

## **Landmarks in Hasmoneans Minting Authority**

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### **Hasmonean coins**

Except for one coin, all Hasmonean-Maccabees coins bear the name of rulers but are not dated. This article will offer dates for the appearance of these coins according to the type they bear and the sparse sources we have.

Four Hebrew names appear on the Hasmonean coins: the high priest Yehohanan, the high priest Judah, King Yehonatan, the high priest Yehonatan and the high priest Mattathias. The Greek name Alexander appears on the coins alongside the name Yehonatan and the name Antigonos alongside Mattathias.

The Hasmonean-Maccabees succession order is as follows: John Hyrcanus I (135–104 BCE), Judah Aristobulus I (104 BCE), Alexander Jannaeus (104–76 BCE), Salome Alexandra (76–67 BCE), Aristobulus II (67–63 BCE) and Antigonos (40–37 BCE). In the past, coins carrying the name Yehohanan were attributed to Hyrcanus II (67, 63–40 BCE) but today are attributed to Hyrcanus I.

### **Coins minted during the Persian and Ptolemaic period**

During the Persian period, in the fourth century BCE, in the context of the autonomy given to Jews in Judea, the Persian governance authorized the *Peḥa* of Judea to mint small silver coins at the values of obol (0.7 g), half obol and quarter obol. Coins were minted bearing on one side the Jewish lily flower and on the other side a falcon with its wings spread and the inscription "YHD" or the image of the Persian king, the sovereign ruler with a crown. The type with the lily flower will be used as a reference point compared to other Hasmonean coins.

Several years ago, a type of small coin was found at Bet Z̄ur, south of Jerusalem from the same period. Both sides of the coin carried the type of an owl and the inscription Yehohanan the priest. This inscription attests that the high priest in Jerusalem had the authority to mint small coins.

Alexander the Great conquered Israel in the year 332 BCE. Following his death and the end of his the rule of his successors (the diadochoi), local minting changed. Under Ptolemaic rule, Egypt ruled vast areas including Judea. King Ptolemy II Philadelphus (286–245 BCE) reaffirmed the permission of Judea's leaders to mint small coins of obol denomination, similar in size to those prevalent in the Persian period carrying the inscription "YHDDH". On one side of the coin appears the head of Ptolemy I, and on the other the Ptolemaic eagle. This Jewish minting ended when Ptolemy II or III introduced bronze coins that gradually replaced the small silver coins, until they went out of circulation.

In 200 BCE, after the battle of Paneion where the Ptolemaic army was defeated, Seleucid rule based in Syria began. The Seleucids ruled at the time a great empire which included most of Mesopotamia, Asia Minor and parts of India. Their kingdom consisted of many countries including Judea.

With the rise of Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), fierce struggles between bearers of the Jewish culture to bearers of the Hellenistic culture took place. In 168 BCE, Jerusalem was conquered by Antiochus IV, who took control of the holy temple in Jerusalem and robbed its treasures. Adjacent to it he erected the Akra fortress where he stationed a garrison.

### **Jewish minting during the Hasmonean period**

A group of priests from Modi'in rebelled against Seleucid rule and brought about the liberation of Jerusalem. The Maccabean family of the house of Hasmonaeus became the new rulers of Judea. The sons were appointed and served as high priests and fostered connections with Rome. In 141 BCE Simon Maccabaeus conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the Akra. Following that move which signifies a turning point in the history of Jerusalem, Judea became temporarily independent and Seleucid military presence in Jerusalem ended.

### **Historical background**

Yosef Ben Matityahu, alias Flavius Josephus, describes in *The Antiquities of Jews* the events in the following order. Simon conquered Jaffa and Gezer which were then under the rule of the Seleucids and was later murdered along with his family. Yehohanan Hyrcanus survived and was appointed high priest in 135 BCE. Antiochus VII came to Judea and lay siege on Jerusalem. At the time of the siege, Hyrcanus offered Antiochus a treaty due to the *sukkot* holiday. Antiochus consented and the treaty was signed. As a gesture of good faith, Antiochus presented an ox as sacrifice to the temple.

