

Money, Weights and Measures in Antiquity

Money & weights	Capacity	Length & surface
Equations	Some implications	Bibliography



A weight of three mina from the [Assyrian](#) city Nimrod (British Museum)

1 Money and weights

Mesopotamia

1 talent (GÚ.UN; <i>biltu</i>)	= 60 mina	= 3600 shekel	= 30.00 kg
	1 mina (MA.NA; <i>manû</i>)	= 60 shekel	= 500 gr
		1 shekel (GÍN; <i>šiq̄lu</i>)	= 8.333 gr

Four [weights](#) found in [Persepolis](#) indicate that the mina was 499.80 gr.



Subdivisions of the shekel:

- 1 shekel = 2 **divisions** (*zûzu*) or **half shekels**
 - 1 division = 4.17 gr = ca. 1 Greek drachm
- 1 shekel is 8 **slices** (*bitqu*)
 - 1 slice = 1.04 gr
- 1 shekel = 12 **grains** (*mahat*)
 - 1 grain = 0.69 gr ([Parthian](#), Late [Achaemenid](#)?)
- 1 shekel = 24 **carat** (*girû*)
 - 1 carat = 0.35 gr
- 1 shekel = 40 **chickpeas**? (*hallûru*)
 - 1 chickpea = 0.21 gr
- 1 shekel = 180 barleycorn (*ŠE*, *uttetu*)
 - 1 barleycorn = 0.0463 gr

The purity of silver:

Silver in the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid period contained 1/8 alloy, i.e. silver had 87.5 % purity. Sometimes, and chronologically increasingly, silver is characterized as *qalû*, "pure", which may have had a higher purity. The tetradrachms of the Hellenistic period (see below) had purity well above 90%. Cf. Vargyas (2001) 13-17; Mørkholm (1991) 5.



The weight known as [DWd](#)

Persia

1 Babylonian mina	= 6 <i>karšâ</i>	= 60 shekel	= 499.80 gr
	1 <i>karšâ</i>	= 10 shekel	= 83.33 gr
		1 shekel	= 8.33 gr

- King [Darius I the Great](#) introduced gold coinage based on the Babylonian standard (until then, the [Lydian](#) standard of king

[Croesus](#) had been used). 1 gold piece (*dareikos*, daric, *statêr*) was between 8.25 and 8.46 gr of gold, which corresponds to the 8.33 gr of the Babylonian shekel. Darics were struck in extremely pure gold, 98-99%.

- Darius maintained the silver piece or **siglos** on its old standard. Sigloi were between 5.20 and 5.49 of silver. They had a 97-98% purity, although 94-95% is recorded in the fourth century.
- The later silver standard was 5.40-5.67 gr.

(Chicago Oriental Institute; [@!!](#))

Phoenicia; Israel

The weight of the *sheqel* was locally different.

- Palestinian *sheqel* 11.5 gr.
- In the great trade centers of the fifth and fourth century, it was slightly above 7 gr.
- [Tyre](#) went over to the Attic standard ca. 350 BCE.

Greek: Attic standard (and Ptolemaic standard)

Weight

In the "[Solonian](#)" system:

1 talent-weight	= 60 mnai	= 6000 drachm-weights	= 27.47 kg
	1 mna	= 100 drachm-weights	= 457.8 gr
		1 drachm-weight (<i>holkê</i>)	= 4.578 gr

- The [Athenian](#) silver drachm (coin) of the second and first century weighs 4.20 gr.
 - 188 BCE treaty of Apamea: [Antiochus III](#) to pay the Romans 12,000 Attic talents of pure silver, in twelve equal annual payments, the talent to weigh at least 80 Roman pounds ([Livy/Polybius](#)); i.e. coin-drachma of at least 4.31 g.
- An Athenian decree about weights and measures (*IG II² 1013*; late second century BCE?) includes that the *emporike* mina, which had until then been equivalent to 138 coin-drachms, henceforth had to be equivalent to 150 coin-drachms.



