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ABBREVIATIONS

- AJC* Y. Meshorer *Ancient Jewish Coinage*. Dix Hills, NY 1982
- AJN* *American Journal of Numismatics*
- BMC* e.g., *BMC Arab.*: G.F. Hill. *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Persia*. London 1922
- BMCO* e.g., *BMCO 1*: S. Lane-Poole. *The Coins of the Eastern Khaleefehs in the British Museum. Catalogue of the Oriental Coins in the British Museum 1*. London 1875
- CH* *Coin Hoards*
- CIL* *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*
- CNP* e.g., L. Kadman. *The Coins of Akko Ptolemais* (Corpus Nummorum Palaestinensium IV). Jerusalem 1961
- CRE* e.g., H. Mattingly. *The Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum I. Augustus to Vitellius*. London 1923
- DOC* e.g., P. Grierson. *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection 3. Leo III to Nicephorus III 717–1081*. Washington, D.C. 1973
- IEJ* *Israel Exploration Journal*
- IG* *Inscriptiones Graecae*
- IGCH* M. Thompson, O. Mørkholm and C.M. Kraay. *An Inventory of Greek Coin Hoards*. New York 1973
- INJ* *Israel Numismatic Journal*
- INR* *Israel Numismatic Research*
- LA* *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Liber Annuus*
- LRBC* e.g., P.V. Hill and J.P.C. Kent. Part 1: The Bronze Coinage of the House of Constantine, A.D. 324–46. In *Late Roman Bronze Coinage (A.D. 324–498)*. London 1965. Pp. 4–40
- MIB* e.g., W. Hahn. *Von Anastasius I. bis Justinianus I (491–565)*. *Moneta Imperii Byzantini* 1. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Philosophisch-Historische Klasse Denkschriften 109. Veröffentlichungen der Numismatischen Kommission 1. Vienna 1973
- MIBE* e.g., W. Hahn. *Money of the Incipient Byzantine Empire (Anastasius I–Justinian I, 491–565)* (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte der Universität Wien 6). Vienna 2000
- MN* *American Numismatic Society Museum Notes*
- NC* *Numismatic Chronicle*
- NCirc.* *Numismatic Circular*
- NNM* *Numismatic Notes and Monographs*
- NZ* *Numismatische Zeitschrift*
- RRC* M.H. Crawford. *Roman Republican Coinage*. Cambridge 1974
- RIC* e.g., C.H.V. Sutherland. *The Roman Imperial Coinage I. From 31 BC to AD 69*. London 1984
- RN* *Revue Numismatique*
- RPC* e.g., A. Burnett, M. Amandry and I. Carradice. *From Vespasian to Domitian (AD 69–96). Roman Provincial Coinage 2*. London 1999
- SC* e.g., A. Houghton and C. Lorber. *Seleucid Coins. A Comprehensive Catalogue. Part I. Seleucus I through Antiochus III*. New York, Lancaster, PA and London 2002
- SICA* e.g., S. Album and T. Goodwin. *Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the Ashmolean, Volume 1: The Pre-Reform Coinage of the Early Islamic Period*. Oxford 2002
- SNAT* e.g., L. Ilisch. *Sylloge Numorum Arabicorum Tübingen–Palästina IVa Bilād aš-Šām I*. Tübingen 1993
- SNG* *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum* (with suffix as necessary, e.g. *SNG Cop.*)
- SNR* *Schweizerische Numismatische Rundschau*
- TINC* *Transactions of the International Numismatic Congress*
- TJC* Y. Meshorer. *A Treasury of Jewish Coins from the Persian Period to Bar Kochba*. Jerusalem and Nyack 2001
- ZfN* *Zeitschrift für Numismatik*

A Silver-Plated Samaritan Coin from Tel Dor

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Abstract

This article presents a Samaritan silver-plated “*drachm*”/rb’ šql that was recently found at Tel Dor. Depicted on the obverse is a combat scene between two warriors. The author suggests a new reading for the letters on the obverse and discusses the iconography of the coin, which has no parallel in any other Persian-period coins. Yet, some analogy to the scene on the coin is found in Achaemenid cylinder seals and suggests that this specific coin type originated in glyptic art.

