


# INSIGHTS ON THE BAR KOKHBA REVOLT FROM THE COINS

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**Abstract:** Without having any contemporaneous account of the Bar Kokhba Revolt comparable to the writings of Josephus that describe the First Jewish Revolt, our knowledge about many aspects of the later uprising is rather sketchy. The publication of Roman military diplomas and the remarkable series of documents recovered from caves in the Judaean Desert, along with other major archaeological findings, has filled in just some of missing details. This study is devoted to a re-examination of the rebel coinage. It has highlighted the importance of the numismatic evidence in helping to elucidate the religious ideology that succoured the rebellion and shaped its leadership.

**Keywords:** Bar Kokhba Revolt, Numismatics, Judaea, Hadrian, *corona civica*, Cassius Dio, Eusebius, Rabbinic literature, Jewish messianism.

## 1. Background

The Second Jewish Revolt broke out in the early summer of 132 CE<sup>1</sup> with Bethar, the last Bar Kokhba stronghold, falling to the Romans on 9th Ab, August 135 CE, according to rabbinic tradition.<sup>2</sup> However, W. Eck would extend the hostilities into 136 CE, taking account of the Latin inscription from Lanuvium (*ILS* 316 = *CIL* XIV 2088).<sup>3</sup>

Recent archaeological and numismatic finds have demonstrated that the rebellion broke out following Hadrian's refounding of Jerusalem as the Roman colonia of Aelia Capitolina.<sup>4</sup> This finding is consistent with Cassius Dio's assertion in the epitomised form bequeathed to us by the Byzantine monk, Johannes Xiphilinos, that this was the

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<sup>1</sup> Eshel – Zissu 2019, 108–113, with refs.

<sup>2</sup> *mTa'an*. 4.6.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Eck 2003, 160; Eck 2007, 49–50. Eusebius' *Chronicle* also dates the duration of the Bar Kokhba Revolt from the second half of 132 to 136 CE (Horbury 2014, 166, note 13; 285), while rabbinic sources maintain that the war had a duration of three and a half years (*yTa'an*. 4.8, 68d; *Ekhah R.* 2.4).

<sup>4</sup> Bar-Nathan – Bijovsky 2018.

act that triggered the revolt,<sup>5</sup> and was not an outcome of the conflict as claimed by Eusebius.<sup>6</sup> The founding ceremony of Aelia Capitolina, the *sulcus primigenius* ceremony took place during Hadrian's visit to Jerusalem in 129/30 CE.<sup>7</sup> The ban on circumcision may have come as a punitive measure in the course of the revolt, despite the claim of the *Historia Augusta* that it preceded the revolt.<sup>8</sup> It has been further suggested by the present author that it was the mutilation of the summit of Mount Moriah, on which the Jewish Sanctuary had stood, truncating it by more than a metre, to prepare the foundations of Hadrian's Capitolium.<sup>9</sup> This act seems to have been conflated with the ploughing of the furrow in the *sulcus primigenius* ritual in the statement that Rufus ploughed the Temple in both Jerome<sup>10</sup> and the Talmud.<sup>11</sup> For many pious Jews, this was the final straw.

The discovery of letters by rebel officials at Wadi Muraba'at in the early 1950s and of additional documents from other caves further south along the western side of the Dead Sea in 1960–1961 have thrown light on the revolt and its leader. His full name is given in P. Mur. 43,<sup>12</sup> an autograph letter in Hebrew, as שמעון בן כוסבה (*Shim'on ben Kosibah*), but variant spellings of his surname are given in the Aramaic documents.<sup>13</sup> A Greek transliteration, Σίμων Χωσίβα (*Simōn Khōsiba*), is given in P. Yadin 59 from Naḥal Ḥever, which attests to the likely correct vocalisation that was used.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, when we refer to him in person, the name 'b. Kosiba' (b. standing for 'ben' or 'bar') will be used here, but in other contexts, the more familiar 'Bar Kokhba' will apply. His real name would have lent itself to the sobriquet, Bar Kokhba ('son of a star'), by his zealous followers, preserved in the patristic literature as Βαρκοχέβας (*Barkhokhebas*).<sup>15</sup>

The documents directly connected with the rebel leadership that have been recovered from caves in Judaeian desert also provide a glimpse of b. Kosiba's administrative system and name some of his military commanders and local civilian administrators (*parnasim*).<sup>16</sup> However, these documents reveal rather little about the course of the conflict or about key episodes in the fighting, leading up to the final extinction of the revolt.

Despite its extreme brevity, the epitome of Cassius Dio by Xiphilinus remains the most informative textual source we have.<sup>17</sup> It tells us that the strategy of the rebels was to avoid direct engagements with the Roman forces in the field, but to operate from hiding places, principally underground, where they would be stationed.<sup>18</sup> This important detail

<sup>5</sup> Cass. Dio 69.12.1–2; *pace* Horbury 2014, 308–311, 316; *contra* Mor 2016, 121–129. On the factors that may have contributed to igniting the Bar Kokhba revolt, see, *inter alia*, the discussion in Gichon 2016, 116–165.

<sup>6</sup> Euseb. *HE* 4.6.4.

<sup>7</sup> Bar-Nathan – Bijovsky 2018, 148.

<sup>8</sup> SHA *Hadr.* 14.2. For a convincing evaluation of this issue, see Horbury 2014, 311–316.

<sup>9</sup> Jacobson 1990/1991, 60.

<sup>10</sup> Jer. *In Zach.* 8.19

<sup>11</sup> *jTa'an.* 4.8, 69b; cf. *bTa'an.* 29a.

<sup>12</sup> *DJD* 2, 159–161.

<sup>13</sup> Schäfer 1981, 51–52; Weiss 2014, 101 and notes 9–11; Wise 2015, 287.

<sup>14</sup> Yadin *et al.* 2002, 363–366.

<sup>15</sup> Schürer 1973, 543, note 128; Horbury 2014, 384.

<sup>16</sup> Horbury 2014, 352–353; Eshel – Zissu 2019, 116–117.

<sup>17</sup> Isaac 1983/1984; Raviv – Ben David 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Cass. Dio 69.12.3.

has been strikingly confirmed by the archaeologists, who have uncovered the extensive use of underground installations and tunnel complexes as places of refuge for the rebels.<sup>19</sup> Many of these were cut into the rock under existing settlements. Over 400 subterranean hideouts have been identified to date.<sup>20</sup> On the basis of the geographical distribution of these hiding complexes and caves of refuge in which Bar Kokhba material has been found, the area controlled by the rebels for any length of time has been gauged as extending about 40 km west to east, from the foothills of Judaeian hills to the cliffs overlooking the Jordan Valley, and from Shiloh in the north to edge of the Negev in the south, a distance of close to 80 km.<sup>21</sup> Almost all rebel coin deposits have been found within this area.<sup>22</sup> Jerusalem, although at the centre of the area dominated by the rebels, remained under Roman control.<sup>23</sup> As compelling evidence, just four rebel coins have been found in situ in Jerusalem, all probably the loot of brought there by Roman soldiers. It is estimated that the area held by the rebels for much of the period of the revolt rarely exceeded 2,000 sq. km, which is only slightly larger than that of Greater London.

