



Prutah of the Jewish Commonwealth depicting an amphora and a vine leaf (67-68 CE)

Prutah of the Jewish Commonwealth depicting an amphora and a vine leaf (67-68 CE) - Obverse



[1]

[Prutah of the Jewish Commonwealth depicting an amphora and a vine leaf \(67-68 CE\) - reverse](#) [2]



[3]

Denomination:

Prutah

Date: 67 CE to 68 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: Amphora

Inscription: - ??? ????

Reverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: Vine leaf



Inscription: ??? ????

Diameter (mm): 18.50mm

Weight (g): 3.03g

Commentary:

(See Ya'akov Meshorer, *A Treasury of Jewish Coins*, no. 196)

This prutah, minted at Jerusalem in 67-68 CE by the Jewish rebels during the First Jewish Revolt, depicts on the obverse an amphora, and on the reverse a vine leaf. The prutah (in Hebrew ????) was a Jewish bronze coin of low value minted both by the prefects of the Roman province of Judea, and also by the Jews during the First Revolt. They are sometimes also referred to as "Masada coins." This prutah comes from the second year of 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 prutah, 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 "Freedom of Zion," as we see on the present example (coins minted in the fourth year of the revolt instead have the words "To the redemption of Zion"; see Deutsch, "Coinage of the First Jewish Revolt," p. 361). The inscription in Hebrew on the obverse, "??? ???? (ŠNT ŠTYM), means "year 2," and refers to the second year of independence from Roman rule, while the inscription on the reverse, "??? ???? (HRWT ZYWN), reads "Freedom of Zion," in which Zion probably references the city of Jerusalem, reinforcing this message. The obverse depicts an amphora, or large vessel, while the reverse depicts a vine leaf. 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). However, coins such as this prutah minted in the earlier part of the revolt are thought to have been minted under the authority of the temple officials – the priests led by the high priest (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 prutah depict images that fall into the first group – those connected with the Jerusalem Temple. The amphora depicted on the obverse depicts one of the vessels used in the Temple to carry some form of liquid (probably wine judging by the vine on the reverse of the coin) for ritual purposes. On this prutah the vessel lacks a lid, which has led some to question its precise usage. Still, the fact that on the reverse of the coin we find a vine leaf points to the possibility that this amphora was used as a container for wine (see Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage, Volume 2*, p. 110-113). Indeed, Robert Deutsch notes that both "year 2" and "year 3" coins from the First Jewish Revolt, the present coin being an example of the former group, variably bear both the amphora with or without a lid as well as vine leaves, and he argues that these symbols represent wine "both as an agricultural product and for cult purposes" (see Deutsch "Coinage of the First Jewish Revolt," p. 365-366). In relation to wine as an agricultural product, it is also worth noting here that the vine was one of the Seven Species which characterized the Land of Israel (see Deuteronomy 8:8; the other six species are wheat, barley, figs, pomegranates, olive oil, and the date palm, the latter of which is rendered as "honey" in the Bible in reference to the product made from its fruit; for a 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 \(54 CE\)](#) [5]). In addition to the connection to wine suggested above, 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).

Contrary to the shekel, which was used in the Temple, the prutah was a small denomination used by all the layers



of the population in everyday life (Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage, Volume 2*, p. 112-113). Thus, the Jewish rebels chose symbols for these coins which emphasized the close bond between the wider Jewish population and the Temple. In the case of this prutah, the symbols evoked the ritual practice, and possibly also the visual characteristics which were strongly associated with the Jerusalem Temple, and the inscription forwards the hopeful ideal of liberation from Roman dominion.

Keywords in the original language:

- [??? ???? \[6\]](#)

Thematic keywords:

- [Judea \[7\]](#)
- [high priest \[8\]](#)
- [priests \[9\]](#)
- [Judaism \[10\]](#)
- [Jews \[11\]](#)
- [Jewish symbols \[12\]](#)
- [war \[13\]](#)
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- [vessel \[16\]](#)
- [amphora \[17\]](#)
- [vine \[18\]](#)
- [Roman domination \[19\]](#)
- [Roman rule \[20\]](#)
- [First Jewish Revolt \[21\]](#)
- [wine \[22\]](#)
- [ritual \[23\]](#)
- [freedom \[24\]](#)
- [liberation \[25\]](#)

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Other sources connected with this document: Relief / Sculpture

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Numismatic item

[Prutah of Antonius Felix depicting two shields and javelins and a palm tree \(54-60 CE\) \[33\]](#)

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- [4] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/triumphal-arch-titus-81-82-cereliefs>
- [5] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/prutah-antonius-felix-depicting-two-shields-and-javelins-and-palm-tree-54-60-ce>
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