During the 2006 excavation season at Tel Dor a Samaritan coin was found (Fig. 1).¹ Based on its weight and diameter (see below), this coin should be categorized as “*drachm*” or rb’ šql.²



Fig. 1. Samaritan coin from Dor (1:1 and 2:1 scale)

Obv. Two confronted fighting warriors; between the figures, two Aramaic letters: 𐤒 𐤑; all in square dotted border.

Rev. Two soldiers standing confronted; each holding a long spear; the one on the r. carries an oval shield ornamented with a frontal head of Bes; the l. figure is in relief and the r. appears in incuse;³ test cut in r. field.

Silver-plated Æ, ←, 2.74 g, 15×16 mm.

1 The coin (Reg. No. 55000) was found on the surface in Area D1. I wish to thank the directors of the Tel Dor excavations, Ilan Sharon and Ayelet Gilboa, for permission to publish this coin. I also wish to thank Barak Monnickendam-Givon and Yiftah Shalev for the photographs.

2 For the question of coin denominations and weight standards in fourth-century BCE Samaria see Tal 2007:20.

3 Although the right figure appears in incuse, the outline of the design is represented in linear relief. For this technique see Gitler and Tal 2006b:56 n. 34.

A similar specimen was first published by Imhoof-Blumer (1883:370, No. 64) as a Cilician coin. The same specimen was published again by Babelon as “Incertaines de Phénicie, de Cilicie ou de Chypre” (*Traité* II,2:629–630, No. 1018) and later again by Meshorer and Qedar (1991:60, No. 89) as part of their first corpus of Samaritan coins. Two other specimens were published later, both from private collections and from unknown origin; one was published by Meshorer and Qedar (1999:92, No. 49) as part of their second corpus of Samaritan coins, and the second specimen was published by Rynearson (2000:155, No. 24; Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Samaritan coin, after Rynearson 2000:155, No. 24

The obverse of the coin from Dor is better preserved than the other previously published specimens and thus can help us to better identify some of its details (below).⁴

The obverse scene presents two confronted fighting warriors; the one on the left is wearing trousers, tunic(?) and Persian tiara and holding a dagger in his right hand; behind him an unclear vertical object (scepter/bow case?); The warrior on the right is wearing broad trousers and a crested Corinthian(?) helmet and holding an uncertain object (a stone?) in his raised left hand and a dagger(?) in his right; the warrior on the left tries to stab his opponent with right hand while holding his helmet's plume-holder with his left; the warrior on the right is trying to stab his rival with his right hand.

The headdress of the left figure covers its head, cheeks and beard(?) and thus indicates that this figure should be identified as the Persian governor (satrap) or the so-called ‘Persian hero’ or ‘royal hero’ (Kaptan 2002:55–73; Curtis 2005:92–94).⁵ This specific type of headdress (probably a *tiara*) is known on other Samaritan coins (Meshorer and Qedar 1999:97–118, Nos. 75–76, 185, 188, 190; Gitler and Tal 2006b:55, No. 15) as well as on Cilician coins (*SNG Cilicia*: Pls. 10:282–289; 14:391–394).⁶ The figure on the right appears to be wearing a crested helmet, probably Corinthian (or “pseudo-Corinthian”) with nose-

4 Unfortunately, I could not check these specimens and their photographs are not of sufficient quality for die-study.

5 For the identification of this figure see also the discussions by Root (1979:303–308) and Leith (1997:214–217).

6 Similar, but not identical types of headdresses appears on other Samaritan (Cf. Meshorer and Qedar 1999, Nos. 1–2, 4–5, 71–72, 137, 189, 191) as well as Lycian (*BMC Lycia, Pamphylia, and Pisidia*:22–25, Nos. 101–102, 110–111) and other coins.

guard(?).⁷ This figure might represent a Greek person, but the broad trousers that he seems to be wearing militates against this possibility. The combination of the Corinthian helmet with the broad trousers is not usual and probably points to a more generic identification.