Despite being so geographically confined, through their resourcefulness and sheer determination, the rebels managed to hold out against the might of Rome for more than three years. Their lengthy resistance owed even more, perhaps, to the exceptional discipline of their fighters and helpers, instilled by b. Kosiba and his commanders, which permeates the correspondence and other documents from the Judaeian Desert. Their outstanding organisation is attested by their creation of the extensive network of underground installations that survives to this day.

Even the lowest estimates of the strength of the Roman force ranged against the rebels, 13,000 men, according to W. Eck,<sup>24</sup> or 27,500, suggested by M. Mor,<sup>25</sup> ought to have been sufficient to quell a rebellion of such small-scale dimensions. Certainly, the duration of the revolt was lengthened by the failure of the Imperial army to get a speedy grip on the rebellion, with the ignominious defeat of the legate of Judaea, Q. Tinnēius Rufus.<sup>26</sup> Rufus is mentioned by name in the sources as the leading Roman protagonist.<sup>27</sup>

Unfortunately, the literary sources and archaeological evidence, including the contents of the documents from the Judaeian Desert, are patchy and produce hardly any information about the course of the conflict.<sup>28</sup> From these sources, we learn next to nothing about the early stages of the rebellion. The rabbinic sources, by contrast, focus on the bloody conclusion of the War, stunned as they were by the ultimate failure of the rising with the fall of Bethar, the last rebel stronghold, and the painful aftermath.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Eshel – Zissu 2019, 48–61; id. 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Eshel – Zissu 2019, 61.

<sup>21</sup> Zissu – Klöner 2014, 100, fig. 7; cf. Raviv – Ben David 2021, 590–591.

<sup>22</sup> Zissu – Eshel 2000/2002; Eshel – Zissu 2019, 135.

<sup>23</sup> Mor 2016, 249–288; Eshel – Zissu 2019, 140–141.

<sup>24</sup> Eck 1999, 81.

<sup>25</sup> Mor 2016, 226–227.

<sup>26</sup> *PIR*<sup>2</sup> T 227; Dąbrowa 2017, 290; *CIIP* 2, 1121–2160, no. 1276.

<sup>27</sup> *yTa'an*. 4.8, 69b; Euseb. *HE* 4.6.1; Jer. *In Zach.* 8.19; *Ab Abr.* 2148.

<sup>28</sup> Dąbrowa 2019, 69.

<sup>29</sup> *yTa'an*. 4.8, 68d–69a; Euseb. *HE* 4.6.3.

There is an important area of research relating to the Bar Kokhba Revolt, which earlier generations of scholars, including Isaac and Oppenheimer,<sup>30</sup> had overlooked. This is the significant corpus of epigraphical material relating to Roman governors and military officers who served in Syria and Palestine during the reign of Hadrian. In recent years, these inscriptions have been profitably studied by Dąbrowa and Eck, in particular. Dąbrowa has drawn on these sources to reconstruct the succession of Roman legates of Syria and of Judaea/Syria Palaestina in the last decade of Hadrian's reign, covering the years before, during and immediately after the Bar Kokhba Revolt.<sup>31</sup> He has also managed to elucidate some of the key stages in the Roman military campaign.

Following the debacle of the Roman legionaries under the command of Rufus, which Dąbrowa places in 132 CE, the legate of Syria, C. Quinctius Certus Poblucius Marcellus,<sup>32</sup> was drafted in to help plug the gap until the legate of Britain, Sextus Julius Severus,<sup>33</sup> could be brought to Judaea to replace the previous legate of Judaea. This transfer apparently took place in the first half of 133 CE.<sup>34</sup> While in Britain, Julius Severus had demonstrated his prowess in administering one of the most important military commands in the Empire.<sup>35</sup> He had also gained valuable experience in dealing with guerrilla insurgencies which he applied to the Roman military tactics used against the Bar Kokhba rebels.<sup>36</sup>

This study revisits the rebel coinage afresh for information it can yield about the Bar Kokhba Revolt and its course in relation to that party to the conflict.

## 2. The Bar Kokhba Coins

Throughout the Bar Kokhba War, the coinage struck by the Jewish rebels divides into at least five denominations, two silver and three or four bronzes. They bear inscriptions solely in Hebrew, in the Palaeo-Hebrew script. All the coins are overstruck issues of coins that circulated locally in the Levant at that time and traces of the under-type is frequently clearly visible, more especially in the silver coins, for which there was less attempt to smooth down the surfaces and remove the more valuable precious metal. The two principal silver issues were the tetradrachm based on the Phoenician standard, weighing 12 to about 14 g and the Roman denarius of around 3.5 g, which was by then that time circulating abundantly in the region. The tetradrachm was known to the Jewish population as the *sela* ' and the denarius as the *zuz*.<sup>37</sup> The denarius was then on a par with the drachma, with 4 denarii (*zuzim*) to the tetradrachm (*sela* '). A rare half- *sela* ' (didrachm) of year 3, referred to as a sheqel in P. Yadin 46,<sup>38</sup> is represented by just four known examples.

<sup>30</sup> Isaac – Oppenheimer 1985, 53.

<sup>31</sup> Dąbrowa 2017; Dąbrowa 2019.

<sup>32</sup> *PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 1042; Dąbrowa 1998, 92–94; cf. Mor 2016, 355–358.

<sup>33</sup> *PIR*<sup>2</sup> I 576; Dąbrowa 2017, 286, note 12; Mor 2016, 351–354.

<sup>34</sup> Dąbrowa 2019, 77–78; cf. Mor 2016, 266–267 (arguing for the arrival of Severus in Judaea a year later).

<sup>35</sup> Eck 1999, 78–79.

<sup>36</sup> Cass. Dio 69.13.3.

<sup>37</sup> Yadin 1962, 252 and note 43; Yadin – Greenfield – Yardeni 1994, 90 and note 42.

<sup>38</sup> See Eshel – Zissu 2019, 125, note 7.

The bronze denominations have been subject to controversy and some confusion.<sup>39</sup> Differences of opinion principally relate to the inter-denominational relationship between the different coin types and whether there were meant to be three or four distinct denominations in bronze. There are two distinct coin types among the middle bronzes, and the question is whether they represent a single or two different denominations. That uncertainty is compounded by the wide weight variation in coins of the same type. This is a consequence of the rebel mints basing their operations on striking over earlier issues from elsewhere and not applying a high degree of selectivity. At least in one case, they even availed themselves of serrated Seleucid bronze coins dating from at least two centuries earlier for one of their middle bronzes.<sup>40</sup>

With the aim of bringing clarity to the denominational sequence, a statistical determination was carried out on a sample of 25 specimens of each coin type, a procedure that smooths out the weight variations between individual coins. The results are summarised in **Table 1** and are quite clear.