Josephus refers to the Seleucid siege stage of Jerusalem and stated in his book that "it was the moderation of Antiochus which captured the heart of Hyrcanus". Hyrcanus sent messengers to Antiochus and the latter informed him that the besieged should surrender their weapons and pay a tax for Jaffa and Gezer which were conquered by Simon.<sup>1</sup>

In actuality, Antiochus received 300 silver talents out of the agreed 500. In addition, he received hostages from the Hyrcanus family that served as an alternative to his demand to place a garrison in Jerusalem or he may have wanted to receive them in order to settle them in fringe areas of the kingdom. Since Simon, Hyrcanus's father, destroyed the Akra fortress to the ground and banished the garrison that was stationed there, no garrison was present in the period before the siege of Antiochus or after it, in light of the agreement between Hyrcanus and Antiochus to entrust hostages as an alternative to a garrison.

Subsequently Antiochus removed the siege from Jerusalem in 132 BCE, and Hyrcanus signed the favorable treaty with Antiochus. This took place in 131 BCE. It is also known that the long siege Antiochus placed upon Jerusalem ended through Roman mediation.

According to the same source, Antiochus destroyed Jerusalem's walls, perhaps partially. Josephus writes "...and destroyed the city walls completely" (*Antiquities* 13.248). However,

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<sup>1</sup> According to Josephus "Jaffa and the ports, and Gezer and Pegai and all other cities and provinces that Antiochus took (from them) during the war not under the (Roman) senate shall be returned (to them)". This indicates that (a) Antiochus took from Hyrcanus Jaffa and Gezer and Hyrcanus was required to pay later on, a tax for the control of these cities from the time of their conquering by Simon until the time of their conquering by Antiochus. (b) This conquering activity was done by Antiochus against the senate's decision (*antiquities* 13.261).

from Josephus's description it is clear that "brought him into the city and supplied his army plentifully and friendly" (it does not state "and Antiochus entered the city" because that would imply that the city had no walls). Jerusalem did not turn into an unfortified city. It may well be that Antiochus started destroying sections of the wall in the north of the city during the siege.

According to most researchers' opinions, Antiochus VII Sidetes placed a hard and continuous siege on Jerusalem which ended in a forceful submission agreement. It is my opinion that the researchers' approach to the data brought by Josephus source is severe, although the continuous siege of Antiochus on Jerusalem demonstrated repeated flexibility and willingness towards Hyrcanus, a line which I will follow in this article.

### **Research on the authority granted to Simon to mint coins**

According to the book of Maccabees 1.13, the high priest Simon received in 143 BCE a missive from Demetrius II who sought the Jewish support in the bloody disputes taking place in the Seleucid courtyard and weakened the kingdom. The missive comprised an offer of autonomy to Judea and tax benefits. The instability in the Seleucid courtyard continued into the reign of Antiochus VII Sidetes (138–129 BCE), and the breakthrough in minting Jewish coins occurred with the missive of Antiochus to Simon which permitted him to mint coins. In a missive from 139 BCE addressed to Simon, high priest and Ethnarch to the Jewish nation, it was written "and I let you make your own coin, a coin in your country".

The authority to mint coins was not consummated in Simon's days but during the reign of his son and Yehohanan Hyrcanus I. In any case, the permission given by Antiochus to Simon was a monetary turning point.

Finally, the statement of minting right attests to a monetary and political change in Judea. But in actuality, at the same time they continued using the same standard Seleucid coins that were prevalent at the time.

In early numismatic research, coins that carried the name Simon were attributed to Simon the Hasmonean, as evidence to this authority. Nowadays we know that these coins were minted by Simon bar Kokhba that led the revolt against the Roman empire in Hadrian's time (132–135 CE). It is not known why Simon did not take advantage of the minting authority given to him by Antiochus. It may be for technical reasons such as lack of resources and knowledge, or because of other reasons such as a difference of opinion between Simon and Antiochus concerning the type appearing on the coin. It is possible that Antiochus demanded that the coins bear the Seleucid kings' image and other pagan symbols that were at odds with the Jewish law.

The majority of researchers view the permission granted to the high priest Simon as an exclusive permission that expired with his death. Some claim, by interpreting the written sources, that after a while, Antiochus withdrew his consent to Simon and consequently this minting authorization expired. According to the missive, Simon did not receive this authorization as a leader personally, but in his role as high priest or ethnarch, as the missive states: "King Antiochus sends greetings to Simon, the priest and ethnarch and to the Jewish

nation".<sup>2</sup> The high priest and ethnarch is the authority and the Jewish nation is his intended population for the use of the coins minted. Further on in the missive a reference to the substance of the authorization appears: minting coins in Simon's country. Thus, when the high priest passes away, the next priest henceforth continues to have the authority. On the other hand, this authority does not authorize minting for other nations, for example, to the Syrians, Greeks and other foreigners which lived in Israel, only to the Jewish nation.

