

THE PROPAGANDA OF THE JEWISH REBELS OF 66-70 C.E. ACCORDING TO THEIR COINS¹

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Key words: Jewish Revolt of 66-70 C.E., revolutionary coinage, symbols of Jewish independence, minting authorities

Abstract: In this paper, I argue that the coins of the Jewish war of 66-70 C.E. demonstrate the theocratic conception of the Zealots and of the faction of Simon bar Giora. They are designed as responses to Roman issues and, therefore, are influenced by Roman currency. This minting is a powerful affirmation of independence for a so-called Jewish “State.” The divisions into several factions make it impossible to recognize a unanimous conception of what the political system among the Jews must have been. However, each coin seems to support the theocratic ideal, focalized either on the temple of Jerusalem or on the redemption of the people.

Introduction

In 66 C.E., the Jewish people rose up against Roman power and established a proper political organization. Founded in emergency, it was reminiscent of the characteristic form of ancient Jewish government: theocracy.² The nature of this government appears on the coins. In the absence of evidence for the political structures of the State opposing Rome between 66 C.E. and the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., these coins, due to their function as vehicles of propaganda, make its ideology visible.

Coins indeed carried heavy symbolic power in Antiquity, as they were a way of spreading a political message. This is the case not only owing to their mere existence, as they stressed the independence of a community, but also because of their inscriptions

¹ I am grateful to C.-G. Schwentzel and to E. Nantet for their support and their invaluable comments on this paper. I thank C. Jennings for his language correction. Any error remains mine.

² Josephus, *Against Apion* 2, 164-168. De Vaux 1989, 153: “Israël est le peuple de Yahvé et n’a pas d’autre maître que lui. Et c’est pourquoi Israël reste d’un bout à l’autre de son histoire une communauté religieuse : c’est la religion qui fédèrait les tribus installées en Canaan comme elle groupera les exilés revenus de Babylone, c’est elle qui maintient la cohésion du peuple sous la monarchie et malgré la division des royaumes. Les chefs humains de ce peuple sont choisis, acceptés ou tolérés par Dieu, mais ils lui restent subordonnés et ils sont jugés à la mesure de leur fidélité à l’alliance indissoluble conclue entre Yahvé et son peuple.”

and portraits.³ Coinage is a precious source for historians, because it is a privileged media for power. It reveals the manner by which the minting authority sought to be represented. There was the core of a political discourse, and thus it was assumed it was necessarily biased by the power. It was a careful and thorough preparation of a government that promoted values, behind which it hoped to bring the community together. This was especially in a seditious context, when the adhesion of the whole people was not assured.

Despite the presence of divisions, coins struck during the revolt of 66-70 C.E. are perhaps evidence for the existence of a proper state in Judea, and show the elements of identity for this short-lived, but important, power in Jewish history.

Symbols of Jewish independence

The first remarkable point about the coins struck in Judea during the Jewish war concerns the metal that was used: they are silver coins. It must be noted that none of the Roman procurators seem to have struck silver coins in the province. Roman coinage is attested from the early years of its presence, at the time of Coponius⁴ (6-9 C.E.), essentially in Jerusalem.⁵ However, even if there is no doubt that silver circulated, the only evidence of the use of such coins is their overstriking during the Bar Kokhba War. It seems that the denier was “the census coin” (τὸ νόμισμα τοῦ κήνσου), the expected unit of Roman tribute,⁶ rather than a proper currency. But it was bronze that was minted by the procurators.⁷ After an interruption in minting between the rules of Marcellus Marullus (36-41 C.E.) and Ventidius Cumanus (48-52 C.E.), Antonius Felix (52-60 C.E.) issued new coins, relatively heavier on overage, but again exclusively in bronze. It is noteworthy that the mints remained inactive in the days of Porcius Festus (60-62 C.E.), Luceius Albinus (62-64 C.E.) and Gessius Florus (64-66 C.E.), probably because of the excess of cash in circulation, posterior to the mints of Felix.⁸

In fact, there is nothing to suggest that Judea practiced minting in precious metal prior to the uprising of 66 C.E. Nevertheless, we can assume that the workmen were in possession of a model. One may wonder whether this model could have been the Hasmoneans' coinage. Indeed, in 139/138 B.C.E., Antiochos VII granted to Simon Maccabee the privilege to strike his own money at his own die (ἐπέτρεψά σοι ποιῆσαι κόμμα ἴδιον νόμισμα).⁹ Unfortunately, apart from some iconographic representations, the survey is disappointing: the Hasmoneans do not appear to have struck silver coins.

³ Bolin 1973, 13; Rebuffat 1996, 93; Figueira 1998, 21, 252-254.

⁴ Even from the fall of 6 C.E., according to Reifenberg 1947, 27.

⁵ Meshorer 1982, 186.

⁶ *Matthew* 22.19; Freyberg 1988, 75-76; Sartre 1991, 102; Paltiel 1991, 59; Goodman 2000, 60; Millar 2002, 299.

⁷ It may be noted that the same mints and craftsmen worked for the procurators and for the rebels of 66 C.E., according to Roth 1962, 35; Goldstein – Fontanille 2006, 16, 20-21; Ariel 2011, 387, 391; Hendin, 2012, 140.

⁸ Meshorer 1982, 104-105.