**Table 1.** Average weights and sizes, with standard deviations, of Bar Kokhba bronze coin denominations, in a sample size of 25 specimens of each type

|                    | Large bronze | Middle bronzes        |                                    |                                   | Small bronze |
|--------------------|--------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
|                    |              | Vine leaf / palm tree | Wide lyre / palm branch, years 1–2 | Narrow lyre / palm branch, year 3 |              |
| Weights, g         |              |                       |                                    |                                   |              |
| Average            | 21.5         | 11.6                  | 10.2                               | 7.2                               | 5.7          |
| Standard deviation | 5.8          | 1.7                   | 2.1                                | 1.2                               | 0.9          |
| Sizes, mm          |              |                       |                                    |                                   |              |
| Average            | 30           | 24                    | 23                                 | 21                                | 19           |
| Standard deviation | 7            | 2                     | 2                                  | 6                                 | 2            |

For bronze coins marked ‘year 1’ and ‘year 2,’ only three distinct denominations are clearly differentiated, based on size and weight criteria, consistent with the numismatic literature in which these coins are referred to the large, medium and small bronzes. The three denominations can be clearly recognised as the large bronze unit and its half and quarter fractions by weight. In the case of the undated Bar Kokhba coins, which are assigned to the third year, the two middle bronzes separate into two distinct denominations, so that, in this case, there are four denominations, the unit, half, third and quarter fractions. The large bronze corresponds to a light *sestertius* (in many cases actually an over-

<sup>39</sup> Typically, see Eshel – Zissu 2019, 125–126.

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., CNG Mail Bid Sale 75 (23.05.2007), lot 510.

struck sestertius with its original surface detail ground off), the middle bronze of 10 to 12 g either a light *dupondius* or *as*, and the small bronze is similar to a Roman *semis*.<sup>41</sup>

I shall examine the motifs and inscriptions and try to elucidate their true significance. Because these coins follow a specified chronological sequence, we can hope to learn something of the course of the rebellion and cast light on its ideological basis. First, it is necessary to present a brief survey of the Bar Kokhba coinage, in chronological order.

## 2.1. The Coins of Year 1 (132–133 CE)

Inscription on all the reverses: שנת אחת לגאולת ישראל ('year one, for the redemption of Israel').

The Year 1 *sela*/tetradrachm (*TJC*, no. 218; *GBC5*, no. 1373; **Fig. 1**) depicts on the obverse the tetrastyle façade of the Temple of Jerusalem. The Ark of the Covenant is represented as a chest with a semi-circular lid and short legs, seen from a narrow side. Indicated as two dots are the pair of staves used to carry the ark, which 'were not seen, but protruded through the curtain and looked like two woman's breasts'.<sup>42</sup> The accompanying inscription reads ירושלים ('Jerusalem'). The reverse bears 'the four species' of the Sukkot (Tabernacles) festival, comprising the citron (אתרוג) to the left alongside the customary bundle of a palm frond (לולב), myrtle (הדסים) and willow twigs (ערבות).



**Fig. 1.** Year 1, *sela*/tetradrachm (*TJC*, no. 218; *GBC5*, no. 1373). The New York Sale, Auction 39 (10.01.2017), lot 48. Courtesy of Ira & Larry Goldberg Coins & Collectibles, Inc.

The *zuz*/denarius of that year is represented by a single type (*TJC*, no. 219; *GBC5*, no. 1374; **Fig. 2**). On its obverse is a flagon and branch. Y. Adler argues that the branch is that of a willow, and so stands for the willow branch ceremony that took place along with the water ceremony (represented by a gold flagon) at the Temple altar during Sukkot festival.<sup>43</sup> The accompanying inscription reads אלעזר הכהן ('Eleazar the priest'). The reverse bears bunch of grapes, vine-leaf and tendril.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Eshel – Zissu 2019, 125–126.

<sup>42</sup> *b.Yoma* 54a; *b.Menah.* 98b.

<sup>43</sup> Adler 2007/2008. A brief account of these two festivals is preserved in *mSukkah* 4.5, 9–10. See also below.



**Fig. 2.** Year 1, zuz/denarius (*TJC*, no. 219; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1374). Courtesy of David Hendin

A large bronze denomination was struck in year 1. There are two different obverse types, displaying wreaths with inscriptions. One of these consists of the single word ירושלם ('Jerusalem') (*TJC*, no. 221; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1375; **Fig. 3**) and the other, שמעון נשיא ישראל ('Simon, *nasi*' of Israel') (*TJC*, no. 220; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1376; **Fig. 4**). The reverse of both large bronzes bears an amphora with two handles.



**Fig. 3.** Year 1, large bronze (*TJC*, no. 221; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1375). Courtesy of David Hendin



**Fig. 4.** Year 1, large bronze (*TJC*, no. 220; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1376). Courtesy of David Hendin

The first of the two middle bronzes (*TJC*, no. 222; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1378; **Fig. 5**) displays a seven-branched palm tree with two bunches of dates and accompanying inscription שמעון נשיא ישראל (as above) on the obverse. The reverse has as its motif a vine leaf and tendril hanging from a branch.



**Fig. 5.** Year 1, middle bronze (*TJC*, no. 222; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1378). Courtesy of David Hendin

The second Middle bronze (*TJC*, no. 223; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1377; **Fig. 6**) exhibits a palm branch within a wreath and the usual inscription, שמעון נשיא ישראל ('Simon, *nasi* ' of Israel'). The reverse is adorned with a wide lyre (*nebel* – נבל or *chelys*) of four or more strings.



**Fig. 6.** Year 1, middle bronze (*TJC*, no. 223a; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1377). Courtesy of David Hendin

There are two small bronzes of year 1. The first (*TJC*, nos. 224–226; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1380; **Fig. 7**) displays on its obverse, once again, a seven-branched palm tree with bunches of dates, but with the inscription אלעזר הכהן ('Eleazar the priest'), and the reverse displays a bunch of grapes, leaf and tendril.



**Fig. 7.** Year 1, small bronze (*TJC*, no. 224; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1380). Courtesy of David Hendin

As we shall see, one of the four known obverse dies for the small bronze was retained in the mint and later used to strike a very limited number of coins during the 2nd and 3rd years.



The second year 1 bronze has the same motifs, but a different inscription on the obverse: ירושלים ('Jerusalem'), as on one of the large bronze types (*TJC*, nos. 227–228; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1381; **Fig. 8**).



**Fig. 8.** Year 1, small bronze (*TJC*, no. 227; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1381). The New York Sale, Auction 39 (10.01.2017), lot 64. Courtesy of Ira & Larry Goldberg Coins & Collectibles, Inc.

## 2.2. Coins of Year 2 (133–134)

Inscription on all the reverses: ש ב ל ה ישראל ('year two, for the freedom of Israel').

For year 2, we find two versions of the silver *sela* /tetradrachm. The obverse motif is similar for both types, namely the tetrastyle temple with a flat roof with the Ark of the Covenant enclosed within, as in Fig. 1. One of these bears the inscription. ירושלים ('Jerusalem') as for the *sela* 'im of year 1 (*TJC*, nos. 230a–c; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, nos. 1386–1387; **Fig. 9a**), while on the second version, the name שמעון ('Simon') appears instead (*TJC*, no. 233; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1388; see **Fig. 9b**). Another conspicuous change, in year 2, a device is added above the façade of the temple, taking the form of a cross in the first version, which is developed into a rosette in the second version. The reverse retains a representation of 'the four species' of the Sukkot festival.



