The Coins from the Monastery at Har Ḥoma Gabriela Bijovsky

Eleven coins were discovered in the excavation of the monastery at Har Homa¹ (Fig. 1; see Catalogue, below; see Zelinger, this volume); five of them unidentifiable. The numismatic evidence accords with the stratigraphic data attesting to a single-phase site. The earliest coin is a completely worn *nummus* dated to the fifth–sixth centuries CE (No. 1). A *follis* of Justin II dated to 574/575 CE, from Constantinople, was discovered on the courtyard's surface (No. 3).

A small hoard consisting of three Byzantine gold *solidi* was found in the corner of Room 509 in the monastery's western wing, where two holes had been carved into the walls' rock foundation on either side of the room's entrance. The coins had been deliberately hidden



¹ The coins were cleaned at the IAA laboratories and were photographed by Clara Amit of the IAA.

within the southern hole in W520, and could have been easily inserted into it through the small opening resulting from the gap between the narrower wall built on top of the wider foundations. These *solidi* belong to three different emperors—Justinian I (No. 2), Justin II (No. 4) and Tiberius II (No. 5)—and were all struck in Constantinople. Due to their significant value and deliberate hiding in a secure place, it can be determined that the hole was purposely built to serve as the monastery's safe.

Coin finds are rare in monasteries, indicating that little commerce took place with the outside world. Currency was needed for basic transactions, but its accumulation was against Church principles calling for modesty, poverty and worldly property repudiation.² A few examples from our region are known, among them a hoard of 10 *solidi* from Lady Mary's Monastery at Bet She'an (FitzGerald 1931:11)³ and two *solidi* hoards hidden within small juglets—one containing four coins and the other, 50—unearthed at a monastery in Shoham (Bijovsky, forthcoming).

Another parallel is a modest hoard of five Byzantine *folles* hidden in a jar at the Martyrius monastery in the Judean desert (Bijovsky 2012:427, 453–454). However, the intrinsic value of the three *solidi* from Har Homa is significantly superior to the hoard from Martyrius. Between 578 and 615 CE, one *solidus* was equivalent to 288 *folles*, our hoard equaling, thus, 864 *folles*. Also, during this period, one kilogram of second-quality bread cost five to eight *folles* (Morrisson and Cheynet 2002:829), approximately the same as a modius of wheat. With one *follis*, a laborer could purchase his daily subsistence of bread, oil and vegetables; ascetics would survive on a half *follis* (Harl 1996:286).⁴ Therefore, if the excavator's assumption that around fifteen monks inhabited the monastery is correct, this hoard would have equaled two months of food supply for all of them (864 *folles*/15 monks = 58 days).

A question arises as to why the coins in this safe were never recovered by their owner. The excavator is of the opinion that the monastery was systematically abandoned, i.e., rooms were emptied, some doors were sealed, and no utensils or storage goods were discovered. However, no signs of violent destruction were noticed throughout the building. The latest Byzantine coin from the site is a *solidus* belonging to the hoard (No. 5), struck by Tiberius II (578–582 CE); consequently, the coins could not have been hidden before his rule. No particular threads can be specifically related to the last quarter of the sixth century in our region.

Even though no Phocas and Heraclius (602–641 CE) coins are present in the hoard, the reasons for its concealment may be linked to events corresponding to the Persian invasion

² See Callegher 2016: nn. 66–70, for a discussion of this topic and more examples of coin finds in monasteries in our region.

³ The coins were found buried under the floor of Room H together with ritual gold objects. FitzGerald attributed the hoard's concealment to the Arab conquest (636–640 CE), but the coins, rechecked by the author, date no later than the 610–614 CE Persian invasion (see Bijovsky 2002:183, Fig. 11).

⁴ For further examples of values and prices, see Harl 1996:270–289, Chapter 11: Coins, Prices and Wages.