⁹ *1 Macc.*, 15.6; Hill 1914, XCIII-XCIV.

The coins of 66 C.E. might have been the first minted in this metal in Judea, as copper-alloy was employed more often.¹⁰ They thereby placed the new power in the stature of ancient states, which usually affirmed their sovereignty by this media. Silver, indeed, circulated more easily than bronze, whose use was more localized.¹¹ Because of the intrinsic value of that currency, it was also possible to know the propaganda beyond the provincial borders;¹² coins dated from the first year of the revolt, moreover, were found in Cyprus.¹³ One can therefore assume that here was “an ostentatious demonstration of the recovery of independence.”¹⁴

There is some evidence that the outbreak of the rebellion was rather confused, and that the mass of people was not absolutely hostile to the Roman occupation in itself. The speech that Josephus accords to Agrippa II in Jerusalem at the first stage of the insurrection may imply that the movement was, in fact, somewhat like a “demonstration”: the purpose was to be heard by the emperor, whose leniency was expected to provide justice to the people affected by the vexations of Gessius Florus (*War of the Jews* 2, 403-404). There is no reason to believe in a unanimous uprising, decidedly hostile against Roman power. However, the seditious would have precipitated events in the burning of public archives. For the ancient historian, the aim was to “gain the gratefulness of the mass of debtors and to impunity cause the uprising of the poor peoples against the richest ones” (*War of the Jews* 2, 427). There are two ways in which one may understand such a remark. First, freed from their debts, the poorest ones would have been urged to rejoin their liberators;¹⁵ secondly, this act of manifest revolt would have placed the irresolute ones in a tricky situation, as they would have been forced to choose sides. The simple “demonstration” thereby turned into a full-scale revolt, and the defeat of the *legio XII Fulminata* transformed it into a full-fledged war of independence. Moreover, Josephus notes that the victorious return of Bethoron coincided with organization of Jewish resistance (*War of the Jews* 2, 562-563). The coinage makes this radicalization apparent, and points to the ideology of this “State” in war.

The minting of precious metal was permitted by the stock owned by the temple, which received the contributions of the entire diaspora. For those Jews, indeed, paying the didrachm tax to the temple was a way of obtaining symbolic affiliation to the community that had stayed in Judea.¹⁶ As demonstrated by Leo Kadman, the didrachm tax was essentially paid in staters (a communal contribution for two fellows) or half-staters (individual contribution, then increased by one denier).¹⁷ The staters were Tyrian from the foundation of the Tyrian mint, around 126-125 B.C.E. Their high purity¹⁸ is the rea-

¹⁰ Hendin 2001, 422.

¹¹ Augé 1984, 203-217; Howgego 2014, 309-310.

¹² This was particularly the case since the mint of Jerusalem seems to have had a peculiar importance for monetary circulation in Roman Galilee, according to Syon 2015, 193.

¹³ Kapera 2009, 41.

¹⁴ Roth 1962, 34.

¹⁵ Mézange 2003, 90.

¹⁶ Regev 2013, 77; Girardin 2016, 58.

¹⁷ Kadman 1965.

¹⁸ Notis *et al.*, 2007. We can state, in agreement with Deutsch 2011, 370-371, that the shekels of the rebels are manifestly purer than the Tyrian staters.

son for their use in this context, despite the representation of Phoenician deities like Melqart.¹⁹ This can be deduced from the following midrash:

Silver mentioned in the Pentateuch is always Tyrian silver. What is Tyrian silver? It is Jerusalemite (Tosefta, *Ketubot*, 13.20)²⁰

The use of a coin bearing the head of Melqart, the chief deity of Tyre, for the sanctuary's obligations may be surprising – in particular because of Jewish rigidity during the Second Temple period concerning the representation of living beings. The reason was the radical interpretation of the second commandment. According to Jean Ouellette, however, “[...] never has ancient Judaism cultivated, its whole history long, a rigid nor uniformly hostile attitude facing the figurative representation. [...] Basically, it is the symbolism attached to such-and-such image that determined its licit or illicit character.”²¹ Moreover, the so-called “Second Commandment” was never “a rigidly and uniformly anti-iconic attitude on the part of the Jews [...]”²²

After the closing of the Tyrian mint, the need for staters for the fiscal system of the Hierosolymitan temple would have led to the production of silver coins in Judea, which were not likely to have a political purpose. According to Ya’akov Meshorer, this would have happened in 19 B.C.E., due to a Herodian initiative.²³ However, Leo Kadman and Arye Ben-David believe that this event did not occur before the middle of the first century C.E.²⁴ There is again another opinion – that of Sir George Hill, Claudia Wallack Samuels and David Hendin: according to these scholars, no interruption could be noticed in the Tyrian mint until the appearance of the Jerusalemite one rendered it obsolete in 66/67 C.E.²⁵ The fact remains that, in that year, there was a mint in Jerusalem, associated with the sanctuary, and it produced shekels on the Tyrian standard. Perhaps some had already been struck before, but in any case war had changed their signification. Henceforth, the purpose was to display political slogans of the nascent power asserting its independence.

Responses to the Roman coinage

The “independence war” against Rome was obviously sustained by a number of anti-Roman slogans, and the scope of the minted words and images is especially revealed by the comparison between the Jewish new coins and the old Roman ones.