**Fig. 9(a).** Year 2, *sela* /tetradrachm (*TJC*, no. 230; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1387), obverse. The New York Sale, Auction 39 (10.01.2017), lot 82; **Fig. 9(b).** Year 2, *sela* /tetradrachm (*TJC*, no. 233; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1388), obverse. Same auction sale, lot 84. Courtesy of Ira & Larry Goldberg Coins & Collectibles, Inc.

Year 2 saw an expansion in the number of types used for the *zuz*/denarius denomination (*TJC*, nos. 238–254; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, nos. 1389–1403). The previous obverse and reverse are switched around, with the name of the leader, now only ‘Simon’, accompanying the bunch of grapes, while the flagon and willow branch are complemented by the inscription ‘year two to (!) the freedom of Israel’ on the reverse. Three additional obverse types appear, two with the name, שמעון (‘Simon’) written in full and the other with only the first three Hebrew letters שמע present. In all three cases, the name is set inside a highly distinctive wreath consisting of rows of four lenticules on either side and tied below. Four new reverse motifs were introduced to the silver coinage in year 2, the wide lyre (*nebel* – נבל, *chelys*), a narrow lyre (*kinor* – כנור, *kithara*), a solitary palm branch (*lulab* – לולב) and a pair of trumpets. The *zuzim* were issued with combinations of the obverse and reverse types, as shown in Fig. 10, below.

### Obverse types



### Reverse types



**Fig. 10.** Coin types of the year 2 *zuzim* (denarii). Courtesy of David Hendin and Ira & Larry Goldberg Coins & Collectibles, Inc. (D1)

Usual combinations: A1, A2, A3, B2; B4; B5; C1, C2, C3, C4; D1, D2, D3, D5.

\* The arrangement of the letters is different on some examples.

The large bronzes for year 2 closely mirror the silver *sela* ‘im/tetradrachms. Again, there are two versions. The motifs are similar to those of the previous year’s large denomination. The wreath on the obverse remains the same, but the wording within it is different. In both versions, the inscription is limited to one word, ירושלם in the one case, (*TJC*, no. 255; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1404) and שמעון (‘Simon’), in the other (*TJC*, no. 256; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1405). The reverse repeats the motif of an amphora with handles.

In year 2, there are again two distinct middle bronze types. The motifs are the same as for year 1, but the inscription accompanying the palm tree is now reduced to just שמעון

(‘Simon’) (*TJC*, nos. 259; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1408a), or even further down to שמעון (*TJC*, nos. 257–258, 260–262; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1408). The obverse of the second type, which is decorated with the wreath and palm branch, retains the inclusion of Simon’s title from year 1: שמעון נשיא ישראל (‘Simon, *nasi*’ of Israel’) (*TJC*, no. 263; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1406). Hendin lists an unusual variant of this type (*GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1407), where the inscription on the obverse reads לחרות ירושלם (‘to the freedom of Jerusalem’), a slogan associated with coins of year 3.

There are two distinct small bronzes of year 2, one bearing the obverse inscription אלעזר הכהן (‘Eleazar the priest’) (*TJC*, no. 265; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1409) and the other has ירושלם (‘Jerusalem’) (*TJC*, no. 266; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1410). However, the designs on both sides remain the same: a palm tree with clusters of dates and a bunch of grapes and small leaf hanging from a vine, as in year 1.

### 2.3. Year 3 and 4(?) (134 to 135, and possibly 136)

Inscription on all the obverses: שמעון (‘Simon’).

Inscription on all the reverses: לחרות ירושלם (‘for the freedom of Jerusalem’).

The undated coin series is generally recognised to date from the third year and possibly the fourth as well. The repertoire of coin types that was established in year 2 fed into these remaining issues, mostly limited to changes in the inscriptions. The name ‘Simon’ is now stamped on the obverse of every coin, along with ‘To the freedom of Jerusalem’ on the reverse. One denomination is dropped, namely the large bronze, no doubt because of the lack of access of the increasingly embattled rebels to procure even a minimum number of sestertii to justify a restriking. At this time, a silver half-*sela* /didrachm of close to 7 g (*TJC*, no. 271; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1415), makes a fleeting appearance, with just four specimens known.



**Fig. 11.** Coin types of the year 2 *sela'im* (tetradrachms). Courtesy of David Hendin (B) and The New York Sale (C). Courtesy of Ira & Larry Goldberg Coins & Collectibles, Inc.

As before, tetradrachms couple representations of the Jerusalem Temple enshrining the Ark of the Covenant, with ‘the four species’ of Sukkot, although on some coins without the *ethrog* (citron), as for the half-*sela* coin (*TJC*, nos. 267–270; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, nos. 1411–1414). The Temple design is subject to different treatments to the cornice. A serpentine parapet is added to some of coin images (**Fig. 11B**) which may represent the famed golden vine that had existed over the Temple porch (*GBC*<sup>5</sup>, 377), although in some instance, this feature morphs into a castellated parapet (**Fig. 11C**). These variations in the representation of the Temple support the view that the so-called star, or more accurately the rosette, shown above the building (**Fig. 11A**) is purely a decorative device. The half-*sela* didrachm is interesting because of its different representation of the Temple (as distyle) and Ark (**Fig. 12**).



**Fig. 12.** The rare half (didrachm) of year 3 (*TJC*, no. 271; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1415). Courtesy of David Hendin

The multiplicity of pairings of types increases in these late *zuzim*, as indicated in **Fig. 13** (*TJC*, nos. 272–287; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, nos. 1416–1435). Once again, there are four distinct obverse designs, three of different forms of the name שמעון (‘Simon’) inside the *corona civica* (one carried over from year 2), as well as the bunch of grapes hanging from a vine. The wide lyre (*chelys*) is now absent, and there is a new type featuring the flagon without the willow branch.

### Obverse types



### Reverse types



**Fig. 13.** Coin types of the year 3 *zuzim* (denarii). Courtesy of David Hendin (C, D, 2, 3 and 4)  
Usual combinations: A1, A2, A3, A5; B1, B2, B3, B4, B5; C1, C2, C3, C4, C5; D1, D2, D3, D4, D5.

The two middle bronze types continue into the third year, now very clearly differentiated by weight, as noted earlier. The heavier of the two continues the palm tree and vine leaf type (*TJC*, nos. 289–295; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1437; **Fig. 14**).



**Fig. 14.** Year 3, middle bronze, palm tree/vine leaf type (*TJC*, no. 289; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1437). Courtesy of David Hendin

On the second middle bronze coin type, the narrow lyre (*kinor*, *kithara*) replaces the wide lyre (*nebel*, *chelys*) for year 2 and the two sides are swapped around with the name שמעון accompanying the lyre on the obverse (*TJC*, nos. 297–299; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1437; **Fig. 15**).