In order to cancel the authorization Antiochus, or any of the kings who followed him, needed to send a missive to the high priest that was ruling at that time and cancel unequivocally the minting right. According to the sources, no such document was found.

## **The second phase of minting Hasmonean coins**

### **Minting the coin with the lily flower and the anchor in Jerusalem**

The coin under discussion is a bronze *pruta*. On one side appears an anchor with the Greek inscription "by king Antiochus the benefactor" and one of two dates: 181 or 182 of the Seleucid era. On the other side appears a lily.

Research concurs that it was minted in Jerusalem.



Assuming that the Seleucid troops were stationed somewhere near Jerusalem, the question remains whether the Seleucids minted this coin in Antiochus's name for internal use of the troops? Most likely not. This bronze coin was mainly produced for regular use in the Jewish markets, which were under the supervision of Hyrcanus and obviously not for use by the Seleucid troops. It is more than likely that these soldiers mainly used Seleucid coins that were common and marketable in the area, and were used in the Jewish markets as well.

Thus, the likeliest solution is that the coins with the lily flower and the anchor symbols were minted by Hyrcanus I, under the sponsorship or agreement of Antiochus for Jewish use in autonomous Judea at the time.

Hyrcanus was the first of the Hasmoneans to renew the minting of Jewish coins. He was a practical and decisive leader and a good strategist. He knew how to read the political map well and plan his moves carefully. His success stemmed from working in stages and suited himself to the changing circumstances. He used the political situation in the area for his advantage, while maneuvering his reactions in relation to the Seleucid court which suffered

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<sup>2</sup> It is possible that the Jewish nation is meant by "hever ha-yehudim" (חבר היהודים), loosely translated as 'the congregation of the Jews' which appears on the coins of Hyrcanus I.

continuous struggles that weakened it. Hyrcanus succeeded in a number of occasions to motivate the Romans, that had interests in the region, and they always interfered in his favor in a number of opportunities in their interactions with Antiochus Sidetes. It seems that in the end Hyrcanus arrived at a compromise with Antiochus Sidetes, who suited himself with the changing situation and as a result Hyrcanus received the minting authorization. Evidence to that is seen in the first coin minted in Jerusalem bearing the Jewish lily sign.

According to the opinion of some of the researchers, this coin was minted by Hyrcanus I, under the patronage of Antiochus VII Sidetes. On one side of the coin appears the royal Seleucid symbol, the anchor. This symbol does not provoke the Jewish resentment. This is the side where the sovereign's portrait is usually found. Since the minting of the obols in Judea in the Persian period and the beginning of the Hellenistic period when Jews did not avoid minting figures on their coins changed, the outlook apparently changed, and from the time of the Hasmoneans until Philip son of Herod which used his profile on coins, no Jewish ruler used his image on coins.

Portraits on coins have a Jewish religious aspect pertaining to the second commandment "thou shall not worship any statue or image". However, although no Jewish coins bear the portrait of a Jewish king, the same small silver coins from the Persian and Ptolemaic period who bear the inscription "YHD" and "YHDAH", bear the heads of Ptolemy and the Persian kings. It seems that at the time this did not affront the Jews, although minted in Judea after the leadership time of Ezra and Nehemia, a time when the Jewish leaders were strict about following the Torah commandments.



King profiles on Jewish coins. The coin on the right bears the inscription "YHD" from the Persian period and the coin on its left bears the inscription "YHDAH" from the Ptolemaic period.

The coin mentioned above resembles in shape and standard the other Seleucid bronze coins of that time, and was used basically as a common coin by the sovereign Antiochus and his ally Hyrcanus. To support this claim we can find examples in Josephus that attest to the flexibility of Antiochus VII towards the Jews. We can therefore assume that he enhanced the rights given to Jews including the right to mint coins in Judea, in order to win Hyrcanus as an ally to aid him in other areas. Examples demonstrating the flexible approach of Antiochus include the end of the siege on Jerusalem for *Sukkot* (133 BCE) and presenting sacrifices to the temple headed by the high priest Hyrcanus I, as a personal contribution.

This is the likely time and opportunity that Hyrcanus could have chosen to initiate the minting of coins, which incorporate the Jewish autonomous symbol and the royal Seleucid anchor in Jerusalem. Fortunately, the coins are dated. The coins show dates which refer to the year: 131/132 and 130/131 BCE, following the siege of Antiochus as mentioned in the source of Josephus.