IAA No.		148931			149517						149519				149515						149516						149518			
Notes					Hoard										Hoard						Hoard									
References					DOC 1:71,	No. 9i					DOC 1:212,	No. 38a			DOC 1:199,	No.4e					DOC 1:267,	No. 4e					SNAT 1993:	Tafel 12,	No. 375	
Mint					Constantinople						Constantinople				Constantinople						Constantinople									
Date (CE)		5th-first	half 6th c.		545-565						574/575										579-582						8th c.			
Reverse	NTINE Dize <i>numnus</i>	Obliterated		565)–Gold <i>solidus</i>	VICTORI-A AVCCCO	Angel stg. facing, holding long	Angel srg. racing, notang iong cross and globus cruciger. In r. field, star In exergue: CONOB	In exergue: CONOB	18)-Copper follis	M above cross; to 1.: ANNO; to	r.: X; below, A; in exergue: CON		solidus	VICTORI-A AVCCC5	Constantinopolis seated facing,	holding spear and globus	cruciger	In exergue: CONOB	582)-Gold solidus	VICTORI-A AVCCE	Cross on four steps. In exergue: CONOB			YAD	-Copper fals	Lion crouching l.				
Obverse	BYZAN Uncertain Bro	[]	Bust r., pearl-diademed, cuirassed and draned.	Justinian I (527–5	DN IVSTINI-ANVS PP AVC	Bust facing, helmeted, holding	globus cruciger. On shoulder,	shield with horseman device		Justin II (565–57	DN IVSTI-NVS PP AVG	Justin and Sophia seated facing	on double throne	Gold s	DN IVSTI-NVS PP AVC	Bust facing, helmeted, holding	Victory with wreath. On	shoulder, shield with horseman	device	Tiberius II (578–5	Dm TIb CONS-TANT PP AVC	Bust facing, crowned, holding	globus cruciger. On shoulder,	shield with horseman device	UMAY	Post-Reform	مدمد	رسول	١Ţ٣	with an asterisk appear in Fig. 1.
Axis					→						\rightarrow				\rightarrow						\rightarrow						Î			l. Coins
Diam. (mm)		10			20						30				20						21						16			ise stated
Weight (g)		0.90			4.44						12.04				4.51						4.32						1.76			ss otherwi
Basket		5143			5009						5026				5008						5010						5017			onze unle:
Loc		Surface			509						513				509						509						513			oins are bi
Cat. No.		-			2*						3*				*						5*						6*			ⁱ All c.

The Coins from the Monastery at Har Homa

CATALOGUEⁱ

299

between 610 and 614 CE. The hoards from the Martyrius and Lady Mary monasteries mentioned above share the same time of deposition, i.e., not before 612–613 CE (Bijovsky 2012:468, Nos. 58–59), and several hoards from non-monastic contexts reinforce the assumption that people expressed their fear of an imminent Persian invasion by hiding valuable property (Bijovsky 2012:423–429). In this context, the most striking discovery of the last years is the hoard unearthed at the 'Ofel in Jerusalem, which contained precious gold and silver jewelry together with 36 *solidi*, the latest dated to Maurice Tiberius (582–602 CE) (Sandberg 2013:77–90).

The latest coin found in the excavations of the monastery at Har Homa is an Ummayad post-reform *fals* (No. 6) found on the courtyard's surface.

References

- Bijovsky G. 2002. A Hoard of Byzantine Solidi from Bet She'an in the Umayyad Period. RN 158:161-227.
- Bijovsky G. 2012. Gold Coin and Small Change: Monetary Circulation in Fifth–Seventh Century Byzantine Palestine (Polymnia Numismatica antica e medievale. Studi 2). Trieste.
- Bijovsky G. Forthcoming. Coins and Two Byzantine Hoards from Excavations at Shoham. 'Atiqot.
- Callegher B. 2016. Anacoreti e cenobiti in Egitto e Palestina tra IV e VII secolo: l'imprescindibile "far di conto" monetario. In M. Bottazzi, P. Buffo, C. Ciccopiedi, L. Furbetta and T. Granier eds. *La società monastica nei secoli VI–XII: Sentieri di ricerca. Atelier jeunes chercheurs sur le monachisme médiéval. Roma, 12–13 giugno 2014* (Collana atti 10; Collection de l'École française de Rome 515). Trieste–Rome. Pp. 143–163.
- DOC 1: A.R. Bellinger. Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection 1: Anastasius I to Maurice 491–602. Washington, D.C. 1966.
- FitzGerald G.M. 1931. *Beth-Shean Excavations 1921–1931* III: *The Arab and Byzantine Levels* (Publications of the Palestine Section of the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania III). Philadelphia.
- Harl K.W. 1996. Coinage in the Roman Economy, 300 B.C. to A.D. 700. Baltimore-London.
- Morrisson C. and Cheynet J.-C. 2002. Prices and Wages in the Byzantine World. In A.E. Laiou ed. *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century* III (Dumbarton Oaks Studies 39). Washington, D.C. Pp. 815–878.
- Sandberg L. 2013. The Coins. In E. Mazar ed. The Discovery of the Menorah Treasure at the Foot of the Temple Mount: In Honor of the State of Israel That Chose the Seven-Branched Menorah as Its National Symbol. Jerusalem. Pp. 77–90.
- SNAT 1993: L. Ilisch. Sylloge Numorum Arabicorum Tübingen: Palästina IVa Bilād aš-Šam I. Tübingen 1993.
- Zelinger Y. This volume. The Byzantine Monastery at Har Homa, between Jerusalem and Bethlehem.