The general position of the left figure (e.g., holding an enemy, animal or creature in left hand and ready to stab it with dagger in his right) is frequent on Samarian coins (Meshorer and Qedar 1999:83–120, Nos. 4–7, 20, 22–23, 35, 55–56, 74, 86, 96, 98, 106, 146, 147, 199–204; Gitler and Tal 2006b:54–56, Nos. 14, 18) and Sidonian coins (*BMC Phoen.*:141–154, Nos. 9–13, 34–45, 67–68, 84–85) representing the Persian king/hero as well as on other provincial coins and artifacts of the Persian period (Head 1877:36–37; Leith 1997:214–219; Kaptan 2002:5–50, DS3). It should be noted that on the Samarian and Sidonian coins as well as on some bullas (Kaptan and Leith, above) the Persian king(?) is shown in a more dynamic attitude; e.g., the king's right hand (with the dagger) is shown along his left or right side, while on the coin from Dor his hand is extended forward against the enemy. In both cases the images always represent the stage of combat before the hero plunges his dagger into his opponent.⁸

This type of combat scene is so far unique for coins. But similar representations are known on two cylinder seals, one in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Ghirshman 1964:269, Fig. 331; Summerer 2007:10, Fig. 3) and the other in the British Museum (Tallis 2005:228–229, Cat. No. 415; Summerer 2007:9, Fig. 2), as well as on a painted wooden beam in Munich, originally found near Tatarli in Turkey (Summerer 2007: Figs. I–III).⁹

The central part of the scene depicted on the cylinder seal in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Fig. 3) is very similar to that on our Samarian coin. Some of the details are not quite identical but the general attitudes of both warriors are very similar. Ghirshman entitled the scene “Medes and Scythians fighting” (Ghirshman 1964:269, Fig. 331) without further discussion.

The origins of this type of combat scene are not clear but one should notice the similarity between the position and characters of the ‘Persian hero’ on

7 For similar helmets see Pflug 1988b:83, Figs. 20–21; Bottini 1988:130–131, Figs. 33–34.

8 For various scenes depicting heroes stabbing rampant animals or creatures see Garrison and Roth 2001:295–414; Kaptan 2002:65–66, DS 18; Curtis 2005:82, Figs. 41–42; Ghirshman 1964:202–203, Figs. 250–253. The scene presenting the king/hero stabbing a rampant lion is common in Assyrian glyptic art as well as on some reliefs from Nineveh (Winter 2000:54–60, Fig. 1 and Pls. V:1–2, VI:5).

9 I am indebted to Jarosław Bodzek for these references as well as for some other important suggestions regarding this paper.

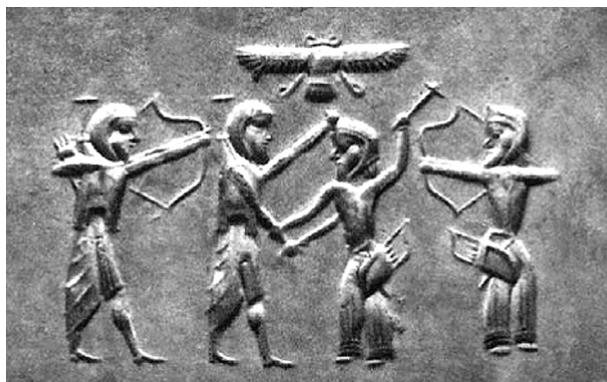


Fig. 3. Cylinder seal, Bibliothèque Nationale (after Ghirshman 1964:269, Fig. 331)

the coin from Dor (and to some extent on the cylinder seal as well) and some representations of Heracles fighting Geryon in early Greek art (Fig. 4).¹⁰



Fig. 4. Combat of Heracles and Geryon. Greek Amphora (c. 540 BCE, height 47.5 cm; courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum; Reg. No. 1867,0506.45)

The close resemblance between the iconography on the coin type under discussion and the one on the cylinder seals (especially the seal from the Bibliothèque Nationale), as opposed to the absence of similar scenes on other Persian-period coins might suggest that this coin type, depicting a combat

¹⁰ For such representations of Heracles see Pflug 1988a:37, Fig. 12; 1988b:81, Fig. 18. For other examples in which Persian artisans followed a Greek iconographic model see Summerer 2007:27–28.

scene between two warriors, was borrowed from glyptic art.¹¹ As was noted by Bodzek regarding another Samarian coin type, “it is probable that the Samarian issuing authority consciously chose iconographic types recalling the Achaemenid aristocratic ethos with which the local community was presumably familiar” (Bodzek 2008:3).

Yet, it is well known that Heracles was very popular among the Greco-Phoenician artisans (Leith 1997:85–94; Stern 2002:100) and thus, one should not exclude the possibility that his iconography, such as the one presented above, was adopted by a Samarian die-engraver for the coin under discussion.