The minting authorization passed on through inheritance given to the high priest who was also ethnarch, is alike in substance to the authorization given by Antiochus IV to a large number of cities, especially in Phoenicia, to mint civic bronze coins. The instability of the

Seleucid kingdom gave rise to the fact that many countries and cities under its patronage used the opportunity and demanded of the Seleucids to receive a large measure of independence. This political trend was a good reason for Hyrcanus, who was aware of the trend, to mint the autonomous coins. This minting brought Hyrcanus a good income from distributing the coins in Judea.

There are different interpretations of the meaning of the lily on the coin. The first is that it is the sign of the high priesthood, a sign which appeared correspondingly on several of the temples facilities in Jerusalem. The second is that it is the symbol of Jerusalem in the Persian and Hellenistic periods. The third is that the symbol signifies the royal house in Judea. My opinion is that the lily on this coin was used in the time of Hyrcanus as the symbol of autonomy or as a symbol of the high priesthood, to counter the other side of the coin, on which appeared the royal Seleucid anchor and the Seleucid inscription of the sovereign Antiochus.<sup>3</sup>

This method of semi autonomous minting which is characterized by one side bearing the autonomous symbol and the other the sovereign symbol, was acceptable in the Persian period. There are a number of examples on coins minted in Judea that testify to this. For example, on one side of the silver coin with the inscription "YHD", appears a falcon with his wings spread and an inscription in Aramaic as one of the autonomous symbols. On the other side is the Persian king's image with a crown as a sovereign symbol of the Persian rule or the lily flower. In my opinion it may be that in the Persian period the combination of the falcon with the inscription "YHD" in Hebrew signifies one of the autonomous symbols in Judea alongside the lily, just as at Sidon one of the symbols is a warship and another autonomous symbol is the walls and towers of Sidon which appear on one of the coins.

Support to this claim can be found in Phoenicia, where some Sidonian coins show the same method of a combination of symbols, where on one side appears the Persian sovereign symbol, such as the image of the Persian king battling a lion, while on the other side appears the autonomous symbol of Sidon, such as a ship with oars.



Sidonian obol silver coin from the Persian period. On one side the Persian king with a lion as a sovereign symbol. On the other side a Sidonian war ship as a Sidonian autonomous symbol.

It may well be that the use of the lily flower or the falcon with its wings spread and the inscription "YHD" in Aramaic, that appeared on the Jewish obols during the Persian period, signify a symbol or local symbols. The symbol was reused according to the same method by Antiochus VII Sidetes and as evidence to our discussion, the lily flower appears on one side

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<sup>3</sup> the coin minted by Alexander Jannaeus bearing the same symbols, the symbol of the lily flower and the symbol of the priesthood and on the other side the royal anchor adopted by the Seleucids as the royal symbol.

of the bronze *pruta*. This coin does not bear any mention of the leader of the autonomy, the high priest Yehohanan.

### **The third phase of the upgrading process of the minting authority**

According to the *Antiquities of the Jews*, Hyrcanus I and Antiochus VII collaborated in several other areas and even made a treaty. Josephus states that Yehohanan Hyrcanus was the first Jew to ever establish an army of mercenaries. He signed a treaty with Antiochus, brought him into the city and supplied his army plentifully (*Antiquities* 13.249). It must be noted that "brought him into the city" (Jerusalem) implies that Jerusalem was surrounded by walls.

This was the opportunity that Hyrcanus was waiting for, and in return for the treaty he made, he demanded the minting authority. The new coin Hyrcanus minted bears the Greek letter Alpha, the first letter of Antiochus's name. The rest of the details minted on the coin attest to an almost full political independence of the Jewish ruler in Judea Hyrcanus, amongst which are an inscription in ancient Hebrew, a pomegranate and more.

In the year 130 BCE, while Antiochus was at war with the Parthians, Hyrcanus joined him with his soldiers. "after defeating the... Parthian general, remained there (Antiochus) two days at the request of Hyrcanus the Jew, because of one holiday – *Shavuot*, a holiday that the religious law would not permit travelling". Josephus quotes Nicolaus of Damascus as a source, "Antiochus placed a victory memorial on the Locos river, after defeating the Parthian general and stayed there for two days at the request of Hyrcanus the Jew". These descriptions demonstrate that the Seleucid ruler did not exact his authority and was considerate of the religious needs of Hyrcanus. This is the most suitable and likely time that Hyrcanus I would choose to mint the coins with the Greek letter Alpha.