Persian coin ([@!!](#))

Coins

1 talent (to talanton)	= 60 minae	= 6000 drachms	= 36,000 obols	= 25.86 kg
	1 mina (<i>hê mnâ</i>)	= 100 drachms	= 600 obols	= 431 gr
		1 drachm (<i>hê drachmê</i>)	= 6 obols	= 4.31 gr
			1 obol (<i>ho obolós</i>)	= 0.72 gr

- Alternative values:
 - 1 talent = 21.45 kg
 - 1 mina = 357.5 gr
 - 1 drachm = 3.58 gr

- 1 obol = 0.60 gr
- 1 stater (*ho statêr*) or tetradrachm = 4 drachms = 17.24 gr
- 1 didrachm = 2 drachms = 12 obols = 8.62 gr (= 1 Babylonian shekel?)
- 1 obol = 8 chalkoi
- 1 *deben* silver ([Ptolemaic demotic](#)) = 20 drachms

Note. In the [Seleucid empire](#) the standard coin was the tetradrachm, "stater". Development of weights: Alexander: 17.28 gr.; In [Antioch](#): ca. 300 BC 17.00 gr.; ca. 172 BC: 16.80 gr.; ca. 105 BC 16.30 gr. – decline well below 15.00 gr. Elsewhere in the second century the standard remained 16.80 gr.; Athens New Style tetradrachms show a weight increase to about 17.00 gr. from the 16.60/16.80 of the preceding issues. In the [Ptolemaic empire](#) [Ptolemy I Soter](#) began reducing the weight to 15.8 gr. > 14.9 > 14.3/14.4 gr. in ca. 290 BC > 14.2 in the early first century BC. (Mørkholm (1991) 8.

Rome

Weights:



A Roman weight from the Saalburg

1 pound (<i>libra</i> or <i>as</i>)	= 12 ounces	= 323 gr
	1 ounce (<i>uncia</i>)	= 26.91 gr

Duncan-Jones: 1 *libra* = 323 gr (better than 327 or 324 g)

Coinage, 211-157/156 (1 denarius = 1/72 libra of silver):

1 denarius (X)	= 2 quinarii	= 4 sestertii	= 10 as	= 4.55 gr silver*
	1 quinarius (V)	= 2 sestertii	= 5 as	
		1 sest. (IIS)	= 2½ as	
			1 as	bronze

* Also recorded: 4.49 gr

Coinage, 157/156 -ca.130 (1 denarius = 1/84 libra of silver):

1 denarius (X)	= 2 quinarii	= 4 sestertii	= 10 as	= 3.85 gr silver
	1 quinarius (V)	= 2 sestertii	= 5 as	
		1 sestertius (IIS)	= 2½ as	= 0.97 gr silver
			1 as	bronze

Coinage, after the revaluation of ca.130 BCE:

1 denarius (*)	= 2 quinarii	= 4 sestertii	= 16 as	= 3.85 gr silver
	1 quinarius	= 2 sestertii	= 8 as	
		1 sestertius	= 4 as	= 0.97 gr silver
			1 as	bronze

Augustus:



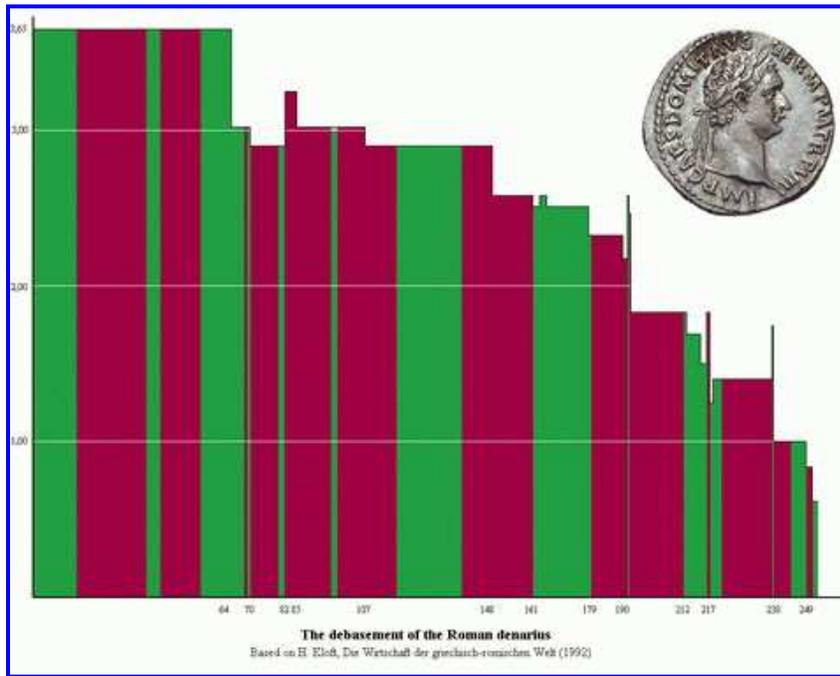
Aureus of Augustus (©!!)