Coponius, procurator of Judea from 6 C.E., followed by Marcus Ambivius (9-12 C.E.), then by Annus Rufus (12-15 C.E.), chose to represent a palm tree bearing two clusters of fruit on the obverse, and a grain ear (wheat or barley) on the reverse. The

¹⁹ Ben-David 1969, 7; Meshorer 2001, 72-78.

²⁰ Quoted in Broshi 1987, 35 n. 17.

²¹ Ouellette 1967, 505 and 516: “[...] le judaïsme ancien n’a jamais cultivé, au cours de sa longue histoire, une attitude rigide et uniformément hostile à la représentation figurée. [...] Au fond, c’est le symbolisme que l’on attachait à telle ou telle image qui en déterminait le caractère licite ou illicite.”

²² Gutmann 1971, 16.

²³ Meshorer 1982, 7-9.

²⁴ Kadman 1965, 74; Ben-David 1970, 120.

²⁵ Hill 1914; Wallack Samuels 2000, 65; Hendin 2001, 425.

palm tree was the traditional emblem of Judea.²⁶ Such consensual iconography is accompanied by a rather brief inscription: KAICAPOC (“[coin] of Caesar”). The purpose was to indicate the name of the new chief of the community, while imitating the Herodian coinage, in order to meet the local susceptibilities.²⁷ The name of the Caesar appeared during the first year of the rule of Rufus Valerius Gratus (15-26 C.E.): from this date, the word TIB(ERIOY) is readable on the obverse, together with the minting date. In 18/19 C.E., a coin bears on the obverse the inscription TIB(ERIOY) KAICAP(OC), and on the reverse the name IOYΛΙΑ, probably referring to mother-empress Livia. The innovation became the custom at the time of Pilatus, who extended the imperial titles to TIBERIOY KAICAPOC (“[coin] of Tiberius Caesar”), while conserving the name of the emperor’s mother on the reverse.

The coinage of the time of Pilatus is probably the most interesting for the purpose of this paper. That same coin of this procurator, struck in 26/27 C.E., represents on the obverse a *simpulum* (fig. 2). The issue of 30/31 C.E. bears a *lituus* on the obverse and a laurel wreath on the reverse (fig. 3). The laurel was the emblem of both the *princeps* and victory. It was resumed in later issues of Pilatus, then in the ones of Antonius Felix, who again extended the inscriptions on one of his issues of 54 C.E.: TI(BEPIOC) KΛAYΔIOC KAICAP ΓEPM(ANIKOC) (“[coin] of Tiberius Claudius Caesar Germanicus”) on the obverse and IOYΛΙΑ AΓPIIIPIIINA (“Julia Agrippina”) on the reverse. Another coin, struck the same year, bears the name of the two heirs of Claudius: BPIT(ANIKΩ) KAI(CAPI) on the obverse (“To Brit[annicus] Cae[sar]”), and NEPΩ KΛAY(ΔIO) KAICAP(I) (“To Nero Clau[dius] Caesar”) on the reverse. One can also see the titulature of the emperor gradually conquering the place on the field. The inscriptions tended to glorify the Empire’s ruler more and more.

Furthermore, the portraits are even more interesting: the *lituus*, which was the curved augural staff, and the *simpulum*, i.e. the ladle used at sacrifices to make libations, and finally the laurel wreath, symbol of victory, were three images that broke with the anterior coinage and would have been perceived as true provocations. Indeed, even if the laurel was represented on the coins of Hyrcanus I and Judah Aristobulus,²⁸ it could be understood as an emblem of military victory over Judea, since the issuing authority was the Roman power. Nevertheless, Judea was annexed without violence in 6 C.E., as the result of a Jewish embassy: the Romans had no victory to celebrate (*Jewish Antiquities* 17, 34-344). It is true that the conquest by Pompey in 64/63 B.C.E. brought the region into the Roman fold, but Hyrcanus II remained *Kohen hagadol*. That is to say, he kept his prestige intact among the community.²⁹ One may surmise that, among the Jews, very few had the feeling of having been defeated by Rome: the laurel wreath may have been seen as a provocation. Furthermore, the vexations at the time of Pilatus are well known (*War of the Jews* 2, 169-178; *Jewish Antiquities* 18, 55-62); his monetary emissions provide a visible aspect of his policy. However, we may follow certain scholars in assuming that if Pilatus had been expected to provoke the religious feelings of the Jews, he would have

²⁶ Romanoff 1944, 16-19; Prigent 1990, 11.

²⁷ Schürer 1961, 177; Kindler 1974, 94; Meshorer 1982, 173; Goodman 2005, 164.

²⁸ Schwentzel 2007a, 139.

²⁹ Schwentzel 2009, 382.

represented living beings on his coins;³⁰ something he did not do. This would have been a simple lack of knowledge about the specificities of Judaism. Moreover, the *simpulum* could have been understood as a ladle for libations conforming to the sacrificial cult of Jerusalem and the *lituus* is comparable to the handles of the amphorae depicted on certain coins of Valerius Gratus (fig. 1). If we suppose that these symbols were provocative, we ought to then affirm that they could be understood as foreign cultic instruments. There is no proof of any contestation concerning these coins, but the iconography of the shekels of the revolt indicates that, at the very least, the priests understood them.

