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Sixteen Bar Kokhba Coins from Roman Sites in Europe

HANAN ESHEL, BOAZ ZISSU, AND GABRIEL BARKAY

IN order to suppress the Bar Kokhba Revolt, Hadrian brought massive Roman forces to Judea from Britannia, western Europe, and the eastern European provinces.¹

As early as 1960, Alexander Scheiber noted that a Bar Kokhba coin had been found in Brigetio (Szöny, Hungary) in 1940. He suggested that it might have been brought there from Judea as a souvenir.²

In this article we discuss sixteen Bar Kokhba coins discovered in three different provinces.³ One was found in Britannia; a dozen were found in Pannonia (one in Vindobona, nine in Carnuntum, and two in Brigetio); and three were found in Dacia, in three different Roman camps: Ilişua, Pojejena, and Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa.⁴

All the Bar Kokhba coins discussed in this article are made of bronze.

¹ H. Eshel: The Bar Kochba Revolt, 132–135, in S. T. Katz (ed.): *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 4: *The Late Roman Period*, Cambridge, 2006, pp. 122–125. For the minimalist position, see M. Mor: The Roman Legions and the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–135 AD), in H. Vetter and M. Kandler (eds.): *Akten des 14 Internationalen Limeskongresses 1986 in Carnuntum*, Vienna, 1990, vol. 1, pp. 163–175. For the maximalist view, see W. Eck: The Bar Kokhba Revolt: The Roman Point of View, *JRS* 89 (1999), pp. 76–89. We thank Prof. Werner Eck for reading an earlier version of this article and offering valuable remarks.

² See A. Scheiber: The Earliest Ties between Hungary and Israel, in S. Ettinger, S. Baron, B. Dinur, and I. Halpern (ed.), *Yitzhak F. Baer Jubilee Volume*, Jerusalem, 1960, pp. 99–101 (Hebrew); on a second Bar Kokhba coin from Brigetio, see the discussion below. On a similar assumption about Spain, see A. Kindler: Numismatic Evidence of a Possible Early Jewish Settlement in North-Eastern Spain, *Tešuda* 12 (1966), pp. 191–198.

³ The discussion in this article is organized from west to east. We predict that coins from the Bar Kokhba Revolt will be discovered in Moesia (Bulgaria) in the future. Two of the three legions situated in Moesia Inferior (Legio V Macedonica and Legio XI Claudia) are mentioned in the Beitar inscription; see C. Clermont-Ganneau: *Archaeological Researches in Palestine during the Years 1873–1874*, London, 1899, p. 465 (CIL III 14155). On the importance of the legionary units and *auxilia* sent from Moesia to Judea during the Bar Kokhba war, see S. Applebaum: *Prolegomena to the Study of the Second Jewish Revolt (A.D. 132–135)*, Oxford, 1976, p. 45. We thank Prof. Rumen Ivanov, Prof. Peti Donevski, and Ms. Lyuba Boyanin for their assistance on the archaeology of Bulgaria.

⁴ The information about the coins from Britannia and Pannonia is taken from L. Berger: *The Kaiseraugst Menorah Ring: Jewish Evidence from the Roman Period in the Northern Provinces* [Forschungen in Augst, no. 36], Römerstadt Augusta Raurica,

A. BRITANNIA

Londinium (London)

In 1913 a large bronze coin (Shim'on within a wreath/amphora) from the second year of the Bar Kokhba Revolt was found in London, near the old General Post Office site in St. Martin's-le-Grand.⁵ It was found together with other coins ranging from the reign of Claudius to the reign of Valentinian I. The area was covered by rubbish pits, and was used from the beginning of the Roman occupation until the late second or early third century. Londinium was the base of several different Roman army units.