1 aureus	25 denarii	50 quinarii	100 sestertii	200 dupondii	400 as	7.72 gr gold
	1 denarius	2 quinarii	4 sestertii	8 dupondii	16 as	3.80 gr silver
		1 quinarius	2 sestertii	4 dupondii	8 as	silver
			1 sestertius	2 dupondii	4 as	silver
				1 dupondius	2 as	brass
					1 as	bronze

- 1 denarius = 1 drachm (eastern part of the Roman empire)
- 1 denarius = 1 tetradrachm ([Alexandria](#))
- 1 as = 2 semis = 4 quadrantas
- The **weight** of the denarius gradually declined from 3.80 to 3.10 gram.
- Its **fineness** was slowly reduced from 98% ([Augustus](#)) to 45% ([Severus Alexander](#)).
- **Gold/silver-ratio:**

Augustus	1 : 11.9
Nero	1 : 10.4 (actual 1 : 11.4)
Diocletian	1 : 12

The declining amount of silver in a denarius (in gr.)	
Augustus	3.65
Nero (64)	ca.3.00
Vespasian (70)	ca.2.90
Domitian (82)	ca.3.20
Domitian (85)	ca.3.00
Trajan (107)	ca.2.90
Antoninus Pius (148)	ca.2.70
Marcus Aurelius (161)	ca.2.65
Marcus Aurelius (179)	ca.2.25
Commodus (190)	ca.2.15
Pertinax (193)	ca.2.65
Didius Julianus (193)	ca.2.20
Septimius Severus (194)	ca.1.85
Caracalla (212)	ca.1.55
Caracalla (215)	ca.1.45
Macrinus (217)	ca.1.85
Heliogabalus (218)	ca.1.25
Heliogabalus (219)	ca.1.40
Pupienus and Balbinus (238)	ca.1.80
Gordian III (238) to beginning reign Decius (249)	ca.1.00
End of reign of Trebonianus Gallus (253)	ca.0.60



Diocletian, Edict on Maximum Prizes

- 1 libra of silver = 6,000 denarii.
- 1 libra of gold = 72,000 denarii.
- Constantine onwards: 72 solidi per libra of gold

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Weights, Measures, and Coins

From the Bible Through the Talmudic Period

Weights in the Bible

Seven weights related to metal (thus creating "coins") are mentioned in the [Bible](#): talent, mina, shekel, beka, gerah, pim, and kesitah. A scale of the relationships between the first five weights mentioned can be established on the basis of the [Bible](#) and other sources; the absolute and relative value of the pim can be determined from archaeological finds. The seventh weight, the kesitah ([Genesis 33:19](#); [Joshua 24:32](#); [Job 42:11](#)), seems to be an archaic weight and the origin of its name and its metrological value are not known.

We can figure out the interrelationships of the three most important weights, the talent, shekel, and gerah.

The talent (kikkar), was the largest unit of weight in the Bible, and was already known by the same name in Ugaritic. In Ugaritic it was pronounced kakaru, as has been shown from Akkadian documents from Ugarit and Alalakh. The relation between the talent and the shekel is defined in [Exodus 38:25–26](#). The half shekel brought by 603,550 men amounted to 100 talents and 1,775 shekels. Thus a talent was 3,000 shekels. This system of dividing the talent into 3,000 shekels differed from the Mesopotamian system which divides the talent into 3,600 parts, and was the same as the Ugaritic system where the talent was also divided into 3,000 shekels. From this it follows that the biblical division is based upon an ancient [Canaanite](#) tradition.

The major weight of metal mentioned in the Bible is the shekel, as its name, which means simply "weight," testifies. Since the shekel was the definite weight, an expression such as "1,000 silver" ([Genesis 20:16](#)) can be explained as 1,000 shekels of silver, and the name of the weight is omitted since it is self-explanatory. Abbreviations like these are also found in other Semitic languages. The fundamental nature of the shekel can also be seen in the fact that all weights which the Bible explains are explained only in terms of the shekel.