As an antithesis to these representations,³¹ the silver coins of the rebels were very uniform during the five years of minting. Those of the fifth year, from March through August 70 C.E., bear a legend and a portrait similar to the coins struck during the first year³² (figs 5 and 6). The portrait could be, on the obverse, the Omer cup,³³ and the inscription is *sql ysr 'l* (shekel of Israel). On the reverse, one can see a branch with three pomegranates, and read: *yrwslm hqdwsh*³⁴ (Jerusalem the Holy). Thus the foreign symbols were replaced by typical Jewish representations. The omer was a measure of barley offered up to the temple on the second day of Pessah; from this offering, the Jews counted forty-nine days before celebrating Shavouot. It was also another sacrificial symbol that ousted the *simpulum* and the *lituus* of Pilatus; the sacrificial system of the temple was substituted for the Roman one. This was a significant identity claim considering propitiatory rites being a factor of Jewish identity.³⁵ The new “State” thus claimed to be hierocratic and sacrificial.³⁶

The pomegranate is a frequently adopted symbol in Judaism. It appears on the brass columns of Solomon’s temple (*1 Kings*, 7.18, 20, 42; *Jeremiah*, 52.22-23) and around the edge of sacerdotal vestment (*Exodus*, 28.33); thus, it is clearly connected with Israel’s cult. The prophets Joel (1.12) and Haggai (2.19) used the image of the pomegranate tree that had ceased to flower in order to illustrate divine punishment. In the *Song of Songs*, the fruit symbolizes passion and sensuality (4.3; 4.13; 6.7; 6.11; 7.13; 8.12). Numerous possible interpretations also abound, but the pomegranate is particularly connected with the sacrificial context.

Robert Deutsch proposes a new interpretation of this motif; instead of a branch, he sees a high priest’s staff ornate with three flowers or burgeons. So, the high priest’s staff would have replaced the *lituus* of the *pontifex maximus*, and the *simpulum* would have given way to the omer cup. Such modifications could be seen as responses, but again as paradoxical forms of adoption of the Roman iconography. This would represent the minting authority,³⁷ which I shall now discuss.

³⁰ Meshorer 1967, 105-106; Lémonon 1981, 114.

³¹ Meshorer 1982, II: 112.

³² However, their minting appears to be of lower quality: Reifenberg 1947, 32; Meshorer 2001, 117.

³³ Romanoff 1944, 21-25; Reifenberg 1947, 31-32; Meshorer 2001, 117.

³⁴ The words of the first-year coins are written otherwise: *yrwslm qdsh*.

³⁵ Smith 1927, 226-227, 244-268; De Vaux 1964, 18-19; Schmidt 1994, 14-15.

³⁶ It is moreover surprising, as Hendin (2012, 139) writes, that the menorah was never represented on coins.

³⁷ Deutsch 2011, 362-365.

Different minting authorities, different purposes

Such attention paid to the temple is not surprising. Since the mint was probably established near to the metallic stock of the temple,³⁸ it was most likely the faction holding the temple during the uprising that inaugurated the silver Jerusalemite coinage in 66 C.E. Among the different factions disputing the leadership inside Jerusalem, the Zealot party is the most probable. Formed during the winter of 67-68 C.E., it was visibly organized around the priests who interrupted the twice-daily sacrifices in the name of the emperor.³⁹ Continuity between the pre-Zealots and the Zealots is likely. David Rhoads states they had “democratic tendencies”⁴⁰ and a preference for the equity of all Jews before God. He continues: “the Zealots had ‘zeal’ for the purity of the sanctuary and the realization of a new order in the Temple.”⁴¹ Obviously, since there is no mention of any leader or any human power on the coins, it is tempting here to see the propaganda of the *Sicarii*, whose sole aim was the domination of God over Israel. However, the desire to affirm the temple’s centrality and to recall the cultic instruments leads us rather to look for the Zealots. The ideas of Martin Hengel, according to whom the Zealots were a messianic faction, have been corrected by Richard Horsley: the Zealots, just like the *Sicarii*, rejected any form of human authority.⁴²

Furthermore, they held the temple for almost the entire duration of the war; and, it seems, were likely to have struck coins near to the sanctuary. They were actually defeated by Simon bar Giora (*War of the Jews* 5, 105), but the fact that they maintained their presence on the temple mount under Simon’s rule is attested.⁴³ In fact, as shown by Donald Ariel, “probably the same priests were responsible for the minting even though the ‘minting authority’ had changed three times.”⁴⁴

The bronze coins, however, seem to have been struck by another authority. The mint was not located on the temple mount, where Ariel proposes situating the mint of silver coins, but perhaps in the Upper-city, near the royal palace and the agora.⁴⁵ Many differences in the coinage from year 4 suggest that Simon bar Giora himself could have been the minting authority for the copper-alloy coins that year.⁴⁶ Over time his slogans became more spiritual (“redemption” replaced “freedom”), and more aggressive.

Thus we have the inscription *lg'lt sywn* (“for the redemption of Zion”). Zion was another name for Jerusalem, but, by metonymy, it often designated the whole community, and not only the territory. For example, in this text:

³⁸ MacLaren 2003, 140-141; Goldstein – Fontanille 2006, 16; Rappaport 2007, 106-108.

³⁹ Rhoads 1976, 97-99; Horsley – Hanson 1985, 229; Mézange 2003, 125-129.