**Fig. 15.** Year 3, middle bronze of the narrow lyre (*kinor*, *kithara*)/palm branch within a wreath type (*TJC*, no. 297; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1436). Courtesy of David Hendin

The design of the regular small bronze, sporting a palm tree and bunch of grapes on a vine, remains unchanged, apart from the inscriptions (*TJC*, nos. 302–304; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1440; **Fig. 16**). However, there is another small undated bronze, presumably struck in year 3. It was struck from an obverse die of year 1, naming ‘Eleazar the priest,’ in combination with a year 3 reverse die (*TJC*, no. 300; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1438; cf. Hendin 2011/2014, 160, 161, coin 5; **Fig. 17**). This is not unusual, as there are other known hybrid coins issued in later years. Thus, in year 2, there is a *sela*/tetradrachm (*TJC*, no. 229; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1385), three *zuzim/denarii* (*TJC*, nos. 234–235; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1384, *TJC*, no. 236; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1383, *TJC*, no. 237, *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1382), and a small bronze struck with the same obverse die inscribed ‘Eleazar the priest’ retained from year 1 (Hendin 2011/2014, 160 and 161, coin 4). In year 3, the hybrids include the small bronze illustrated in **Fig. 17** and a different one (*TJC*, no. 301; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1439). This phenomenon reveals that the Bar Kokhba rebels

took the precaution of retaining some earlier dies for reuse in subsequent years, possibly because they were not sure that they would be in a position to produce new dies in at a future date.



**Fig. 16.** Year 3, small bronze (*TJC*, no. 302b; Hendin, no. 1440). Courtesy of David Hendin



**Fig. 17.** Year 3, small hybrid, with obverse of year 1 (*TJC*, no. 300; Hendin, no. 1438). The New York Sale 39 (10.01.2017), lot 227. Courtesy of Ira & Larry Goldberg Coins & Collectibles, Inc.

### 3. Special Features on the Bar Kokhba Coins

The Bar Kokhba coins uphold two principal conventions of Jewish coinage:

- The absence of human and other animate images.
- The use of the Palaeo-Hebrew script.

These two conventions were established in the coins of the Hasmonaean ruler, John Hyrcanus I, fully revived in those of the First Revolt, and repeated in the Bar Kokhba issues. The inconsistency in the letter forms, and misspellings show that the Palaeo-Hebrew alphabet had fallen out of use and was unfamiliar to those who were responsible for the Bar Kokhba coins. They chose to use the archaic script for one evident purpose, namely to manifest their fidelity to the values of ancient Israel. A similar ideological attitude must have been responsible to the use of Palaeo-Hebrew on the coins of the First Revolt.

### 3.1. The Representation of the Temple

One of the defining images on the Bar Kokhba coinage is the representation of the Jerusalem Temple on the highest denominations. It shall suffice here to remark that the consensus view at the present time is that the Jewish Sanctuary on the *sela* 'im/tetradrachms is rendered schematically. It follows the usual iconographic practice on Roman coins, where temples are symbolically rendered as distyle, tetrastyle or hexastyle buildings, with the deity or object venerated shown at the centre.<sup>44</sup> The temple on the Bar Kokhba coins is particularly interesting because the image of a deity occupying the centre of a temple on Roman coins is replaced by the Ark of the Covenant. D. Barag had argued that the cult object was the Table of the Showbread and not the Ark,<sup>45</sup> but his proposal makes little sense. Since the image of the Jerusalem Temple on the Bar Kokhba coin is clearly based on a classical template, it stands to reason that it should showcase an object of veneration, here the chest containing the tablets of the Law, and not a cult appurtenance. In any case, in near-contemporaneous depictions of the Showbread Table, its top surface is entirely flat (e.g., on the small 'menorah' bronze coin of Mattathias Antigonus dating from c. 37 BCE (*TJC*, nos. 41–42; *GBC*<sup>5</sup>, no. 1168) and on the 'booty relief' of the Arch of Titus in Rome, from the 80s CE). In the Bar Kokhba temple motifs, the profile of the object in question is semi-circular, a normal form for chests of this period, purposed for valuables, that were to adopt this shape.<sup>46</sup> It is not clear why the representation of the Ark on the much scarcer half-*sela* ' is of a totally different form.

The evocation of the Ark of the covenant is significant, because its existence ended with the sack of Jerusalem and destruction of Solomon's Temple by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. Therefore, the temple represented is meant to be that of Solomon, described in the Book of Kings, and not its successor that was destroyed by the Romans. The depiction of the original biblical Temple and the use of archaic Palaeo-Hebrew script on the Bar Kokhba coins celebrate the glorious past of Israel and patently express the steadfastness of the rebels and their leader to their people's eternal faith.<sup>47</sup> These touches point to the fundamentalist character of the rebel movement and its desire to return to the religious purity of the biblical text and the strict observance of its ordinances.

Rather unusual, too, is the flat roof of the temple on the Bar Kokhba coins. The coin artists knew that the Temple in Jerusalem had a flat roof, in contradistinction from classical temples are mostly crowned with triangular pediments. One instance of a temple on a Roman denarius of Domitian dated to 95–96 CE, i.e., prior to the Bar Kokhba Revolt, has been identified, featuring a temple of Cybele (*RIC* 2.1, no. 813; **Fig. 18**). The image on the reverse is of a tetrastyle temple with the goddess standing within the portal. The roof is flat and floating above the centre of its cornice is a tiny image of Cybele riding a galloping lion. The other roof detail in this image consists of facing lions at the corners and spikes on the parapet, as we know existed on the roof of the Sanctuary in Jerusalem,<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Jacobson 2008a.

<sup>45</sup> Barag 1994.

<sup>46</sup> See, e.g., Yadin 1971, 148–149 with illustrations.

<sup>47</sup> Hendin (2011/2014) has put forward the ingenious suggestion that the legend 'Eleazar the priest' on some of the legends was not to a contemporaneous leader, but another reference to Israel's illustrious past, commemorating Eleazar the high priest, the son of Aaron, who accompanied Joshua into the Promised Land.

<sup>48</sup> Jos. *BJ* 5.224; 6.278: *mMid.* 4.6.

but the spikes are not indicated on the Bar Kokhba coin depictions. On a worn example, illustrated in *BMCRE 2*<sup>2</sup>, Pl. 67.5, this detail is worn down to an outline of a six-pointed star and then to a cross. It is not impossible that this very coin type provided the model for the Temple rendered on the *sela 'im* of Bar Kokhba (Jacobson 2008a). It is impossible that the device in question was intended as a star to symbolise Bar Kokhba.<sup>49</sup>



**Fig. 18.** Domitian, CNG Triton V Sale (16.01.2002), lot 1946. Courtesy of Classical Numismatic Group, LLC

### 3.2. The Oak Wreath on the *zuzim*, Identified as the *corona civica*

At first sight, the distinctive wreath on the Bar Kokhba *zuzim* might be construed as essentially decorative. However, careful comparison of this motif with types of wreath in Roman art shows that it was intended to be recognised as the *corona civica*, a chaplet of oak leaves woven into a wearable circlet, albeit reproduced in simplified form (Jacobson 2008b). It may have been stylised to distinguish b. Kosiba's military honour from that of the pagan Roman emperors, according to D. Hendin (private communication). A typical Roman example can be seen on a common denarius of Galba, struck in 68/69 CE (*RIC 1*<sup>2</sup>, no. 167; see **Fig. 19**). The designers of the Bar Kokhba coins would have been familiar with denarii of Galba because they are among those that were over-struck for *zuzim*.