The shekel was used as a bartering material, not a minted coin. Jeremiah bought a plot of land and weighed his payment (silver) on scales ([Jeremiah 32:9](#)).

Subdivisions of the shekel were the beka or half-shekel ([Genesis 24:22](#); [Exodus 38:26](#)) and the gerah, a 20th of the shekel ([Exodus 30:13](#)). The gerah is known in Akkadian as gir-. The basic meaning of the Akkadian word is a grain of carob seed.

The shekel, in turn, was a 50th part of the maneh, and the maneh was a 60th part of the talent. The talent was, of course, equal to 3,000 shekels. The maneh and the talent, however, were only units of account and remained so during the Second [Temple](#) period when the shekel became a coin denomination. Scales and weights of the shekel unit have been found in excavations as have gold, silver, and bronze ingots.

A Simple Table:

1 talent=60 maneh=3,000 shekels
1 maneh=50 shekels=100 beka=1,000 gerahs

In short, all weights fit together nicely...if we only knew how much a shekel weighed...

In excavations carried out in [Palestine](#) some of the weights which have been found have their weight marked on them, but most are without any notation. The shape of the weights, for the most part, is semicircular (dome-shaped). There are also some cast metal weights that are rectangular and cube-shaped, and some that are oval or in the shape of animals. Most of the weights found in [Palestine](#) are from the end of the period of the monarchy (the seventh to sixth centuries BCE).

Very few weights and inscriptions with the word shekel written explicitly have been found in strata from the Israelite period. A bronze weight in the shape of a turtle was found in the coastal plain; on its reverse side it bears the inscription "one-quarter shekel." And in fact, a weight of this sort (one-quarter shekel) is mentioned in I Samuel 9:8. That quarter shekel weighed 2.63 grams. That would make the shekel 10.52 grams.

Another bronze weight from Samaria, also in the shape of a turtle, bears the inscription "five", and this has been interpreted to mean five gerahs. Since there are twenty gerahs in a shekel, that would make that weight one-quarter of a shekel as well. Its weight is 2.49 grams, making a shekel 9.56 grams.

Another weight from Samaria is marked on one side "one-quarter shekel," and its weight is 2.54 grams. That would make the shekel 10.16 grams.

In establishing the value of the shekel there is an additional complication in that the Bible mentions at least three kinds of shekels: in [Genesis 23:16](#), a shekel of silver "at the going merchant's rate [over la-socher]; in [Exodus 30:13](#), "shekel by the sanctuary weight [ha-kodesh]"; and in [II Samuel 14:26](#), "shekels by the king's stone [b'even ha-melech]," that is, shekels stamped by the royal treasury as proof that they are perfect. It cannot be determined whether these shekels were equivalent in

value, but on the basis of evidence from external sources, it appears that there were differences between them.

The mina (Hebrew: Maneh) which designates a weight of approximately 50 shekels, is found in the Bible primarily in the late books ([Ezekiel. 45:12](#); [Ezra 2:69](#); [Nehemiah. 7:70, 71](#)). In the period preceding the destruction of the [First Temple](#), the mina is mentioned only once, in the verse about [Solomon's shields](#) ([I Kings 10:17](#)). From this it is reasonable to assume that in ancient times in Israel reckoning was done in shekels and talents only, and the mina was not used except in unusual situations. It appears that this practice too had its roots in an ancient Canaanite tradition, for in Ugaritic writings many calculations are found involving shekels and talents and very few involving the mina. The value of the mina is defined in [Ezekiel 45:12](#). From this verse it follows that the mina is equivalent to 60 shekels like the Akkadian man-.

The beka is mentioned twice in the Bible ([Gen. 24:22](#); [Ex. 38:26](#)) and its value is explicitly determined as one-half a shekel. Its name is derived from the root bq, "to break, to divide," and its basic meaning is "a part."

In addition to being divided into the beka and gerah, the shekel was also divided into a fourth and a third ([I Sam. 9:8](#); [Neh. 10:33](#)). There is support for this division both inside and outside Palestine. From Assyrian documents found at Calah it is evident that the shekel was very often divided there into many more subunits, but there is no proof that this was so in Israel as well.