⁴⁰ Rhoads 1976, 106. See Horsley – Hanson 1985, 233, who define “democratic principle” as “nonhierarchical” ideals, and, 235, as “collective leadership.”

⁴¹ Rhoads 1976, 107.

⁴² Hengel 1961, 299, 306; Horsley, 1985, 337-340; Mézange 2003, 211-218.

⁴³ Rhoads 1976, 109; Horsley – Hanson 1985, 219.

⁴⁴ Ariel 2011, 390. See: Meshorer 2001, 115; MacLaren 2003, 150; Rappaport 2007, 107-111.

⁴⁵ Ariel 2011, 387 (silver mint) and 391-392 (bronze mint).

⁴⁶ Roth 1962, 43-45; Goldstein – Fontanille 2006, 23; Deutsch 2011, 367-368; Ariel 2011, 395; Hendin 2012, 130.

For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. ‘This is My resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her needy with bread. Her priests also I will clothe with salvation, and her godly ones will sing aloud for joy. There I will cause the horn of David to spring forth; I have prepared a lamp for Mine anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame, but upon himself his crown shall shine. (*Psalms*, 132.13-18, *New American Standard Bible Version*)

By choosing the redemption of Zion for his propaganda, Simon declared that his objective was to purify the community and the city, and to reestablish the relationship between Israel and God. Instead of a terrestrial Jerusalem, he attempted to rebuild a sanctuary agreeable to Yahweh, from where God would rule and judge the nations. A well-known verse reads as follows:

So it will happen in that day, that the LORD will punish the host of heaven on high, and the kings of the earth on earth. They will be gathered together like prisoners in the dungeon, and will be confined in prison; and after many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed, for the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and His glory will be before His elders. (*Isaiah*, 24.21-23, *New American Standard Bible Version*)

Simon did, however, keep some cultic representations, particularly the chalice, which had previously only been used on silver issues. On his bronze coins one recognizes the *lulav* and the *etrog*⁴⁷ (figs 7 and 8), central elements of the Sukkot festival; namely, a lemon and a palm⁴⁸ that the believers waved during the celebrations (*Leviticus*, 23.39-40). Here again, the imagery is a reminder of the Jewish cult. Moreover, the palm appeared on the coins of the procurators and there is probably here again a continuation of the Roman iconography. On some of these coins are baskets filled with fruits, which Adolph Reifenberg concludes to be a reference to offerings and premises.⁴⁹ The amphora may well represent the wine libations.⁵⁰ Indeed, required payments in cash or in kind may be seen as consequences of Jewish theocracy.⁵¹

Evidence of the rebels’ theocracies

The revolt of 66 C.E. was the victory of the “fourth sect,” which appeared, according to the account of Josephus, at the time of the census of Quirinius (*War of the Jews* 2, 117-119; *Jewish Antiquities* 18, 4-25). That year, a Galilean named Judas opposed the success of the Roman provincialization, and attempted to persuade the Jews not to submit themselves by declaring their property. According to him, paying Roman taxes levied on account of the census would mean recognizing the Roman emperor as master over Israel. On the contrary, he believed it necessary to oppose any tribute required by a foreign ruler, but rather to give an offering to the God of Israel. According to Judas, only God

⁴⁷ Romanoff 1944, 19-21.

⁴⁸ Perhaps an influence of the procurators, according to Hill 1914, CII.

⁴⁹ Reifenberg 1953, 13.

⁵⁰ Romanoff 1944, 31-33.

⁵¹ Girardin 2016.

was the genuine master of the Jewish community.⁵² Despite the defeat of his movement, his doctrine seems to have secretly circulated in Roman Judea.⁵³ Moreover, a “clandestine” and “terrorist” group conducted series of violent actions against the Romans and those who accepted their rule. Any Jew submitting himself to Roman power seemed to them an obstacle for the coming of the king anointed by God, and it was thus necessary to eliminate any collaborator in order to hasten the coming of the messianic era.⁵⁴

Such a conception of divine power over Israel appears to be widespread in Roman Judea. Josephus coined the word “theocracy” in the second half of first century C.E., in order to define the government (πολίτευμα) of Jews. Here is his statement:

There is endless variety in the details of the customs and laws which prevail in the world at large. To give but a summary enumeration: some peoples have entrusted the supreme political power to monarchies, others to oligarchies, yet others to the masses. Our lawgiver, however, was attracted by none of these forms of polity, but gave to his constitution the form of what – if a forced expression be permitted – may be termed a “theocracy” placing all sovereignty and authority in the hands of God. To Him he persuaded all to look, as the author of all blessings, both those which are common to all mankind, and those which they had won for themselves by prayer in the crises of their history. He convinced them that no single action, no secret thought, could be hid from Him. (*Against Apion*, 2, 164-166, translation of the Loeb Classical Library)