On this coin, the significance of the oak wreath is clearly indicated by the abbreviation, OB C S within the wreath. It is the citation for the award of the *corona civica*, namely, *ob cives servatos*, which represents 'for saving [the lives of] citizens.'<sup>50</sup>

The main features that the two wreath representations have in common are:

- The 2 branches of the wreath are tied by ribbons below, and linked by a round medalion at the top. There are 4 rungs of leaves/lenticules, on each side.
- The flecked borders of the Roman *corona civica* (representing oak leaves viewed edge on) are depicted as beaded borders of the lenticules on the Bar Kokhba coins.
- The acorns of the oak wreath on the Roman coins are matched by large dots astride the nodes in the wreath on some Bar Kokhba specimens.

<sup>49</sup> Pace *TJC*, 153; Mildenberg 1984, 43–45, 73–76.

<sup>50</sup> *Sen. Clem.* 1.26.5.





**Fig. 19.** Galba, AR denarius (reverse). Rome mint. Classical Numismatic Group, Inc., Triton VIII Sale (11.01.2005), lot 1106. Courtesy of Classical Numismatic Group, LLC

The *corona civica* was one of the highest Roman military honours. It was awarded to a Roman soldier of any rank who, in the course of a battle, single-handedly saved the life of a Roman citizen, killed at least one enemy soldier and held his ground on the battlefield for the rest of the day. This act of valour had to be attested by the individual whose life was saved.<sup>51</sup>

Augustus was voted this honour in recognition that he was always victorious over his enemies and was the saviour of Roman citizens.<sup>52</sup> His successors, including Hadrian, received this high honour almost as a matter of course. There are two marble statues from Perga in of Hadrian wearing a *corona civica*. In one of these, the emperor is in cuirass (see **Fig. 20**).<sup>53</sup> The other statue represents him as a nude hero.<sup>54</sup>

The depiction of the *corona civica* on the Bar Kokhba coinage may reflect the desire among his followers to cast him as a heroic leader, whose status was not inferior to that of the Roman emperor. This aspiration seems to be preserved, albeit in garbled form, in the rabbinic literature:

There were two brothers in Kefar Ḥaruba, who did not allow any Roman to pass there, but they killed him. They said, “The conclusion of the whole matter is that we must take Hadrian’s crown and set it upon the head of Simon [or, on our own head]”.<sup>55</sup>

There has been some speculation about the location of Kefar Ḥaruba, where the Bar Kokhba rebel forces inflicted a defeat on the Roman legionary force, but it remains uncertain.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Gell., *NA* 5.6.13–14; Plin., *HN* 16.11–14.

<sup>52</sup> Cass. Dio 53.16.4; *RG [Mon. Anc.]* 34.

<sup>53</sup> Antalya Archaeological Museum, Inv. no. 3730–3728.

<sup>54</sup> Antalya Archaeological Museum, Inv. no. 3861–3863.

<sup>55</sup> *Ekhah R.* 2.2.4 (cf. the variant passage in *Ta’an.* 4.8, 69a):

שני אחין היו בכפר חרוכא ולא הוון שבקין רומאי עבר תמן דלא הוו קטלי יתיה אמרי כל סמא דמילה ניתי כלילא דאדריאנוס וניתב בראשו של (אלו) שמעון.

<sup>56</sup> Mor 2016, 205–206.



**Fig. 20.** Cuirassed statue of Hadrian, donning the *corona civica*, from the North Nymphaeum at Perga (Antalya Museum). CC-BY-2.0 license (photograph by Andrew Kuchling)

### 3.3. The Sukkot Imagery

It has been noted that two of the coin motifs give emphasis to the Jewish festival of Sukkot, with ‘the four species’ portrayed on the large silver *sela* ‘im/tetradrachms being readily recognisable today.<sup>57</sup> It has also been noted above that the flagon with branch motif refers to ancient water and willow branch ceremonies that took place in the days of the Second Temple.

The musical instruments and *lulab* that feature on the *zuzim* complement the flagon and willow branch type as additional references to the festival of Sukkot. The Babylonian Talmud reminds us that Sukkot was a highly popular festival prior to the destruction of the Temple and was celebrated with dancing and music:

<sup>57</sup> Eshel – Zissu 2019, 134–135.

One who did not see the Celebration of the Place of the Drawing of the Water never saw celebration in his days ... and there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that was not illuminated from the light of the Place of the Drawing of the Water. The pious and the men of action would dance before the people who attended the celebration, with flaming torches that they would juggle in their hands, and they would say before them passages of song and praise to God. And the Levites would play on *kinorot*, *nebalim*, cymbals, and trumpets, and countless other musical instruments<sup>58</sup> (trans. A. Steinsaltz).

Two of the Bar Kokhba letters from the Judaean desert, P. Yadin 52 (in Greek) and P. Yadin 57 (in Aramaic) demonstrate the importance that b. Kosiba and his supporters attached to this festival and concern to punctiliously observe the appropriate ritual requirements.<sup>59</sup> The emphasis given by them to the festival of Sukkot might be due to its messianic associations. According to tradition, the Messiah will come at Sukkot and will usher in a time of peace:

Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Sukkot (Tabernacles).<sup>60</sup>

### 3.4. The Fruit of the Vine

The prominence given to vine motifs on the Bar Kokhba coins has generated discussion: G. G. Porton has suggested that the cluster of grapes may symbolise b. Kosiba's role as leader of the Jewish people.<sup>61</sup> Mor and Rappaport, on the other hand, see the bunch of grapes merely as a reference to the fruits of the earth, along with the date palm and vine leaf, and that they should be regarded as national rather than religious symbols.<sup>62</sup>

These explanations are likely to have some validity, but just as a date-laden palm tree refers to the fecundity of Judaea, the palm also has a religious significance, bound up with the Sukkot festival. The same is likely to be true of the vine, which is actually what is represented on the Bar Kokhba coins and not only a grape cluster. There is a metaphorical interpretation of the vine that is repeatedly encountered in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, standing for the people of Israel.<sup>63</sup> Passages in the Hebrew Bible refer to Israel as the vine planted by the Lord. It tells us that:

The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>58</sup> *bSukkah* 51a–b:

מי שלא ראה שמחת בית השואבה לא ראה שמחה מימיו ... ולא היה חצר בירושלים שאינה מאירה מאור בית השואבה. חסידים ואנשי מעשה היו מרקדין בפניהם. באבוקות של אור שבידיהן ואומרים לפניהם דברי שירות ותושבחות והלויים בכנורות ובנבלים ובמצלתים ובחצוצרות ובכלי שיר בלא מספר.

<sup>59</sup> Yadin 1971, 128–131; Lapin 1993; Yadin *et al.* 2002, 322–328 (P. Yadin 57), 351–362 (P. Yadin 52).

<sup>60</sup> Zech. 14.16. All biblical passages cited in this article are NIV translations into English.

<sup>61</sup> Porton 1976, 175.

<sup>62</sup> Rappaport 1983, 135; Mor 2016, 417–418.