Thus, the joint war period of Antiochus and Hyrcanus against the Parthians was a suitable time to end the minting of the coin with the lily and anchor, common to Hyrcanus and Antiochus and a fitting time to start minting new autonomous coins by Hyrcanus. This minting is characterized by at least three types of coins bearing the letter Alpha.

One of the types Hyrcanus minted is at the value of half "Pruta" made of bronze, that looks similar in size to the small coin at the value of obol used in Judea during the Persian period, and was minted by Yehohanan the high priest at the time. It is not certain, but it seems there is a continuing minting tradition, where minters in the Seleucid period adopt and use a combination of elements from Persian period types like the lily and the vertical ancient Hebrew inscription, "Yoḥanan the priest" from the Persian period. The types appear on coins minted by two high priests named Yoḥanan. It is an interesting coincidence especially since the two priests named Yoḥanan first minted a coin bearing their name. Greek inscription on

Hyrcanus/Antiochus coin also has inscription arranged in the same way.

This tiny silver coin were rare and may have been used in the Persian period as a donation to the Temple and it was mandatory to donate pure silver in addition to the use of the coin in regular business dealings.

The half *pruta* coin minted by Hyrcanus bears on one side the lily flower type and alongside it, in my opinion the Greek letter Alpha. Also in my opinion, alongside the lily flower appears

the letter Lambda. Some scholars think the monogram represents Alpha and pi, others opinion it looks like Delta. The monogram is a device of a name used as an identifying mark of a ruler and in this case I suggest the name of the die engraver or the minter. Half pruta it may have been used in the Hasmonean period for the changers near the Temple because of the different rates of foreign currencies for donation by the pilgrims.

On the other side of the coins appears a palm branch and the vertical ancient Hebrew inscription "high priest Yehohanan head of *Hever* of the Jews" which is divided into four columns. By comparison to the small silver coin from the Persian period with the vertical ancient Hebrew inscription divided into two columns "Yohanan / the priest".



Half a pruta coin by Hyrcanus bearing a lily, a willow and the inscription "the high priest Yehohanan head of the *Hever* of the Jews".

Another type of bronze coin with the Greek letter Alpha exists. On the one side appear two parallel horns of plenty and on the other a helmet. The helmet may indicate the military activities of Hyrcanus' army that joined forces with Antiochus' army in his war against the Parthians. It must be noted that Antiochus VII minted a similar type at Ascalon.

On the third type of coins minted by Hyrcanus appear on one side two horns of plenty and on the other side the Hebrew inscription "the high priest Yehohanan and *Hever* of the Jews", above it appears the letter Alpha. According to some researchers, the two horns of plenty are influenced by the early Seleucid types. A similar type was minted in Gaza in the year 143/2 BCE with parallel horns of plenty in the days of Demetrius II (146–138 BCE). The type attests that the Hasmoneans adopted their new coin types from the Seleucid types which were common in the marketplace. Between the horns of plenty appears a pomegranate that is often used as a Jewish symbol. On the other side of the coin appears the letter Alpha, the initial of Antiochus' name.



Hyrcanus' coin with the Greek letter Alpha above the Hebrew inscription

The appearance of the abbreviation of Antiochus's name has two meanings: one, a royal Seleucid mark, the second, a confirmation that Hyrcanus adopted the weight standard used by the Seleucid coin and the third, it may be that the letter Alpha signifies that the coin is a legal tender in other Seleucid areas not under Hyrcanus's control, contrary to the original authorization, which gave Simon the authority to mint coins for the Jewish people only.



### **Additional scholarly opinions on the meaning of the letter Alpha and the coins of Hyrcanus**

Some researchers tend to attribute the coin with the letter Alpha to a late period in Hyrcanus's rule or to the rulers that followed him. According to Kindler (1985), the Greek letter Alpha on Hyrcanus's coins, is the first letter in queen Alexandra's name, who he believes minted the coins in the name of her son Hyrcanus II. Other scholars attribute this coin to Antipater the Idumaeen or Antiochus VIII Grypus (121–96 BCE) and to Aristobulus I, son of Hyrcanus I. Another opinion is that the coin was minted in the first year (year A) of Hyrcanus's I reign (135 BCE). The authors' suggestion to attribute the letter to the first letter in Antiochus VII Sidetes name was already made by De Saulcy (1854), who suggested that it was an abridgment of Alexander Zebina's name (128–123 BCE). The number of coins bearing the letter Alpha, revealed in excavations is far smaller than those without.