In such a conception, rulers were considered as chosen by God: it was He who gave power to Saul and who subsequently chose David, who ruled with abilities and qualities received from God.⁵⁵ Even the chosen king could be deposed if he disobeyed, like Saul (*1 Samuel*, 15.11, 26-29; 23.16-17; 24.15-21). This meant that political matters were never far from the watchful eyes of God. As such, while the government was supposed to be approved by the deity, there was no concurrence between terrestrial and celestial power. This is the reason why the Hasmoneans and Herodians exploited the theocratic ideal in their propaganda.⁵⁶ The Hasmoneans even pursued an ambitious policy of homogenization of their State, in order to enforce their own legitimacy.⁵⁷ Therefore, the public fund was mixed with the sacred treasury of the temple, and offerings were mingled with royal taxes.⁵⁸ When Jesus encouraged his detractors to pay Caesar’s taxes and God’s taxes as well, he actually taught them to recognize God’s sovereignty above foreign rule.⁵⁹ This is an inclusive conception of theocracy, but it is obvious that a more exclusive conception existed; and such a vision had partially motivated the uprising against Rome. As Christophe Mézange writes, “la haute idée que Judas [le Galiléen] et ses partisans se font de la souveraineté de Dieu sur Israël a pour corollaire la révolte contre Rome.”⁶⁰ And such an

⁵² Hengel 1961, 91; Rhoads 1976, 48-49; Horsley – Hanson 1985, 192-193; Mendels 1992, 293-294; Mézange, 2003, 36-40; Girardin, 2015, 71.

⁵³ Mézange 2003, 72-73.

⁵⁴ Rhoads 1976, 85; Horsley – Hanson 1985, 193-194; Mézange 2003, 47.

⁵⁵ Cazelles 1973, 70-73.

⁵⁶ Schwentzel 2007b; 2009.

⁵⁷ Dabrowa 2010a; Regev 2013, 73, 101; Babota 2014, 285.

⁵⁸ De Vaux 1989, 215-218.

⁵⁹ Carter 1999, 28-29: “Paying the tax, then, is no longer for disciples of Jesus [...] an action that acknowledges the all-controlling power of the (Roman) kings of the earth and the oppressive sovereignty of the empire. Paying is also invokes, for those with eyes to see, God’s sovereignty.”

⁶⁰ Mézange 2003, 46.

idea, according to which it is impossible to obey God and the Romans at the same time, probably dated from Pompey's profanation of the sanctuary in 63 B.C.E.⁶¹

Also, instead of consensual symbols used by the first procurators and instead of foreign religious imagery from the time of Pilatus, the rebels of 66 C.E. chose to represent the key elements of Jewish worship identity. This choice was politically and religiously oriented; it was a theocratic choice, since the main purpose was to declare the independence of the new State in which God is asserted to be the figurehead and the true master. Here is a powerful identity claim.

This is particularly noteworthy because the Hasmoneans struck many aniconic coins. Incidentally, the Maccabean rulers displayed a star on their coinage, a traditional symbol of Davidic royalty,⁶² but this was not the case for the coins of 66-70 C.E. There is no reference to royalty, or to high priesthood either. It is important to notice that the high priest was, until the revolt, a part of the elites favorable to the presence of the Romans. Moreover, Ananias was slain in the early stage of the revolt,⁶³ and according to Josephus, the new pontiff chosen by lots in 67 C.E., Phanni, son of Samuel, was entirely ignorant of sacerdotal functions. He was used as an organ of legitimization of the Zealot faction, while not holding any proper authority.⁶⁴ Nothing implies the domination of one person over another, and there is no messianic message nor any allusion to any terrestrial power on the coins of the first Jewish war. Herein lies a difference between these coins and those of the Hasmoneans or those of the Bar Kokhba revolt. The apparent lack of minting authority on the coins is remarkable. Paradoxically, the Jewish political form while at war against Rome does not appear to be that of a proper State. It had no government, and no leader.

The inscriptions are also clear. The mention of KAICAPOC (“[coin] of Caesar”) is replaced by YSR'L (“Israel”). To a foreign leader, for whom titles appeared in Greek,⁶⁵ rebels substituted the whole community of Israel in Paleo-Hebrew script. The Hasmoneans claimed by their issues their janiform character.⁶⁶ Here there was no bilingualism, and the rebels wrote in a long-outdated alphabet.⁶⁷ It was an archaism of legitimization by the wholesale rejection of foreign cultural influence, and thus an affirmation of identity. According to Edward Dąbrowa, the Hasmonean's choice to use this alphabet would have been a reference to the biblical tradition of high priesthood. Here again we would see a religious purpose.⁶⁸

One could question the strategic choice of diffusing political slogans in an extinct language. However, as David Hendin argues, “lack of literacy need not reduce the efficacy of messages or their transmission via coins. Considering the strong Jewish oral traditions, it is likely that the coins provoked patriotic discussion among the rebels.”⁶⁹

⁶¹ Atkinson 2011, 9-11.

⁶² Schwentzel 2012, 185-186.

⁶³ Josephus, *War of the Jews* 2, 41. On the failure of the ruling class in controlling Judea in the name of Rome, see Goodman 1987, especially 29-50.

⁶⁴ Josephus, *War of the Jews* 4, 155-157; Horsley – Hanson 1985, 232.

⁶⁵ It must be noted that Herod was the first to strike coins exclusively in Greek in Judea, see Reifenberg 1947, 18.

⁶⁶ Schwentzel 2014, 128-129.

⁶⁷ Reifenberg 1947, 28-29; Kadman 1954, 167; Meshorer 2001, 40-41, 48-49; Zissu – Abadi 2014.

⁶⁸ Dąbrowa 2010b, 136-137.

⁶⁹ Hendin 2012, 132.