According to Cassius Dio, Sextus Julius Severus was the governor of Britannia sent to Judea to suppress the revolt.⁶ There is no question that he brought with him some units from Britannia. Some scholars have suggested that Legio IX Hispana, which was stationed in Britannia, suffered losses in the Bar Kokhba war.⁷

In light of this, we can not connect the Bar Kokhba coin found in London to a specific Roman army unit stationed in the city during this period.⁸

B. PANNONIA

Vindobona (Vienna)

A small, bronze Bar Kokhba coin (bunch of grapes/palm tree) was found in Vienna in 1913 on the Herrengasse, a street in the First District of the city, which was part of the road system near the Roman camp. The coin was found together with 118 Roman denarii in a grave located 6 meters below the modern road. The earliest denarius is from the reign of Trajan; the latest is from the reign of Elagabalus.⁹

Switzerland, 2005, pp. 133–142. The information on the coins from Dacia was collected by Gabriel Barkay.

⁵ F. Lambert: Recent Roman Discoveries in London, *Archaeologia* 66 (1915), pp. 225–274; S. Applebaum: Were There Jews in Roman Britain? *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 17 (1950), pp. 199–200.

⁶ B. Isaac: Cassius Dio on the Revolt of Bar Kokhba, *SCI* 7 (1983/4), pp. 68–76.

⁷ E. Birley: *Roman Britain and the Roman Army: Collected Papers*, Kendal, England, 1961, pp. 27–30; for the opposite view, see M. Mor: Two Legions — The Same Fate? (The Disappearance of the Legion IX Hispana and XXII Deiotariana), *ZPE* 62 (1986), pp. 267–278.

⁸ It should be noted that a coin found at Melandra Castle, Derbyshire, was wrongly dated to the Bar Kokhba Revolt. This coin is from the Great Revolt (the “Jewish War”); see R. S. Conway: *Melandra Castle*, Manchester, 1906, pp. 97–98. The identification of it as a Bar Kokhba coin was suggested by B. V. Head of the British Museum. For the correct identification, see Applebaum (n. 5 above), p. 199.

⁹ F. Dick (ed.): *Wien*, part 9 of R. Göbl (ed.): *Die Fundmünzen der römischen Zeit in Österreich*, Vienna, 1978, p. 47, Tafel I, no. 788; G. Dembski: Die Rolle von nichtreichsrömischen Münzen im Geldumlauf Noricums und der Nachbarprovinzen,

It may be assumed that this coin was brought to Vindobona by a soldier of Legio X Gemina, which was stationed there. Three inscriptions seem to indicate that commanders from this legion served in Judea during the reign of Hadrian.¹⁰

Carnuntum (Petronell)

Nine Bar Kokhba coins were apparently found in Carnuntum, all of them made of bronze. The exact location of the find within Carnuntum is unknown. One of them is a small denomination from the second year of the revolt (bunch of grapes/palm tree). No details about the other eight coins were given.¹¹

Soon after the Roman conquest of Pannonia between 12 and 9 BCE, Carnuntum became a base for military operations led by Tiberius against the Germanic Marcomanni tribe. By 14 CE the area was patrolled by Legio XV Apollinaris. Between 35 and 40 CE this legion erected a military camp that initiated Roman settlement in Carnuntum and became one of the largest and most important Roman bases along the Danube limes. In 62 CE Legio XV Apollinaris took part in the eastern campaigns, and from 66 to 70 CE it fought in the Jewish

in C. E. King and D. G. Wigg (eds.): *Coin Finds and Coin Use in the Roman World: The Thirteenth Oxford Symposium on Coinage and Monetary History* 25.-27.3.1993, *A NATO Advanced Research Workshop* [Studien zu Fundmünzen der Antike, no. 10], Berlin, 1996, p. 122, n. 15. Dembski (ibid) and Berger (no. 4 above, p. 134) wrote that this coin is a drachm/denarius, but the photograph published by Dick shows unquestionably that it is in fact a small bronze coin. This is the only Bar Kokhba coin found in Europe as part of a hoard.