One may ask whether this combat scene commemorates an historical event or not. As was explained by Summerer regarding the scene on the wooden beam from Munich, “...the depicted Persian victory should not be seen as an historical documentation, but rather as a more generic battle ‘Persians versus enemy,’ perhaps an ideological construct which was determined by the warfare experience of Persians” (Summerer 2007:27).

The reverse scene is known from an “*obol*” attributed to Samaria (Meshorer and Qedar 1991:60, No. 90; 1999:46, No. 50; Rynearson 2000:155, No. 25; Gitler and Tal 2006b:56, No. 19) — probably a smaller denomination of the “*drachm*” under discussion.¹² The position of the two figures and especially the oval shield of the right figure,¹³ are very similar to some Persian guards presented in the Persepolis reliefs, especially those presented in the center of the eastern stairway of the Apadana (Ghirshman 1964:163, Fig. 211 and 204, Fig. 254; Roaf 1983:Pl. Ia).¹⁴ One should notice that the shield on the coin is ornamented with a frontal head of Bes (Fig. 2 above), while the shields in Persepolis are ornamented with a wheel-shaped boss. The frontal head of Bes was a popular image on Samarian (Meshorer and Qedar 1999:33–34, 93–119, Nos. 53–54, 120, 122, 151–153, 157–158, 179–180, 198) and Philisto-Arabian (Mildenberg 1995) coins. The specific head of Bes on the coin is quite similar to the one appearing on some Cilician coins.¹⁵ This might serve as evidence for the Cilician origins of this Samarian coin type.

11 For similar case regarding another Samarian coin type, see Bodzek 1999. For Achaemenid iconography as evidenced by glyptic art, see Garrison 2000.

12 A similar reverse type is also known from a coin of Tarsus: In this coin the two soldiers are standing confronted; each holds a long spear but neither holds a round shield. See *SNG Cilicia*: Pl. 7:208 = Babelon, *Traité* II:361–362, No. 527.

13 This shield is called a ‘violin shield’ because of its oval shape with circular cut-outs on either side, giving it the appearance of a violin. The shield is also referred to as a *Dipydon* shield.

14 Boardman (2000:138) stated that the only exact parallel to these shields can be found in a Greek shield type (‘Boeotian’) which some scholars believe to be heroic and imaginary, or at best, a parade shield.

15 See for example Mildenberg 1995: Pls. 1:14–15.

The two Aramaic letters on the obverse (see below) were not mentioned by Imhoof-Blumer, Babelon or by Meshorer and Qedar in their 1991 publication, and thus, it is possible that these letters did not appear on the specimen they observed. If so, the specific specimen that they observed may be an original Cilician(?) coin, while the other two specimens, as well as the coin from Dor, are Samaritan imitations of this type. The fact that the coin from Dor is silver-plated and bears a test cut and that two test cuts appear on the specimen published by Meshorer and Qedar (1999:92, No. 49), while no test cuts appear on the first published specimen,¹⁶ might support this assumption.

The two letters were first identified by Meshorer and Qedar (1999:92, No. 49) as *sn* (סנ). But later Rynearson suggested these letters be read as *yd* (דך), and he offered that this coin may have been issued under the governor or high priest Yaddu'a (Rynearson 2000:155, No. 24). The letters on the coin from Dor are clearer than the ones on the other specimens and thus, a new reading of these letters may now be suggested. The letter on the right looks like *yod* but has a short leg extending downward and not to the right. Thus, it should be read as *samekh*. The leg of the letter on the left curves to the left and does not continue straight downward and thus should be read as *bet*,¹⁷ and not as *nun*. Thus, it seems that these letters should be read as *sb* (סב). A similar reading was also suggested by Lemaire (2002:153).

The same abbreviation appears on other Samaritan issues (Meshorer and Qedar 1999:93, Nos. 51–53, 56) where these letters were identified as the letters *sn*, probably an abbreviation for Sanballat. Based on the new reading suggested here, it seems the letters on these coins should also be read as *sb* — probably another abbreviation for the same name.¹⁸

Samaritan coins retrieved from controlled excavations are very scarce and are known from a few sites only; at least 20 coins were found on Mount Gerizim in Samaria (Magen 2008:168; Gitler and Tal 2006b:56–57). One coin, excavated in Samaria, which was published by Fulco and Zayadine (1981:203, No. 12) as uncertain, was re-attributed by Elayi and Lemaire to the mint of Samaria (1989:162). Another Samaritan coin is known from Gan Soreq in northern Philistia (Gitler and Tal 2006b:49, No. 2c). Two other coins, a silver-plated “*hemiobol*” from Ḥorbat 'Eleq (Barkay 2000:377, No. 4) and a silver “*hemiobol*” from Jerusalem (Fig. 5),¹⁹ were identified as Samaritan imitations of Sidonian types.