<sup>63</sup> Hayward 1990, 9–18.

<sup>64</sup> Isa. 5.7.

You transplanted a vine from Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land.<sup>65</sup>

Israel was a spreading vine; he brought forth fruit for himself.<sup>66</sup>

The New Testament draws on the same metaphor. It was so prevalent in the 1st century that Jesus expressly used the vineyard as a symbol for Israel in one of his parables (Mark 12:1–12), which begins:

A man planted a vineyard ...<sup>67</sup>

#### 4. What the Coins Reveal about the Conduct of the War and the Ideology of the Rebel Movement

From the coins, we learn that in the first year, the Jewish rebels were led by a dyarchy of its military leader, styled the *nasi*’, Simon (b. Kosiba) and the priest, Eleazar. ‘Eleazar the priest’ is named on both the silver and bronze coins, while the *nasi*’ Simon is only mentioned on the bronze coins. On that criterion, it would seem that Eleazar held the more exalted position in year 1.

In the second year of the revolt we find b. Kosiba in the ascendancy, while Eleazar is ousted from the coinage and replaced by ‘Simon.’<sup>68</sup> The dyarchy of year 1 was superseded by b. Kosiba on his own in the supreme position. Thereafter, Eleazar the priest disappears from view, except when the rebel mints feel the occasional need to recommit an earlier coin die, inscribed with Eleazar’s name to fill a gap.

The new designs for the obverse of the silver *zuzim* in year 2 feature the name ‘Simon’ encircled in a *corona civica*, to emphasise his personal bravery. Whilst the coins of year 2 exalt the status of b. Kosiba, they also showcase two more musical instruments, the *kithara* and a pair of trumpets, which had been played in the Temple and especially at *Sukkot* celebrations.

As has been mentioned, in year 3, ‘Simon’ features on the obverse of every coin issued and it appears without his title. By this stage, he was now the unchallenged leader of the rebels, so perhaps there was not the same need to include his official title on the rebel coinage as when he shared the top position with Eleazar the Priest, although that practice of including his title, *nasi*’, continued in official correspondence.

<sup>65</sup> Ps. 80.8–9.

<sup>66</sup> Hos. 10.1.

<sup>67</sup> Mark 12:1–12.

<sup>68</sup> The fairly abrupt disappearance of the name ‘Eleazar the priest’ from Bar Kokhba coins in year 2 would not be expected if it referred to a revered biblical figure, as suggested by Hendin (2011/2014), especially as other pointers to the Bible, including the images of Solomon’s Temple and inscriptions in Palaeo-Hebrew, were retained.

#### 4.1. The Rebel Leadership Structure and Titles as Evidence of Messianic Ideology

The title assumed by b. Kosiba, *nasi* (נשיא), is often translated as ‘prince,’ although in both the Qumran literature and the Bar Kokhba documents, this Hebrew term is used to denote the supreme ruler of Israel.<sup>69</sup> This is the same connotation that the title has in the Bible, most clearly in Ezek 44.2–18 and Ezra 1:8, but also in the meaning of its use in Lev 4.22, according to *mHor* 3.3. However, there is some latitude applied to it, for in 4Q376, frag. 1, iii.1, the *nasi* is clearly the military leader of ‘the whole congregation,’ being described in ‘the army camp.’<sup>70</sup>

There is no agreement among scholars concerning the identity of Eleazar the priest. Some have identified him with Eleazar of Modi‘in, who was credited to be b. Kosiba’s uncle according to certain rabbinic sources.<sup>71</sup> Although other candidates have been put forward, they have been shown to be even less suitable.<sup>72</sup> P. Schäfer gives little credence to the rabbinic literature as a whole on this question.<sup>73</sup>

A more fruitful inquiry concerns the question of the leadership at the start of the revolt, namely the pairing of the *nasi*, the secular leader, Simon, with the priest, Eleazar. It follows the model of high priest and governor as the form of governance for Judah adopted during the early the Persian period, with Joshua, son of Jehozadak, as high priest and Zerubbabel, a scion of David, the governor of the province.<sup>74</sup> That arrangement was associated with a long period of peace and stability, seldom matched in subsequent Judaean history, and therefore viewed as a suitable model for the future.

This form of dyarchy is found imprinted in the theology of the Qumran sect as an ideal form of government for the Jewish people. It is reflected in texts such as 4Q375–376, where ‘the anointed priest’ (frag. 1, i.1) is mentioned alongside the *nasi* (frag. 1, iii.1).<sup>75</sup>

Their expectation of such a dyarchy in the messianic age to come, informed the interpretation of biblical texts by the Qumran community. This particular eschatological belief is manifested in their explanation of the prophesy of Balaam in Num. 24.17, as follows, with phrases from that biblical verse underlined:

The star is the Interpreter of the Law who came [or, shall come] to Damascus; as it is written, A star shall come forth out of Jacob and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel. The sceptre (שֵׁבֶט) is the *nasi* of the whole congregation, and when he comes, he shall smite all the children of Sheth<sup>76</sup> (trans. G. Vermes).

According to this view, the star symbolised is the high priest, and the *nasi* the military leader of the messianic age.<sup>77</sup> Another Qumran document, the so-called *Florilegium* of

<sup>69</sup> Goodblatt 1984, 118–120.

<sup>70</sup> ... ואם במחנה יהיה נשיא אשר לכול העדה ... See Strugnell 1990, 236–237; Goodblatt 1994, 69.

<sup>71</sup> *jTa’an* 4.8, 68d; *EkhahR.* 2.4.

<sup>72</sup> Schürer 1973, 544; Horbury 2014, 356–357; Mor 2016, 429–436.

<sup>73</sup> Schäfer 2003, 6–7.

<sup>74</sup> Horbury 2014, 357.

<sup>75</sup> הכוהן המשיח. See Goodblatt 1994, 69; Abegg 1995, 140.

<sup>76</sup> CD, 7.18–21 = 4Q266 frag. 3, iii (*DJD* 18, 43–45):

הכוכב הוא דורש התורה הבא דמשק כאשר כתוב דרך כוכב מיעקב וקם שבט מישראל השבט הוא נשיא כל העדה ובעמדו וקרקר את כל בני שת.

<sup>77</sup> Collins 2010, 1–20.

Cave 4, announces the coming of the ‘Branch of David’ and the Interpreter of the Law, i.e., the Davidic and Priestly messiahs.<sup>78</sup>

It was a leadership of this specific form, a dyarchy of *nasi*’ and priest, that was chosen initially by the rebels at the outbreak of the Bar Kokhba Revolt. It is too much of a coincidence that this choice was motivated by anything other than fervent messianic ideology, as pointed out by some scholars,<sup>79</sup> and this author. This reading of the Bar Kokhba episode is reinforced by the slogans (especially ‘redemption of Israel’) and images on the coins, such as the Jerusalem Temple and references to the festival of Sukkot. As Hendin has aptly pointed out, and has been noted in passing above, the Bar Kokhba coins are redolent with messianic associations.<sup>80</sup> In fact, the Babylonian Talmud records a distant memory that b. Kosiba expressed messianic claims for himself (*bSanh.* 93b).