¹⁰ The three inscriptions are as follows: *CIL* VIII 6706 (*ILS* 1065) refers to Q. Lollius Urbicus, who later served as the legate of Legio X Gemina and received honors following his term of duty in Judea. *CIL* VI 1523 (*ILS* 1092), found in Rome, speaks of M. Statius Priscus, a tribune of this legion who received honors following his service in Judea. *CIL* VI 3505 refers to Sextus Attius Senecio, a tribune in Legio X Gemina who served in Judea. See A. R. Birley: *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor*, London and New York, 2000, p. 274. Menahem Mor agrees that units of this legion participated in the Bar Kokhba war; see M. Mor: *The Roman Army in Eretz-Israel in the Years 70–132*, in P. Freeman and D. Kennedy (eds.): *The Defense of the Roman and Byzantine East: Proceedings of a Colloquium Held at the University of Sheffield in April 1986*, Oxford, 1986, pp. 575–602.

¹¹ The small bronze coin is in the Carnuntum museum, located in Bad Deutsch-Altenburg, under Inv. No. 4619. See W. Hahn (ed.): *Carnuntum (Bad Deutsch-Altenburg, Stadt Hainburg)*, vol. 1 of R. Göbl (ed.): *Die Fundmünzen der römischen Zeit in Österreich, part 3: Niederösterreich*, Vienna, 1976, p. 174, no. 9876. The other eight bronze Bar Kokhba coins are mentioned by Dembski (n. 9 above), pp. 124–125. According to M. Pfisterer, none of the coins come from controlled excavations and all of them are in collections originating in Carnuntum; see M. Pfisterer: *Fremdes Geld im Römischen Carnuntum*, 8.1.14, *Syria bis Arsakiden*, in M. Alram and F. Schmidt-Dick (eds.): *Numismata Carnuntina: Forschungen und Material; Die Antiken Fundmünzen im Museum Carnuntinum*, vol. 2 of Göbl (above, this note), p. 621.

War. The legion returned to its base in 71 CE.¹² During the reign of Trajan it was replaced by Legio XIV Gemina, which remained garrisoned in Carnuntum for the rest of the Roman era. According to Applebaum, the epitaph of a soldier of Legio XIV Gemina was found in Gadara.¹³ Presumably, this soldier was wounded during the Bar Kokhba Revolt and was sent to Gadara to recover. Thus, some cohorts of this legion appear to have fought in the Bar Kokhba war.¹⁴

Brigetio (Szöny)

Two Bar Kokhba coins were found in Szöny. The first is the coin discussed by Scheiber in 1960. This coin, found in a common grave in a Roman villa, 30 m from the eastern wall of the legionary camp, is from the undated series. The second coin, dated to the second year of the revolt, is pierced, which shows that it was brought to Brigetio as a souvenir. The exact place of origin of this coin in Brigetio is unknown. Both coins are of the common type (palm tree/vine leaf).¹⁵

Brigetio was the base of Legio I Adiutrix. From a burial inscription found there, we learn of a soldier from this legion who was apparently recruited in Caesarea during the reign of Hadrian.¹⁶ There are also other clues indicating that this legion had connections with Judea.¹⁷

¹² Three *perutot* from the second year of the first Jewish revolt and one coin from year 4 were found in Carnuntum. See R. Reich: Note on Coins of the Great Jewish Revolt Found at Carnuntum in Austria, *Qadmoniot* 41 (2008), pp. 128–129 (Hebrew), and article by Reich in this volume. One *perutah* was found northeast of the northern gate (*Porta Principalis*) of the legionary camp; see Berger (n. 4 above), p. 134. The coin from year 4 was identified by W. Hahn (n. 11 above) as a coin of “Simon Maccabaeus” therefore M. Pfisterer (n. 11 above) wrote that only three coins from the first revolt were found at Carnuntum.

¹³ See Applebaum (n. 3 above), pp. 23, 58 (*CIL* III 12091).

¹⁴ On the deployment of Roman legions during political crises, see Y. Le Bohec (ed.): *Les Légions romaines sous le Haute-Empire, Actes du Congrès de Lyon (17–19 septembre 1998)*, Lyon, 2000.