According to historic evidence, it seems preferable to attribute the minting of these coins to the end of Antiochus VII's reign and no later than that, since Hyrcanus had the right opportunity. According to scholars who claim that Hyrcanus minted only at the end of his days, his subjects used during a considerable portion of his reign Seleucid coins only.

### **The fourth phase: Hyrcanus' coins after the death of Antiochus VII**

After the death of Antiochus VII in 129 BCE, Hyrcanus dropped the letter Alpha from above the Hebrew inscription in his coins. The Hebrew inscription "high priest Yehohanan and hever of the Jews" remained. This situation attests to total independence. According to Josephus in "Antiquities of the Jews", Hyrcanus's conquests to expand his kingdom began immediately after the death of Antiochus. Given Hyrcanus's position and his independence from the Seleucid ruler Demetrius II, the coins with the letter Alpha can be attributed to the year 130 BCE and the coins without the letter Alpha to the year 129 BCE, the year Hyrcanus set out conquering Israel or to the year after that, 128 BCE.



Coin of Hyrcanus without the letter Alpha above the Hebrew inscription

A small portion of Hyrcanus's coins that bear the inscription "head of Hever of the Jews" seem to have been minted contemporaneously with the coins without the letter Alpha. "head of Hever of the Jews" might mean the head of the Jewish community, the ethnarch, a title Hyrcanus apparently inherited from his father or that "Hever of the Jews", was an institution headed by the high priest.

According to the new types of coins Hyrcanus I minted, his political status improved, evidenced by the fact that his new coins do not include Seleucid sovereign markers. Therefore, this marker can be taken to indicate total political independence that began in his days and continued through his heirs' days.

Demetrius II (Nicator), that rose to power in 129 BCE, indirectly brought about the foundation of Hyrcanus I's state, since according to Josephus "Demetrius the king that longed to go to war with Hyrcanus found no time or opportune moment to do so since the Syrians and soldiers disliked him...". For evidence that Hyrcanus could not expand his border and reinstate cities that were once under his rule, we are dependent on the testimony of Josephus in "Antiquities of the Jews" that when he heard about the death of Antiochus and immediately went to war against the cities in Syria, because he believed he would find them empty of warriors and did conquer Madaba. Six months later he conquered Misgav and its areas and in addition Nablus and Gerizim. Hyrcanus also conquered Adora and Maresha, the cities of Edom and vanquished all the Edomites".

A vassal king does not freely engage in conquests without the intervention of the sovereign. The evidence concerning Hyrcanus's conquests attest to his standing as an independent ruler with all that implies in Judea. Antiochus's heirs did not have the power to go to war against the state of Judea and this period is characterized by constant struggles between the heirs to the Seleucid throne. This claim has support in the source of Josephus "Antiquities of the Jews": "for after the death of Antiochus, he rebelled against the Macedonians and did not supply them with anything anymore, both as a subject or a friend". Hyrcanus became an independent sovereign in the territory in his hands and completely independent of any Seleucid ruler. At the time we can see signs of independence in the coins minted of other cities. For example, Aradus minted coins in 137 BCE and 'Akko-Ptolemais began minting civic coins again in 132 BCE. Tyre has been minting coins since 125 BCE, Ascalon since 104 BCE and Gaza since 103 BCE.

According to the testimony of Josephus, Hyrcanus sent his troops to renew the covenant with Rome in 125 BCE. According to the letter of the Roman senate, the messengers were sent by the "Jewish people". It might be, in some researchers opinion, that the term "Jewish people" or all the Jews, suits the Hebrew term "Hever of the Jews", that first appears on the coins of Hyrcanus, bearing the letter Alpha and it might mean, according to some researchers that this is an important institute headed by the high priest.

Assuming the "Hever of the Jews" means all the Jews, then this framework<sup>4</sup>, according to Hyrcanus's coins came before 125 BCE. It is additional supporting evidence that the coin bearing the letter Alpha was minted in 130 BCE, and the coin without the letter Alpha was minted in 128 BCE, after the death of Antiochus Sidetes in 129 BCE, when Hyrcanus became an independent sovereign.

Following the murder of Demetrius II, Alexander II Zebina (127–122 BCE) rose to power, and his days brought contentment to Hyrcanus as well. Josephus writes "then Alexandros received the throne and made a covenant with Hyrcanus the high priest".