And such discussions would have been sufficient. We might agree with Richard Horsley that “[...] the ordinary people, even if illiterate, had some substantial acquaintance with biblical stories and images [...]”⁷⁰ If the purpose was to gain support for the cause and to intensify the warrior determination, then the maintaining of a secret, sharing knowledge of cryptic slogans full of references to biblical times, and exchanging mental representations of the world, would have been most effective.

Throughout the war, no mention is made of any leader, only a unified representation of the Jewish people in the name of Israel, Zion, Jerusalem. Even the word “Judea,” designating the land of Israel in the eyes of foreigners, is foregone; this in order to create a more inclusive community, integrating diaspora.⁷¹ No leader guarantees, by his mint, the validity of circulating coins anymore; this was now the role of the whole community. Even the Hasmoneans’ reference to a community’s council, the *haver yehudim*, had disappeared. Granting the veracity of Josephus’ account, however, there was a council of Hierosolymitans (συνέδριον τῶν Ἱεροσολυμιτῶν), to which the author sent letters for receiving instructions during his mission in Galilee (*Vita*, 62). This assembly would, perhaps, have been a reminiscence of the Hasmonean’s “council of elders.”⁷²

This apparent egalitarianism may refer to the time of Exodus, when Moses levied the half-shekel tax on the Israelites. The payment meant, inter alia, the equity of all Jews in face of God,⁷³ and this is probably a consequence of that “exclusive” form of the rebels’ theocracy.⁷⁴ Having rejected foreign power and local elites, the Jerusalem crowd would have imagined a government more similar to patriarchal institutions of Torah than that of monarchy. This choice could be justified by ancient traditions.⁷⁵ With the First Book of Samuel, the monarchy might appear to have been in contradiction with a “genuine” theocracy. Thus, when the elders asked Samuel to appoint a king, God said to him:

The LORD said to Samuel: “Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day – in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods – so they are doing to you also. (*1 Samuel*, 8.7-8, *New American Standard Bible* version)

In the same chapter, one finds a list of the rights, presented as excessive, of a king *vis-à-vis* the people of Israel. But the people persisted. This tradition may explain why the rebels of 66 C.E. did not pretend to appoint a king over them. The recently liberated Jews would pretend to depend exclusively on God and to renew the Covenant concluded at Sinai.

This is the monetary discourse of the ephemeral Jewish State. On the contrary, Josephus and Tacitus presented a land ravaged by internal strife. For example, John of Gischala set fire to the grain stocks of the besieged Jerusalem in order to weaken his opponents (*War of the Jews* 5, 24-25; Tacitus, *Histories* 5, 12). The struggle between Eleazar and Menahem⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Horsley – Hanson 1985, 92.

⁷¹ Goodman 2005, 166; Hendin 2012, 128.

⁷² On the *haver yehudim*, see Dąbrowa, 2010b, 39, 109-110; Regev, 2013, 192.

⁷³ *Exodus*, 30.11-16. See also Girardin 2016, 59.

⁷⁴ Horsley – Hanson 1985, 22 (Simon bar Giora), 233-234 (the Zealots).

⁷⁵ Horsley – Hanson 1985, 4: “Because God was the true king, there could be no human institution of kingship, no state in early Israel.”

⁷⁶ Hengel 1961, 371; Rhoads 1976, 114-117; Horsley 1985, 339, 344; Mézange 2003, 97-98.

explains in particularly pragmatic way the lack of visible power on the coins. This was not only a theocratic ideology, but also the inability to find unanimity in the city.

The words “Jerusalem the Holy” call to mind the centrality of the Jewish cult, and the dates are, for the first time, the same in the entire region. This mention sounds like a translation of the ΤΥΡΟΥ ΙΕΡΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΣΥΛΟΥ of the Tyrian shekel: “of Tyre the holy and (city) of refuge”. This is not a particularly innovative legend. The purpose was to claim the unification by this way again, in building the memory of the reborn *ethnos*, freed from pagan cults. However, here again the internal divisions are minimized. A recent publication by Danny Syon shows that there is no uniformity in coinage in Judea during the war. Except Gamla, conquered by Vespasian in September 67 C.E., no mint issued Jewish coins outside Jerusalem. Akko and Scythopolis, bases of the Roman’s legions, struck coins for paying the soldiers. Hippos and Gadara tried to manifest their support to Rome by their issuing. Paneas, the mint of Agrippa II, was the best way for the king to prove himself loyal to the emperor.⁷⁷

According to Josephus, the city of Sepphoris had called on Rome for help since the very beginning of the war (*War of the Jews* 3, 30-34). The ancient historian himself was sent to Galilee in order to convince the Galileans to join the fight (*Vita*, 28-30). There was no unanimous rising for the “national” liberation. Inside Jerusalem, the rebels were unable to unify themselves; outside, they needed to negotiate to gain support. Each city adapted its politics to the situation according to its own interests. As an example of the divisions, Josephus explains that the *Boulê* of Tiberias decided to send messengers to Jerusalem, in order to accuse Josephus about his government of Galilee. The people of Jerusalem was believed to be easily swayed (*Vita*, 313-316). Nothing here would suggest evidence of high respect, neither for the holy city, nor for the chosen people.