Also mentioned in the Bible is the peres ([Dan. 5:25, 28](#)). The peres is also mentioned in the [Mishnah](#) (Pe'ah 8:5) and its value there is half a zuz.

Coins In the Talmud

The currency system most commonly found in Talmudic literature was based on the Roman monetary system both in terminology and metrological structure. Its standard was linked to that of the Tyrian tetradrachm (sela).

There were 1,500 sela'im in a talent.

The now-famous shekel, one-half sela, was no longer the main coin of measurement even though 3,000 of them still made a talent.

The smallest known coin was the perutah. There were four perutot in a dinar (also called a "zuz").

Although our sages disagreed about the value of certain small coins, the Talmudic monetary system appears to have been as follows:

1 talent=60 mina=120 tartimar=750 uncia=1,500 sela=3,000 shekel== either 4,000 or 3,000 Italian issar=6,000 zuz (also called dinar) = 12,000 PROVINCIAL sela=24,000 perutah

Coins in daily use were denarii (or zuz) and sela'im from imperial mints, while

"small change" copper coinage was minted locally in a number of cities, and were considered to be equal to 1/8 the imperial coins.

In Babylonia during the Sassanid period (from the early third century onward), the standard silver unit was the Sassanid drachm, called in the Talmud zuz (from Akkadian zuzu—"to cut"), while smaller copper coins of varying sizes were called peshitte.

The History of Coins: How We Got From Shekels to Sela'im

Under [Persian](#) rule, some forms of Judean coins were minted, imitations of Athenian coinage. These silver coins are rather rare, but at least six coin types are known with the inscription Yehud (Aramaic: Judea). Some follow the "head/owl" type, while others show a falcon, a fleur-de-lis, a Janus head, a god seated on a winged chariot, and a bird of an unidentified kind. It cannot be determined whether the Jewish high priest or the local Persian governor was the issuing authority, but it's clear that the community of Judea at that time had no problems placing images on coins. In fact, one of the coins contains the Hebrew name Hezekiah (Yehezkiyyah).

With the rise of [Alexander the Great](#), the coins of the [Greek](#) world were briefly universalized. With the mounting tension between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies, each Greek nation created its own coins.

Beginning in 137 BCE, the [Hasmoneans](#) minted their own coins, mostly the small bronze perutah or dilepton. In accordance with the Second Commandment no likeness of living beings, men or animals, are found on them. Most of the emblems, for example the cornucopia—single or double—the wreath surrounding the legend, the anchor, the flower, the star, and the helmet, were copied from emblems found on the late issues of the Seleucid coinage. All Hasmonean coins bear Hebrew legends, but those of Alexander Yannai and Mattathias Antigonus also have legends in Greek.

The Hebrew legend, written in the old Hebrew script, almost always appeared in the formula, "X, the high priest and the assembly of the elders of the state of the Jews." The Hasmonean rulers were thus styled on most coins as high priests. The only exception is Alexander Yannai who eventually also styled himself king on some of his Hebrew legends. On the Greek legends the Hasmonean rulers styled themselves throughout as "king."

With one exception, all Hasmonean coins were undated, which presents scholars with difficulties in arranging them chronologically, especially as different rulers went by the same names. In spite of earlier opinions, Simeon, the first independent Hasmonean ruler (142–135 BCE), never issued any coins. According to I Maccabees 15:2–9, Antiochus VII granted Simeon the right to issue coinage, but it has been proved that this grant was withdrawn before Simeon could make use of it. It has been suggested that Simeon's son [John Hyrcanus I](#) (135–104 BCE) did not start issuing coins immediately on succeeding his father, but only considerably later, probably in 110 BCE. This suggestion is based on the fact that cities in

Phoenicia and in Palestine received the right to coin their own money from the declining Seleucid kingdom: Tyre in 126 BCE., Sidon in 110 BCE, and Ashkelon in 104 BCE.

John Hyrcanus' coins were the main pattern for the whole series of Hasmonean coins. One side depicted a wreath surrounding the legend, "Johanan [Yehohanan] the high priest and the assembly of the elders of the state of the Jews," while the reverse side showed a double cornucopia with a pomegranate. All his coins were of the perutah denomination. The coins of his successor, Aristobulus I (104–103 BCE), were in brass with the same denomination and type, but the name was replaced by Judah (Yehudah).

