (Wetteren 1979), p. 193 and pl. 21, 5–9.
- 5 Mildenberg, p. 193 and pl. 21, 10.
- 6 Meshorer, p. 116, 7.