



Half Shekel of the Jewish Commonwealth depicting a palm tree and the Four Species (69-70 CE)

Half Shekel of the Jewish Commonwealth depicting a palm tree and the Four Species (69-70 CE) - Obverse

[1]

[Half Shekel of the Jewish Commonwealth depicting a palm tree and the Four Species \(69-70 CE\) - Reverse](#) [2]

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Denomination:

Half Shekel

Date: 69 CE to 70 CE

Material:

Bronze

Mint:

Jerusalem

Actual Location (Collection/Museum):

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien/Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Name of Ruler:

Jewish Commonwealth

Obverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: Palm tree flanked by two baskets of dates

Inscription: - ????? ???? ?

Reverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: Etrog fruit flanked by two bundles of lulav

Inscription: - ??? ???? ???

Diameter (mm): 26.50mm

Weight (g): 14.72g

Commentary:

(See Ya'akov Meshorer, *A Treasury of Jewish Coins*)

This half shekel, minted in Jerusalem in 69-70 CE by the Jewish rebels during the First Jewish Revolt, depicts on the obverse a palm tree flanked by two baskets of dates, and on the reverse an etrog fruit, which is flanked by two bundles of lulav. Ya'akov Meshorer argues that by 69-70 CE, the rebel government decided to mint bronze coins in various denominations. Three denominations can be recognized, a bigger denomination, such as this one, bearing the inscription "one half," a middle denomination, bearing the inscription "one quarter," and a small denomination, bearing the inscription "one-eighth." Generally, the value of the coin is not stated. Thus, Meshorer suggests that these coins, although minted in bronze, bear values which refer to silver coins. Therefore, these three denominations are in fact a half, a quarter and an eighth of a shekel (see Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*,



Volume 2, p. 114-116).

The First Jewish Revolt, which broke out in 66 CE, reached a climax with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by Titus in 70 CE (on which see, for example, the [Arch of Titus](#) [4]; Jerusalem Talmud, Berakhot 4:1, 7b; Taanit 4:6, 68c), and continued until 73 CE when the last Jewish stronghold of Masada was captured. The Jews minted both silver and bronze coins, the latter being represented by this half shekel, and which were of lower production quality than the silver coins. The silver coins bore the words “Jerusalem the Holy,” while the bronze coinage instead bore either “Freedom of Zion” if minted in the earlier part of the revolt (see, for example, [Prutah of the Jewish Commonwealth depicting an amphora and a vine leaf \(67-68 CE\)](#) [5]), or if minted in the fourth year of the revolt, such as is the case with this half shekel, the words “To the redemption of Zion” (see Deutsch, “Coinage of the First Jewish Revolt,” p. 361). As mentioned above, the inscription in Hebrew on the obverse of this coin, “????? ???? (LGYLT ZYWN), means “To the Redemption of Zion,” in which Zion probably references the city of Jerusalem, reinforcing a hopeful message of liberation and salvation. The inscription on the reverse, “??? ???? ??” (ŠNAT ‘RB’ ?TZY), means year 4 and a half, and refers to the fourth year of independence from Roman rule. These coins from the First Jewish Revolt, minted by the Jewish rebels, are valuable as first-hand, non-literary evidence of the event (Deutsch, “Coinage of the First Jewish Revolt,” p. 361), and reveal something of the ideology which the Jews wished to maintain and circulate during this momentous stand against the Roman imperial power. As Robert Deutsch and others have suggested, it could be that minting which had taken place in Jerusalem previously ceased once the city was captured (see Deutsch, “Coinage of the First Jewish Revolt,” p. 361; Rappaport, “Who Minted the Jewish War’s Coins?” p. 106-108).

The symbols appearing on the coinage from the First Jewish Revolt fall into two categories: 1) those related to the Temple and its cult and practices; and 2) agricultural symbols related to Jerusalem and the Land of Israel. Some symbols were familiar from previous Jewish coinage, and others were used also in the coinage of the Bar Kokhba Revolt sixty years later (see Deutsch, “Coinage of the First Jewish Revolt,” p. 361). Bronze coins such as this half shekel depict images that fall into the second group – those connected with Jerusalem and the Land of Israel. The palm tree flanked by two baskets of dates, depicted on the obverse, was one of the Seven Species which characterized the Land of Israel (Deuteronomy 8:8) (for another depiction of the palm, albeit on a coin minted by a Roman procurator of Judea rather than one minted by the Jews themselves, see [Prutah of Antonius Felix depicting two shields, javelins, and a palm tree \(54 CE\)](#) [6]). In the Bible, the word honey designates the product made from its dates. Thus, the palm with seven branches, shaped akin to a menorah, came to symbolize Judea. The palm tree also stood for righteousness (Psalms 92:13). Moreover, according to Midrash Rabbah on Numbers 3:1, the dates of the palm tree can be compared to the Jewish people because the dates, which can be of good, average, and bad quality, reflect the fact that the Jewish people includes in its midst “righteous, upright, pious and learned, but also plain and boorish people” (Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage 2*, p. 120-121).