¹⁵ These two coins are in the Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, Budapest, Inv. 4/1940–17; 41/1892–16. On these two coins, see A. Scheiber: *Jewish Inscriptions in Hungary, from the 3rd Century to 1686: Corpus Inscriptionum Hungariae Judaicarum*, Budapest and Leiden, 1983, pp. 62–63; K. Biro-Sey: *Coins from Identified Sites of Brigetio and the Question of Local Currency* (Regeszeti Füzetek, series 2, no. 18), Budapest, 1977, p. 47, no. 226.

¹⁶ L. Barkóczi and A. Mócsy: *Die Römischen Inschriften Ungarns (RIU)*, part 2, Budapest, 1976, pp. 164–165, no. 506. The place name Caesarea is the authors’ interpretation. The inscription reads “Caeriaensis”, and Scheiber (n. 14 above) suggested that this is Caesarea Maritima. On Roman soldiers from Pannonia fighting in Palestine during the reign of Hadrian, see M. R. Alföldi: *Beitraege zur Frage der Cistophori Kaisers Hadrian, Folia Archaeologica* 8 (1956), pp. 91–92.

¹⁷ Jodi Magness points out the similarity between the pottery assemblage found in the potters’ quarter at Kurucdomb in Brigetio and the Roman pottery of the Legio X

C. DACIA

We are aware of three Bar Kokhba coins, all of the common type (palm tree/vine leaf), found at three different Roman sites in Dacia.

Ilișua

A bronze coin from year 1 of the Bar Kokhba Revolt was found at the headquarters (*principia*) of the Roman fort of Ilișua in 1983.¹⁸ The fort — the base of Ala Tungrorum Frontoniana — was located west of Cluj (Napoca) on the northern border of Dacia. This coin is in the Bistrița Museum. Although we previously had no evidence that this auxiliary unit participated in the Bar Kokhba war,¹⁹ the discovery of a Bar Kokhba coin at this Roman base suggests that part or all of the unit was sent to Judea between 132 and 136 CE.

Pojejena

A bronze coin from year two of the Bar Kokhba Revolt was found in 1970 in the Roman settlement approximately 100 m west of the Roman fort at Pojejena (Caraș-Severin County). This fort is located west of Drobeta (Turnu-Severin), on the northern bank of the Danube.²⁰ Pojejena was the garrison of the Cohors V Gallorum. We may assume that some soldiers or the entire cohort fought in the war in Judea (132–136 CE).²¹

Fretensis in Jerusalem. See J. Magness: The Roman Legionary Pottery, in B. Arubas and H. Goldfus (eds.): *Excavations on the Site of the Jerusalem International Convention Center (Binyanei Ha'uma): A Settlement of the Late First to Second Temple Period, The Tenth Legion's Kilnworks, and a Byzantine Monastic Complex* [JRA Supplements, no. 60], Portsmouth, RI, 2005, pp. 77, 108; R. Rosenthal-Heginbottom: The Material Culture of the Roman Army, in O. Guri-Rimon (ed.): *The Great Revolt in the Galilee*, Haifa, 2008, p. 103*.

¹⁸ N. Gudea: Jews in Roman Dacia, part 2: A Jewish Coin in the Roman Fort from Ilișua (Dacia Porolissensis), *Studia-Judaica (Cluj-Napoca)* 7 (1998), pp. 199–202. The coin weighs 9.43 gr. and its diameter is 28 mm. We thank Prof. Nicolae Gudea for this information.

¹⁹ Shimon Applebaum collected the information about Roman auxiliary units that served in Hadrian's Jewish War. His list does not include this ala. See Applebaum (n. 3 above), pp. 67–68. For new data on this subject, see W. Eck: *Rom und Judaea, Fünf Vorträge zur römischen Herrschaft in Palaestina*, Tübingen, 2007, pp. 115–118; W. Eck: *Rom herausfordern: Bar Kochba im Kampf gegen das Imperium Romanum. Das Bild des Bar Kochba-Aufstandes im Spiegel der neuen epigraphischen Überlieferung*, Rome, 2007, pp. 38–40.