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<sup>4</sup> Hever of the Jews: it may mean *politeuma* = community = group of people with a shared origin, enjoying certain political privileges by the regime, as a sort of autonomy. Hyrcanus enjoyed widespread political privileges. As for the term "head of Hever of the Jews" on the coin, is it by chance that the use of the term Jewish body similar to *politeuma*, a sort of community or audience headed by a sort of Ethnarch or that this body is an organized body like the Sanhedrin, or a different civil body, sort of government, and Hyrcanus was at the head of it representing it to the Seleucid ruler.

It must be assumed that after the death of Alexander Zebina in 122 BCE Hyrcanus continued to mint coins of the last types.

Hyrcanus used the struggle in the Seleucid court and went on a successful campaign, while continuing to mint independent coins. According to some scholars, including Uriel Rappaport, Hyrcanus's conquests divide in two: the first conquests between 129–113 BCE and the others in the years 113–110 BCE. Dan Barag, claims that it is possible that Hyrcanus went on conquests later on in his regime. In 111 BCE he began the conquest of Idumea and Nablus and Mt. Gerizim. The city of Samaria might have fallen into his hands in 110 BCE. Hyrcanus turned to conquering Bet-She'an and parts of the Jezreel valley. By the time of his death in 104 BCE he may have expanded his influence to the lower Galilee and possibly Gamla.

At this time Hyrcanus renewed his connections with the Ptolemaic house and his political standing strengthened. However, according to the testimony of Josephus in Antiquities 14.249, Antiochus IX (Cyzicenus) retained the forts and ports he conquered from the Jews. He also kept troops in Jaffa, which means that Hyrcanus now had less territories in the region between 113–112 BCE and at the same time Antiochus IX minted coins in Ascalon. According to Josephus, the Romans were instrumental in Cyzicenus's withdrawal from the coast which led to the end of this minting there.

### **Coins of Hyrcanus coins discovered in hoards and excavations**

Hoard of coins discovered in archaeological excavations allow the dating of coins that are cannot be dated according to the strata they are found in. If a hoard only contains some of the coin types of Hyrcanus for example, then it can be interpreted in one of the following ways: (a) rarity of the type (b) a certain type has not yet been introduced.

The following are a number of sites where coins of Hyrcanus I were found:

- a) In the Galilee a treasure of 700 coins was discovered, most are Hasmonean *prutas* and some are Seleucid coins. All of the Hasmonean coins bear the name Yehohanan. All of the other coins are not dated later than 110 BCE. According to this finding all the coins are attributed to Hyrcanus I. Coins of Hyrcanus were discovered at dozens of sites in the Galilee. These findings allow us to map the distribution of Hyrcanus I coins and deduce the area of his reign, his conquered areas and/or influence. The findings attest to the scope of minting by Hyrcanus I coins and/or the use of these coins in circulation at later times.
- b) The excavations of Mt. Gerizim. According to historical and archaeological evidence, the Samaritan temple was destroyed between 113–111 BCE. The majority of the coins discovered at the excavations are of the last Seleucid kings until 113 BCE. A substantial amount are Hyrcanus I coins, corroborating Josephus' statement that immediately after the death of Antiochus, Hyrcanus conquered Nablus and Mt. Gerizim.

- c) In a hoard in Bet-Zur, 16 Yohanan coins were discovered, two of Alexander Jannaeus and 183 Seleucid coins. The latest of these are of the Cleopatra Thea and Antiochus VIII, between 125–121 BCE. The spectrum of dates between the early coins and the last coins is over 25 years and indicates that coins of dead and foreign rulers were still valid and continued in circulation, sometimes dozens of years. Future study of this finding on the composition of the types and state of preservation could provide evidence on the range of Hyrcanus' territories.
- d) The hoard of Bet Sahur near Bethlehem produced 63 coins by Hyrcanus I, very well preserved and hardly used. The hoard included 15 coins with the letter Alpha, 15 coins of the same type without the letter Alpha and ten coins with the inscription "... head of Hever of the Jews ". The remainder was of the "Hever of the Jews" type. The hoard did not include other Hasmonean coins and basically attests to the fact that they are of Hyrcanus I and not Hyrcanus II.
- e) The excavations at Gezer revealed ten Seleucid coins dated 133–132 BCE. No Hasmonean coins were discovered despite a rumor that Macalister found coins of Yehohanan. It may well mean that Gezer was abandoned since the days of Hyrcanus I.
- f) In Samaria 97 coins of Alexander Jannaeus and Mattatya Antigonus were found. No coins of Hyrcanus were found. The site was destroyed by Hyrcanus towards the end of his reign.
- g) At Qumran six coins of Hyrcanus and 143 Jannaeus coins were discovered.