At the beginning of his reign Alexander Yannai (103–76 BCE) issued coins of the same type as his predecessors, changing the name to Jonathan (Yehonatan). Later, he issued another series of coins (in Hebrew and Greek) on which he styled himself king. Their emblems were star, anchor, both sometimes surrounded by a circle, and flower. A lepton or half-perutah with a palm branch, and a flower also belonged to this "king" series. One type of this series, the star/anchor surrounded by a circle, was very frequent. This was the only coin type in the whole series of Jewish coins which bears an Aramaic legend written in square Hebrew letters and which has been dated. The Hebrew as well as the Greek date 25, which is the 25th year of reign of Alexander Yannai (78 BCE), were recently discerned. As in the Greek legends and this Aramaic one as well, his name is given as "Alexandros." Alexander Yannai also apparently issued lead coins which belong to his "king" series. It is believed that in his final issues he reverted to the early Hasmonean coin type, styling himself again as high priest but altering his Hebrew name from Yehonatan to Yonatan probably in order to avoid the formula of the Tetragrammaton.

The bulk of the coins of John Hyrcanus II (67, 63–40 BCE) were in the same shape as those of John Hyrcanus I. There were, however, varieties which were peculiar to his issues. Greek letters, single or as monograms, eventually appeared on his coins. These letters probably referred to the magistrates who were responsible for the mint.

Besides the regular coin type, Hyrcanus II also issued lepta or half perutot of the same type as did his father Alexander Yannai, bearing the palm-branch/flower. One larger trilepton shows a helmet and a double cornucopia. On all his coins he styled himself high priest.

During the short reign of the last Hasmonean ruler, Antigonus Mattathias (40–37 BCE), a fundamental change occurred in the coin issue of the Hasmoneans. His Hebrew name Mattityahu (Mattathias) is only given on his perutah denomination. The pomegranate between the double cornucopia is replaced by an ear of barley. He issued two larger denominations which can be compared with the Seleucid chalcous and dichalcous. Antigonus was the only Jewish ruler who depicted the holy vessels of the Temple of Jerusalem on his coins, specifically, the table of shewbread and the seven-branched lampstand. In his Hebrew legends he styled himself "high priest" and in his Greek legends "king." His Hebrew name is known to us only from

his coins.

The coins of [Herod the Great](#) (37–4 BCE), all of bronze as those of his successors, can be divided into two groups: those which are dated and those which are not. The dated coins all bear the same date, the year three. As Herod no doubt reckoned his reign from his appointment as king of Judea by the [Romans](#) in 40 BCE and not from his actual accession three years later, the "year three" is equal to 37 BCE. All legends on his coins were in Greek and no Hebrew legends appear on the coins of the Herodian dynasty. The legends rendered his name and title. The emblems on his coins were the tripod, thymiaterion, caduceus, pomegranate, shield, helmet, aphlaston, palm branch, anchor, double and single cornucopia, eagle, and galley. It may be concluded from this selection of symbols that Herod the Great did not wish to offend the religious feelings of his subjects. The denominations of his coins were the chalcous and hemi-chalcous, the trilepton, and frequently the dilepton or perutah.

The coins of Herod Archelaus (4 BCE–6 CE) are undated and bear mainly maritime emblems, such as the galley, prow, and anchor. Other types are the double cornucopia, the helmet, bunch of grapes, and wreath surrounding the legend. His main denomination was the perutah, but he also issued a trilepton.

Herod Antipas (tetrarch of Galilee 4 BCE–39 CE) began to issue coins only after he founded and settled his new capital Tiberias. All his coins are dated. The earliest date is from the 24th year of his reign (19/20 CE). On his coins he is called Herod, but they can easily be distinguished as they bear his title "tetrarch." The emblems on his coins are all of flora such as the reed, the palm branch, a bunch of dates, and a palm tree. Though the emblems are the same on all denominations, three denominations can be distinguished. One side showed a wreath that surrounded the legend "Tiberias"; only the series of the last year referred to Gaius Caligula.