The palm tree was also depicted on coins minted by the Roman governors of Judea, such as issues minted by Coponius in 6 CE, and by Antonius Felix in 54 CE. Later on, the palm tree would be depicted on the reverse of various examples of the *Iudea Capta* series, often together with Jewish prisoners. This series was minted to celebrate the conquest of Judea, mainly under the rule of Vespasian and Titus. All three bronze denominations depict on the reverse symbols which are associated with the Feast of Tabernacles. This holiday had a capital importance for the Jewish population during the Second Temple period. In fact, this holiday, together with Passover and Pentecost, was one of the three pilgrimages to Jerusalem ordered in the Book of Deuteronomy: “Three times in a year shall all your males appear before the Lord your God in the place which He shall choose; on the feast of unleavened bread, and on the feast of weeks, and on the feast of tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the Lord empty” (Deuteronomy 17:16). This holiday was the only occasion when the country population could flock to Jerusalem. Thus, while Passover fell during the wheat and barley harvest, and Pentecost fell when the First Fruits were beginning to ripen, the Tabernacles fell during a lull in the fields’ activities, in the second half of the month of Tishri, between September and October. This denomination therefore depicts all the Four Species (Leviticus 23:40) together. By the late Second Temple period these were identified with the palm branch, which was bundled together with the myrtle and the willow. The fourth species, ethrog, or the fruit of a citron tree, was held in the hand (Mishnah, Sukkah 3.1; 2). The inscription on the obverse, “for the redemption of Zion,” appears in Jerusalem on coins minted from the fourth year onwards. Probably, this inscription referred to the desperate situation of the rebels, and to the idea that only divine intervention could have saved the Jews (Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage 2*, p. 119-120).

In addition to the connection to wine, the vine leaf was closely associated with the Temple more generally. The façade of the Temple was decorated with a huge golden vine which was splendid to behold (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* XV.11.3; see Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage, Volume 2*, p. 25-26). Moreover, this golden vine is



also described in rabbinic literature. A passage of the Mishnah states that people who wished to donate gold to the Temple fashioned it in the shape of a cluster of grapes and hung it on the huge golden vine; this emphasizes the close relationship between the Jews and the Temple and the importance of the symbols depicted on this prutah (see Mishnah, Middot 3.8). The shekel was used in the Temple, as opposed to the prutah, which was a small denomination used by all layers of the population in everyday life (Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage, Volume 2*, p. 112-113). In the case of this half shekel, the symbols evoked the Jewish identity and the strong connection between the Jewish people and the Temple, while the inscription forwards the hopeful ideal of liberation from Roman dominion.

Keywords in the original language:

- [????? ???? \[7\]](#)

Thematic keywords:

- [Judea \[8\]](#)
- [high priest \[9\]](#)
- [priests \[10\]](#)
- [Judaism \[11\]](#)
- [Jews \[12\]](#)
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- [Four Species \[16\]](#)
- [Jerusalem Temple \[17\]](#)
- [First Jewish Revolt \[18\]](#)
- [palm tree \[19\]](#)
- [etrog \[20\]](#)
- [lulav \[21\]](#)
- [redemption \[22\]](#)
- [freedom \[23\]](#)

Bibliographical references: Deutsch, Robert, "[Coinage of the First Jewish Revolt Against Rome: Iconography, Minting Authority, Metallurgy](#)" [24], in *The Jewish Revolt Against Rome: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (ed. Mladen Popović; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 361-372

Kadman, Leo, [The Coins of the Jewish War of 67-73 C.E.](#) [25] (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1960)

Meshorer, Ya'akov, [Ancient Jewish Coinage 2: Herod the Great through Bar Cochba](#) [26] (Dix Hills, N.Y.: Amphora Books, 1982)

Meshorer, Ya'akov, [A Treasury of Jewish Coins: From the Persian Period to Bar Kokhba](#) [27] (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2001)

Romanoff, Paul, [Jewish Symbols on Ancient Jewish Coins](#) [28] (New York: American Israel Numismatic Society, 1971)

Other sources connected with this document: Numismatic item

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[6] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/perutah-antonius-felix-depicting-two-shields-and-javelins-and-palm-tree-54-60-ce>

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