In the face of such consistent evidence, it is surprising that M. Goodman can play down the role of messianism in the Jewish risings against Rome.<sup>81</sup> The lack of references to Eleazar the priest and the dyarchy in the surviving documentary records from the Judaean Desert connected with the Bar Kokhba episode may simply be due to the fact that all those items relate to administrative matters, which lay entirely within the competence of the *nasi*’. These documents and associated artefacts, however, impress on us that b. Kosiba and his followers were devout and scrupulous in their observance of Jewish religious practices.<sup>82</sup> They would also have held beliefs about their imminent redemption and what form it would take.

## 5. Conclusions

The Bar Kokhba coinage demonstrates that, at the start of the revolt, the rebel leadership was held by a dyarchy of Simon b. Kosiba and one Eleazar the Priest. The initial successes of the rebels in defeating the Roman forces ranged against them raised their hopes of messianic salvation. Then, sometime in the second year the tables were turned in the military conflict and the Roman forces gained the upper-hand. Eleazar the priest departed from the scene and b. Kosiba was left in supreme command and expectations of messianic redemption dimmed in the face of more immediate concerns.

This change in the rebel leadership in 133 CE, as indicated by the coins, would appear to coincide with the arrival of Julius Severus from Britain that year, according to Dąbrowa, to take command of the Roman campaign and implement more effective military tactics to stamp out the rebellion. It is very possible that the hard-pressed rebels set aside their expectation of imminent divine deliverance. The coins indicate that the dyarchy of *nasi*’ and priest was dissolved, possibly with the physical elimination of the priest, which is what we are told happened to Eleazar of Modi’in.<sup>83</sup> Under their dog-

<sup>78</sup> 4Q174, i.11. See Goodblatt 1994, 69.

<sup>79</sup> *Inter alia*, Horbury 2014, 32, 355–362.

<sup>80</sup> Hendin 2011/2014, 163–166.

<sup>81</sup> Goodman 2007.

<sup>82</sup> Eshel – Zissu 2019, 115.

<sup>83</sup> *jTa’an* 4.8, 68d–69a; *Ekhah R.* 2.4.

gedly determined military commander, b. Kosiba, the rebels desperately tried to stave off stealthy Roman attacks, concealing themselves in their labyrinthine tunnels and remote caves, some holding out until the beginning of 136 CE.

The diminishing horizons and ambitions of the rebels are implicit in the patriotic slogans on the coins from years 1 to 3.<sup>84</sup> In the first year, their expectation was for divine redemption of Israel from the Roman yolk (through the agency of a messianic dyarchy): לגאולת ישראל ('for the redemption of Israel'). The coins of year 2 express a more sober ambition: להחרות ישראל ('for the freedom of Israel'). Finally, in year 3, we find the hopes of the rebels reduced to a core aspiration: להחרות ירושלים ('for the freedom of Jerusalem'). Other messages on this final series of coins, summarised in **Table 2**, offer a window on the image that b. Kosiba imparted to his stalwart supporters. These are short and sharp, rousing his followers to continue their struggle for freedom under his fearless leadership.

**Table 2.** Messages displayed on the Bar Kokhba coins of year 3

| Coin Content  | Message Conveyed   |
|---|--|
| Images of the Temple of Solomon accompanied by the name 'Simon'<br><i>(TJC, nos. 267–271; Hendin, nos. 1411–1415; Figs. 11–12)</i>  | Simon b. Kosiba is the instrument of God's will, restorer of His holy Temple and faithful custodian of biblical tradition. |
| The name 'Simon' set within a <i>corona civica</i><br><i>(TJC, nos. 272–273, 276, 279–280, 283–284, 287; Hendin, nos. 1416–1429; Figs. 13A–C)</i>                         | Simon b. Kosiba is a brave leader and the equal of the Roman emperor   |
| A vine bearing a large bunch of grapes, accompanied by the inscription 'Simon'<br><i>(TJC, nos. 274–275, 277–278, 281–282, 285–286; Hendin, nos. 1430–1435; Fig. 13D)</i> | Simon b. Kosiba is the true representative of the Israel and the Jewish people   |

By 136 CE the rebellion was completely crushed and harsh recriminations followed. The human cost to the Jewish population of the region was exceedingly great, as we learn from both rabbinic and early Christian textual sources, which have been examined by Horbury.<sup>85</sup>

It is against this sombre background that, I believe, we ought to place the well-known quip about b. Kosiba attributed to Rabbi Akiba, when the latter was expounding Balaam's prophesy:

R. Shimon b. Yohai taught: "My master Akiba used to expound: 'A star will come forth out of Jacob, a liar [כוזבא = *Koziba*] come forth out of Jacob.'" When R. Akiba [first] saw bar Koziba, he would say, "This is the King Messiah." R. Yohanan ben Torta said to him, "Akiba, grass will sprout from your cheeks and the son of David will not yet have come."<sup>86</sup> (trans. J. Rubinstein).

<sup>84</sup> Cf. *TJC*, 140; Mor 2016, 259–260.

<sup>85</sup> Horbury 2014, 401–418.

<sup>86</sup> *jTa'an* 4.8, 68d (cf. the similar passage in *Ekhah R.* 2.2.4):

תני ר' שמעון בן יוחאי: עקיבא ר' היה דורש דרך כוכב מיעקב דרך כוזבא מיעקב. ר' עקיבא כד היה חמי בר כוזבא היה אמר דין הוא מלא משיחא. אמר ליה ר' יוחנן בן תורתא עקיבא יעלו עשבים בלחייך ועדיין בן דוד לא יבא.

In that context, the comments credited to Rabbis Akiba and ben Torta express utter disillusionment with b. Kosiba and his pretensions,<sup>87</sup> pinning the blame for the disaster that had befallen the Jews on the rebel leader, who had falsely raised their hopes of imminent messianic deliverance. Christian sources, too, brand him as a false messiah who had attracted followers by deception.<sup>88</sup>

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## Abbreviations

- BMCRE* 2<sup>2</sup> – H. Mattingly, R. A. G. Carson, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, vol. 2: *Vespasian to Domitian* (2nd ed.), London: British Museum, 1976.
- GBC*<sup>5</sup> – D. Hendin, *Guide to Biblical Coins* (5th ed.), Nyack, NY: Amphora, 2010.
- DJD* 2 – P. Benoit, O. P., J. T. Milik, R. De Vaux, *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert II: Les Grottes de Murabba'at*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961.
- DJD* 18 – J. M. Baumgarten, *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert XVIII: Qumran Cave 4. XIII: The Damascus Document (4Q266-273)*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
- RIC* 1<sup>2</sup> – C. H. V. Sutherland, R. A. G. Carson (eds.), *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. 1: *From 31 BC to AD 69* (2nd ed.), London, 1984.
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- TJC* – Y. Meshorer, *A Treasury of Jewish Coins*, Jerusalem/Nyack, NY: Amphora, 2001.

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<sup>87</sup> Novenson 2009.

<sup>88</sup> Euseb, *HE* 4.6; *Jer. Adv. Rufin.* 3.31; cf. Mor 2016, 410–411.



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