²⁰ N. Gudea: The Jews in the Roman Dacia, part 1: A Bronze Coin Emitted by Simon Bar Kochba Discovered at Pojejena (Caraș-Severin County), *Studia-Judaica (Cluj-Napoca)* 2 (1993), pp. 162–166. A photograph of this coin appears there on p. 166.

²¹ This unit was first based in Moesia Superior (see Gudea, n. 20 above, p. 165). Applebaum lists 24 cohorts that served in Hadrian's Jewish War; some of them came

Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa

Another bronze Bar Kokhba coin was found in 1973 in the Temple of Aesculapius and Hygea in the northern part of the city, east of the amphitheater of Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, the seat of the procurator of Roman Dacia.²² The Roman colony was founded during the reign of Trajan, 40 km from the former Dacian capital of Sarmizegetusa. The colony was the base of Legio IV Flavia. The Bar Kokhba coin may have been brought to the city by a soldier who fought in Judea and later lived at Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa.²³ The coin is from the second year of the revolt.

DISCUSSION

Because most of the coins discussed here were found in Roman military contexts, we can assume that many if not all of them were brought back to Europe by Roman soldiers after the Bar Kokhba Revolt ended in Judea. Of these sixteen coins, only one (found in Brigetio) was pierced; it seems to have been used as a pendant. The sixteen bronze Bar Kokhba coins discussed in this article were found at seven different Roman sites. Three of them were legionary camps, and two sites in Dacia were bases of auxiliary units. In the case of some legionary camps we have hints that parts of the legions stationed in these camps were sent to fight in Judea during the Bar Kokhba Revolt.

Vindobona, where one of the coins was found, was the site of the camp of Legio X Gemina. Three inscriptions may indicate that units from this legion fought in the Bar Kokhba war. Nine Bar Kokhba coins were supposedly found at Carnuntum, where Legio XIV Gemina was stationed. An epitaph from Gadara suggests that some units in this legion may have fought in the Bar Kokhba war, and the discovery of the coins supports this assumption. Two Bar Kokhba coins were found at Brigetio, the base of Legio I Adiutrix. An epitaph also found there

from Moesia (see Applebaum, n. 3 above, pp. 65–67). In light of this Bar Kokhba coin, we may add Cohort V Gallorum to the list.

²² The coin was published in C. Găzdac and S. Cociș: *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*, vol. 1 [in: C. Găzdac (ed.): *Coins from Roman Sites and Collections of Roman Coins from Romania*], Cluj-Napoca, Romania, 2004, p. 97, no. 620, pl. X. Gudea mentions this coin as well; see Gudea (n. 20 above), p. 166.

²³ There is no way to know to which unit this soldier belonged. On the history of Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, see Găzdac and Cociș (n. 22 above), pp. 7–13. On the history of Roman Dacia, see I. A. Oltean: *Dacia: Landscape, Colonization and Romanization*, Glasgow, 2007; C. Găzdac, *Monetary Circulation in Dacia and the Provinces from the Middle and Lower Danube from Trajan to Constantine I (AD 106–337)*, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, 2002, pp. 20–32 (the Bar Kokhba coin from Vindobona is mentioned on p. 500).

may prove that some units of this legion were in Judea during the reign of Hadrian.

As for the three coins found in Dacia, we have no other indications that the army units stationed at these sites fought in the Bar Kokhba war. Nevertheless, it seems likely that the two units (or parts thereof) that were stationed at the two auxiliary bases where two of the Bar Kokhba coins were found did fight in the war. The coin found at Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa may have been brought there by a veteran, although we cannot establish in which unit he served.

We hope that by publishing this article we will encourage other scholars to identify Bar Kokhba coins at other European sites.