As the territory of the tetrarch Herod Philip I (4 BCE.–34 CE) was predominantly non-Jewish, he allowed himself to strike coins with a representation of the ruling Roman emperor and the pagan temple erected by his father in his capital Panias. His coins were dated from the year 5 to the year 37 of his reign, though not all dates occur.

The most common coin struck by King Herod Agrippa I (37–44 CE), grandson of Herod the Great, was a perutah of the year 6 of his reign (42/3 CE), depicting an umbrella-shaped royal canopy and three ears of barley. This coin was obviously struck for Judea. For the other districts of his kingdom he issued coins that would have offended Jewish religious feelings as they carried his own portrait or that of the Roman emperor and even gods or human beings in the Greco-Roman style of the period. On one very rare coin two clasped hands are shown; the legend seems to refer to an alliance between the Jewish people and the Roman senate.

All Agrippa's coins are dated, and in his non-Jewish series two different groups of two denominations each can be discerned belonging to the reigns of Caligula and Claudius respectively.

Herod of Chalcis (41–48 CE), brother of Agrippa I, regularly put his portrait on his coins, calling himself "friend of the emperor." Some of his extremely rare coins bear the date "year 3," others are undated; a system of three denominations can be observed in this coinage too.

From the time of the son of Herod of Chalcis, Aristobulus of Chalcis (57–92 CE), only a few rare specimens have been preserved. They bear his portrait and sometimes also that of his wife Salome. His coins can be identified by their legends which mention him and his wife Salome as king and queen.

Because of his long reign, the series of coins assigned to Herod Agrippa II (c. 50–93 CE) is the largest and most varied among the coin series of the Herodians. Two types bear his likeness, and others issued in the year 5 of Agrippa with the name of Nero have a legend surrounded by a wreath. There are two coins which have a double date (the years 6 and 11) and which belong to the two different eras used on his coins. These double dated coins bear "inoffensive" symbols such as double cornucopias and a hand grasping various fruits. All his coins, like those of his father Agrippa I, were of bronze and dated, making it easy to arrange them in chronological order.

There are however some difficulties. The first is the parallel issue of coins in the name of Vespasian and in the name of his sons Titus and Domitian. It has been accepted that all his Greek coins belonged to an era starting in the year 56 CE. The Latin series issued in the name of Domitian belongs to an era starting in 61 CE. The bulk of his coins were struck during the reign of the Flavian emperors, with Tyche, the goddess of destiny, and the goddess of victory as emblems. A unique specimen, with the victory inscription on a shield hanging on a palm-tree, refers to the Roman victory in the Jewish War (66–70 C.E.). Agrippa thus put himself into the Roman camp against his own people. His coinage, as described above, shows the most far-reaching deviation from Jewish tradition among the ancient coinage issued by Jewish rulers.

By the time the Jewish War broke out, the Tyrian mint had ceased to issue silver shekels, but shekels were needed by every Jewish adult male for the payment of the annual Temple tax of a half-shekel ([Exodus 30:11ff.](#); [II Kings 12:5ff.](#)). This reason and the resolve of the Jewish authorities to demonstrate their sovereignty over their own country led to the decision to strike the well-known "thick" shekels and half-and quarter-shekels dated from the first to the fifth year of the era of the war. These are the first silver coins Jews struck in antiquity. They are of an extraordinarily good quality, artistically as well as technically. The emblems are as simple as they are beautiful: a chalice with pearl rim and three pomegranates. The legends which are, of course, only in Hebrew and written in the old Hebrew script, read Yerushalayim ha-Kedoshah ("Jerusalem the Holy") and Shekel Yisrael ("Shekel of Israel") with the abbreviated dates: shin alef, shin bet for sh[enat], a[lef], "year one," sh[enat] b[et], "year two," etc.). Small bronze coins of the perutah denomination were struck during the second and third year of the war, and three larger denominations were issued during the fourth year, two of which indicate the

denomination as *revi'a* ("quarter") and *chatzi* ("half"). The emblems of the bronze coins were the vine leaf, the amphora, the lulav, the etrog, the palm tree, the fruit baskets, and the chalice.