16 For a discussion of test cuts see Gitler and Tal 2006a:312–313.

17 For cases of a similar *bet* on other Samaritan coins see Meshorer and Qedar 1999:83–92, Nos. 4, 6, 9–10, 15–17, 19, 41–42, 44, 45–46. For the shape of this letter see also Naveh 1970: Fig. 11.

18 The name Sanballat is an Akkadian theophoric name, which is composed of two words: *sin-uballit*, and means “Sin (the moon-god) gives life” (Williamson 1992:973).

19 This coin was found during Magen Broshi's excavations on Mount Zion (IAA 79361),

Both depict the Persian king, kneeling right and drawing his bow, on one side of the coin. The other side of the Ḥorbat 'Eleq coin has a war galley and the other side of the Jerusalem coin is obliterated. These two coins may be Samarian (and see Meshorer and Qedar 1999:101–103, Nos. 97, 105 and 197 for this type of Persian king) although it is also possible that they are Sidonian issues.²⁰



Fig. 5. Samarian(?) coin from Jerusalem (scale 3:1)

Obv. Obliterated

Rev. Persian king kneeling to l. and drawing bow.

AR, 0.16 g, 6–7 mm.

It has been suggested that Samarian coins circulated mostly in Samaria (Gitler and Tal 2006b:57). The find of the “*drachm*” at Tel Dor might point that Samarian coins circulated also further north and along the coast. These coins may have also circulated in Judea, if the quarter “*obol*” from Jerusalem is indeed Samarian.

As noted above, the coin from Dor is silver-plated.²¹ Silver-plated coins are known in Samaria (Meshorer and Qedar 1991:67), Philistia,²² and Phoenicia (*BMC Phoen.*:3, No. 9, pp. 229–232, Nos. 11–12, 18, 33, 38bis, 41; Qedar 2000–2002:10–14). These are usually large denominations. Two explanations are given for the appearance of silver-plated coins. These coins may be official silver-plated issues, coined in periods of financial crisis, or they may be fraudulent

and was identified by Rachel Barkay. I wish to thank her and Shimon Gibson for permission to include this information here and to Donald T. Ariel for locating the coin in the IAA collection.

20 For similar Sidonian types see, for example, *BMC Phoen.*:142, Nos. 14–16; Lambert 1932:7, Nos. 36–38; Meshorer and Qedar 1991, Nos. 195–200; Elayi and Elayi 2004: Nos. 1219, 2596–2606.

21 As far as I know, the question of silver-plated coins in the Persian period has not yet been fully studied. For general information concerning silver-plating of coins see Zwicker, Oddy and La Niece 1993.

22 Several silver-plated Athenian and Athenian-styled “*tetradrachms*” of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE appear in Gitler and Tal (2006a:27–30, table 2.1). Two copper cores of plated Philistian “*drachms*” and another silver-plated “*drachm*” are mentioned by Gitler and Tal (2006a:330; 2006b:60 n. 44), one of Gaza (Gitler and Tal 2006a:132, VI. Gaza. 1D [variant] c) and the other two are classified as Athenian-styled (Gitler and Tal 2006a:184, XIII. Obverse Athenian-styled. 16D). For a silver-plated “*obol*” see Farhi 2009:238, No. 3.

imitations (Gitler and Tal 2006a:313). The occurrence of silver-plated coins can also be explained deriving from the need to produce a defined number of coins from a given amount of silver. Thus, if the minter had difficulty in dividing the given amount of silver into the correct number of coins or if a given amount of silver bullion did not suffice to produce the requested amount of coins, he would supplement his production with coins containing bronze-alloy cores. As was stated by Gitler and Tal (above), since we are dealing with local currency serving the local market, it is possible that such ‘counterfeits’ may have been tolerated by the authorities, as long as they did not upset the stability of economic conditions.

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