### **The fifth and last phase. Minting by the heirs of Hyrcanus.**

Hyrcanus I ruled 31 years, established the kingdom and expanded the borders beyond Judea. The son of Hyrcanus I, Aristobulus, adopted one of the types of coins minted by his father and minted coins with the inscription "High Priest Yehuda and Hever of the Jews". Judah was the first Hasmonean crowned as king but the royal title was not mentioned on his few coins.



A coin of Judah Aristobulus

The fifth and last phase of upgrading the minting right began in the time of Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 BCE). The minting of the independent coins continued and included in the inscriptions the title high priest on them. Later Alexander began using the title 'king' on other types. The development of minting coins and possibly the addition in coin types began during his conquests that expanded significantly the Hasmonean kingdom's borders. Alexander Jannaeus campaigned much and took over a number of provinces in Eretz-Israel that were populated by pagans. The coins he minted were adapted to the needs of the population conquered by him.

Alexander made substantial changes to minting. In addition to the types of his predecessors, he minted royal coins, including bilingual coins. The inscriptions appear in ancient Hebrew script<sup>5</sup>, or Aramaic and Greek, the common languages throughout the kingdom. New types appear on the bilingual coins of Alexander Jannaeus. The inscriptions state the titles, the anchor was used on his coins as a royal sign. A small series of lead coins were minted as well, most with the inscription "of Alexander the king" in Greek. It must be noted that two bullae were discovered bearing the inscription "Yehonatan the king" and "Yehonatan the high priest Jerusalem".



The royal coin of king Alexander Jannaeus. The inscription in Greek "of King Alexander".



Alexander Jannaeus coin. An anchor type with the Greek inscription "of king Alexander". A star with the Hebrew inscription "King Yehonatan"



Coin of Jannaeus which was overstruck twice bearing the name YNTN.(Yehonathan)



Coin of Jannaeus that have been overstruck  
Upon cornucopia model

### Summary of the development phases in minting Hasmonean coins

Phase A – letter of authorization to mint coins given by Antiochus VII to Simon.

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<sup>5</sup> The ancient Hebrew script was not familiar to the Jews of this period, and most of them could not even read it. The writing in use at the time was Aramaic. Use of the ancient writing was acceptable for ritual purposes (scriptures) and for political purposes (coins), in order to retain the Jewish affinity to the kingship of the First Temple. This Hebrew script was in use already during the Persian period on the "YHD" coins.

Phase B – minting a common coin to Antiochus VII and Hyrcanus, bearing the Jewish lily and the Seleucid anchor.

Phase C – a coin with the inscription "high priest Yehohanan and Hever of the Jews" in Hebrew. Above the inscription the letter Alpha abbreviating Antiochus's name.

Phase D – removing the letter Alpha as a sign of independent Jewish minting.

Phase E – royal bilingual minting by Alexander Jannaeus in three languages.

One type of Alexander Jannaeus bears the Lily flower and the royal anchor. This coin is especially interesting and has two main variants: one bears an overstrike on the side with the lily with the inscription "King Yehonatan". The second, more common, bearing the same types comprising of the lily flower and the royal anchor without an overstrike. The types of coins with the types mentioned here, are very like the joint coins of Antiochus VII and Hyrcanus which also include the lily and the royal anchor, that were minted in Jerusalem, as demonstrated by Hoover in 1994.

A royal coin by Alexander Jannaeus, on the one side the lily flower and the Hebrew inscription "king Yehonatan" and on the other side the royal anchor and the Greek inscription "of king Alexander"

We came a full circle that began in minting the "YHD" coins, comprising of the Jewish lily as a symbol of a semi autonomous minting in the Persian period. Later on, a renewed semi-autonomous minting during the Hellenistic period included the Jewish lily flower and the royal Seleucid anchor during the time of Antiochus Sidetes. The development in coins continued under Hyrcanus and culminated in the royal types in the days of Alexander Jannaeus: the coin bearing the lily flower and the royal anchor but this time minted by the Hasmonean king Yehonatan/Alexander.

With the minting of this coin, all possible minting rights were exercised by the Hasmonean rulers.

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