During the [Bar Kochba War](#) (133-135 CE) the last Jewish coin series in antiquity was issued. Bar Kochba became the head of the Jewish community, and the bulk of the coins issued bear the name Simeon and eventually his title "prince of Israel." However, other coins exist from that period which bear the name of "Eleazar the Priest" or simply that of "Jerusalem" as the minting authority. The coins were issued over a period of a little more than three years. The coins of the first two years were dated, but the formula of the era changed from "Year one of the redemption of Israel" to "Year two of the freedom of Israel." During the third year and until the end of the war, the coins issued were undated and bore the war slogan "For the freedom of Jerusalem." These coin types, too, were as numerous as they were beautiful, and artistically ranked first in the series of Jewish coins. The coins were issued in silver and in bronze. The entire issue was overstruck on coins then current in Palestine, such as on the Roman provincial tetradrachms (mainly from Antiochia) and on the Roman denarii or provincial drachma, as well as on local bronze city coins mainly from [Ashkelon](#) and Gaza. Bar Kochba possibly obtained the gentile coins needed for overstriking by means of a public loan for the national war effort.

There were two silver denominations, the tetradrachm or *sela* and the denarius or *zuz*. The Temple front and a lulav and etrog appeared on the tetradrachms, while a rather large number of emblems occurred on the denarii, such as a wreath surrounding the legend, a bunch of grapes, a juglet, a lyre, a kitarra, a pair of trumpets, and a palm branch. These emblems were used in many die combinations, thereby creating a large number of coin types. The bronze coinage was divided into four denominations, a system taken over from the city coinage then current in Palestine and which was reused for the Bar Kochba issues.

In general, the Bar Kochba coinage was based on the tradition of the coinage of the Jewish War, 66–70. The amphora, vine leaf, and palm tree occurred on the coins of that period, and the similarity of the legends is all the more striking, with the name of Zion replaced by the name Israel during the Bar Kochba War.

The vast majority of coins used during the Roman period were minted by the Romans themselves. After the banishment of Herod Archelaus in 6 C.E., his territory (Judea and Samaria) came under direct Roman rule administered by a procurator of equestrian rank. Some of these procurators issued coins of the *perutah* denomination as follows: coin types with a palm tree and an ear of barley; coin types with a wreath surrounding legend, a double cornucopia, olive spray, three lilies, a vine leaf or leaves, *kantaros*, amphora, and a palm branch; coin types with three ears of barley, *simpulum*, *lituus*, and a wreath surrounding the date of issue; and coin types with a wreath surrounding legend, two crossed spears, a palm tree, and a palm branch. It is believed that these coins were issued at Caesarea Maritima, the administrative center of the Romans in Palestine. All coins bore the regal years of the respective Roman emperors and can therefore be arranged in chronological

order without difficulty.

After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., Palestine became a separate administrative unit called provincia Judaea. The Flavian emperors appointed a legatus pro praetore as head of the local administration, and he was also the commander of the military forces stationed in the province.

During the reigns of Vespasian (69–79 C.E.) and Titus (79–81 C.E.) the coins issued refer in their types and legends to the Roman victory; the legends are the Greek equivalent to the well-known legend Judaea Capta. Under Domitian (81–96 C.E.) four series of coins were issued, which do not refer to the victory over the Jews, but to Domitian's victories in Germany and Britain. All but the last two coin types of Domitian are undated and their chronological order was conjectural until recently.

Individual Roman-held cities also minted their own coins. City coins issued under Roman rule customarily had the head of the emperor on one side while the reverse bore images referring to the city, such as temples built there, the gods worshiped by their inhabitants, and military garrisons stationed in them. The legends frequently indicated the status of the city within the Roman empire, such as colonia, autonomous, etc. The archaeological finds suggest that the circulation of these coins was not restricted to the city by which they were issued, but was countrywide.

In some cases ([Ashkelon](#), Gaza, Neapolis, [Sepphoris](#), and [Tiberias](#)) the money systems consisted of three or more denominations. Their equivalency with the Roman coin system cannot be ascertained. All these coins were of bronze. The only city in Palestine that issued an autonomous silver coinage was Ashkelon (between 51 and 30 BCE)—coins bearing portraits of Ptolemy XIV, Ptolemy XV, and Cleopatra VII. The city coinage came to an end in about 260 C.E. when it became known that the value of the metal was greater than their nominal value. It was then replaced by debased Roman imperial coins.

Source: JewishGates.org

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