Finally, we note some differences between two theocratic conceptions on these coins. For the Zealot faction, the theocracy was temple-oriented; that is to say, the power of God was manifested through the temple. According to them, respect for the sanctuary’s obligations was the way of divine power, and the priesthood, as the group of representatives of the deity, had to be the head of the people. For the faction of Simon bar Giora, theocracy meant the entire sovereignty of God over Israel. According to him, the prerequisite for the actual power of God was the extermination of His opponents and the constitution of a new social order. Cleansed from the godless Jews, the holy city would have been able to welcome the messiah.⁷⁸ This is probably the meaning of his claim “for the redemption of Zion.”

Conclusion

The rebels’ minting of 66-70 C.E. differed from the procurators’ issues, since they were claims for political independence. They first differed because of the use of precious metal, which was until that day only used for the staters of the temple. Secondly,

⁷⁷ Syon 2012, 59-60.

⁷⁸ If I am right to see a link between Simon bar Giora and his thoughts on Judas the Galilean: Rhoads 1976, 85; Mézange 2003, 47, as did Horsley – Hanson 1985, 125.

in the face of the progressive extent of the emperor's titulature on the field, and of the iconographic vexations at the time of Pilatus, the Jewish coins may appear to be identity responses. There is an apparent rejection of any explicit form of domination: never is any king, any ethnarch, or any high priest mentioned on the coins. The iconography and perhaps the legends seem equally to be a paradoxical form of Romanization.

However, the imagery refers to the temple in that these shekels and the copper-alloy *prutot* show two concurrent theocratic conceptions. For the Zealots, the faction that may have struck the shekels, there was unity of the community because there was unity of the temple, a sign that God was one and the sole proper master of Israel. Jerusalem, the city of his sanctuary, was emphasized in the centrality that the Hasmoneans had attempted to establish. For the faction of Simon bar Giora, who probably struck the bronzes in year four, the theocracy did not reside in the temple, but in the purification of the holy city through the defeat of his opponents. The extermination of the godless among Jews was seen as a prerequisite for the accomplishing of the messianic era. There is also an opposition between the theocracy based around the temple and sacerdotal functions and the more exclusive theocracy, i.e. the rule of God. In any case, these two conceptions led to strict egalitarianism between Jews.

These official discourses conceal a different state of affairs. The divisions, rivalries, and treasons all broke this so-called unanimity. Indeed, the uprising mixed an anti-fiscal movement to the "nationalism" and brought about social conflict through religious frustrations. The affirmation of a Jewish State did not lead to more unanimity. Doubts even arose as to the appropriateness of the Zealots' actions. According to Josephus, Romans would have been seen as more respectful of the cult than Jewish revolutionaries (*War of the Jews*, IV, 182-183). Perhaps this criticism was for real; in which case, all this emphasis on the sanctity of Jerusalem and on the respect of ancestral values would have been no more than a response, a discourse of legitimization for a faction that struggled to assert itself in a divided Judea.

Plates⁷⁹



Fig. 1. Bronze *prutah* (16 mm, 2.29 g) dated Δ (17/8 C.E.)

Obverse. Vine leaf. IOYAIΑ.

Reverse. Handled amphora.

⁷⁹ The photographs are published courtesy of the Classical Numismatic Group.



Fig. 2. Bronze *prutah* (15.5 mm, 2.02 g) dated Liç (26/27 C.E.)
 Obverse. *Simpulum*. TIBEPLOY KAICAPOC (“[coin] of Tiberius Caesar”).
 Reverse. Three bound grain ears. IOYΛIA KA[ICAPOC] (“[coin] to Julia Ca[esar]”).



Fig. 3. Bronze *prutah* (16 mm, 2.36 g) dated LIZ (30/31 C.E.)
 Obverse. *Lituus*. [TIB]EPILOY KAICAPOC (“[coin] of [Tib]erius Caesar”).
 Reverse. Laurel wreath.



Fig. 4. Bronze *prutah* (2.92 g) dated LIδ (54 C.E.)
 Obverse. Palm tree bearing two bunches of fruit. BPIT(ANIKΩ) KAI(CAPI) (“To Brit(anicus) Cae(sar)”).
 Reverse. Two shields, two spears. NEPΩ KΛAY(ΔIΩ) KAICAP(I) (“To Nero Clau(dius) Caesar”).



Fig. 5. Silver shekel (22 mm, 14.16 g) dated A (66/67 C.E.)
 Obverse. Chalice with pearly rim. *Šql yšr'l* (“Shekel of Israel”).
 Reverse. Staff with three pomegranates. *Yrwšlm hqdwšh* (“Jerusalem the Holy”).



Fig. 6. Silver shekel (12.85 g) dated Š D (69/70 C.E.)
 Obverse. Chalice with pearly rim. *Šql yšr'l* (“Shekel of Israel”).
 Reverse. Staff with three pomegranates. *Yrwšlm hqdwšh* (“Jerusalem the Holy”).



Fig. 7. Bronze *prutah* (21 mm, 5.44 g) dated *šnt 'rb'* (69/70 C.E.)
 Obverse. Omer cup. *lg'lt šywn* (“For the redemption of Zion”).
 Reverse. Bundle of *lulav* between two *etrogs*.



Fig. 8. Bronze *prutah* (9.32 mm) dated *šnt 'rb'* (69/70 C.E.)
 Obverse. *Etrog. lg'lt sywn* (“For the redemption of Zion”).
 Reverse. Two *lulavs*.

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