

COINS FROM THE 1973 AND 1974 EXCAVATIONS AT HESHBON

ABRAHAM TERIAN
Andrews University

Coins from the 1973 Excavations

The third season of excavations at Heshbon¹ yielded the smallest number of coins: 35. Yet among them was found the long awaited city coin of Esbus (no. 249), minted during the reign of Elagabalus (A.D. 218-222), who elevated the city to municipal status.² This coin is undoubtedly the best specimen of its rare type.³

Other interesting finds of the same year include a *denarius* or *drachma* (no. 247) of Trajan (A.D. 98-117) and a *stater* or *tetradrachm* (no. 248) of Caracalla (A.D. 211-217). The italicized words are familiar to Bible students: the one (*dēnariion*) as the ordinary pay for a day's work⁴ or as the "tribute money,"⁵ the other (*statēr*), the equivalent of four *denarii* or a *shekel*, as for paying the temple dues for two.⁶

No Islamic coins of particular importance were found.

The 35 coins are catalogued as follows:⁷

¹ The numismatic reports on the first two seasons: 1968 and 1971, appeared in *AUSS* 9 (1971): 147-160 and 12 (1974): 35-46 respectively. These earlier reports are referred to by the years in which excavations were made.

² The coins of Esbus, like those of most other cities in the Province of Arabia, are our only source of information on this status. See Michael Aviyonah, *The Holy Land* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1966), p. 117.

³ See George F. Hill, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Arabia, Mesopotamia and Persia* (London, 1922), pp. xxxiii, 29-30, Pl. V, no. 2.

⁴ Mt 20:2, 9, 10, 13. The *denarius* was worth 18 cents, devalued to 8 cents during the reign of Nero (A.D. 54-68). Rev 6:6 may betray the inflationary prices of a later time when about a quart of wheat was sold for a *denarius*. Cf. Mk 6:37; Mt 14:21, where a *denarius* is estimated as enough to buy bread for more than 25 people.

⁵ Mt 22:19.

⁶ Mt 17:27.

⁷ Six coins are not included in this catalogue because of their very poor and hardly recognizable condition. Of these, nos. 263-267 (1517, A.6:3; 1526, D.6:59; 1538, B.2:80; 1540, A.7:61; 1541, Tomb F.16:5) are possibly Late Ro-

Phoenician

234. (1644—B.4:88, yellow-brown, crumbly, clayish soil.) Tyre, 96/5 B.C.
Similar to no. 1 in the 1968 report.

Maccabean

235. (1515—A.5:61-62, cleanup debris above bedrock.) Alexander Jannaeus, 103-76 B.C.
Similar to no. 47 in the 1971 report.
236. (1523—B.4:124, soft, moist, brown soil.) Antigonus Mattathias, 40-37 B.C.
Obv. Double cornucopias; around, from l. below and between horns:
--חבר היהוד-- / גדר / סוף / [מחיה]
Rev. Ivy wreath; around, from l. above: ΒΑCΙΑΞΩC [ANTIGONOT].

Nabataean

237. (1646—B.3:72, loose brown soil with rocks of various sizes.) Aretas IV, 9 B.C.-A.D. 40.
Similar to no. 2 in the 1968 report.
238. (1645—B.4:120E LC, over an E-W wall split into two sections by bedrock.)
Similar to the preceding.
- 239-244. (1650-1655—Tomb F.18:8, western half of the chamber to the floor, under Locus 7 and over 9.)
Similar to the preceding.
245. (1528—D.1:53, probe trench in SW corner of square.) Uncertain.
Obv. Head r., laureate; border.
Rev. Horn of plenty r.; ear of barley or wheat l., with pomegranate (?) above.⁸

Provincial Roman

246. (1524—D.6W:56B, NS wall in SW corner of square.) Judaea; Pontius Pilate, A.D. 31/2.
Similar to no. 5 in the 1968 report.
247. (1647—D.2:36, continuation of substructure from stair 32.) *Denarius* (2.93 gm.) of Trajan, ca. A.D. 105.⁹
Obv. Head of Trajan (98-117) r., laureate; around: IMP TRAIANO AVG GER DAC P M TR P; plated.
Rev. Fortuna standing l., draped, holding rudder or prow in r. hand and cornucopias in l.; around: COS VP P S P Q R OPTIMO PRINC; plated.¹⁰

man, belonging either to the reign of Valentinian II, A.D. 375-392, or to that of one of his contemporaries. No. 268 (1649, Tomb F.18:8) is worn beyond recognition.

⁸ Identical with Hill, *Arabia*, Pl. XLIX, no. 9, except that l. and r. objects on the rev. are reversed, owing perhaps to a printing error there in mirror image.

⁹ See Harold Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, vol. 3: *Nerva to Hadrian* (London, 1966), p. 30n.

¹⁰ Referring to the reigns of Nerva to Hadrian, Mattingly says, "In this period they [plated *denarii*] usually offer irregular combinations of types and

248. (1521—B.3:49, over fallen rocks and soil from E balk.) *Stater* (13.22 gm.) of Caracalla, A.D. 211-217.
 Obv. Head of Caracalla, laureate; around: ATT. KAI. ANTONINO (sic) CEB; border of dots.
 Rev. Eagle with wings spread, head r., holding wreath in beak, standing on thunderbolt; two stars in field; around: ΔΗΜΑΡΧ. Ε.Ξ. ΠΙΑΤΟC ΤΟ Γ (Gaza ?);¹¹ border of dots.
249. (1522—B.4:113, red soil with *huwwar* bits.) *Esbus* (Heshbon); Elagabalus, A.D. 218-222.
 Obv. Bust of Elagabalus r., laureate and draped; around: AVT C M AVR ANTONINVS.
 Rev. Within a temple showing four columns, central arch and flat roof to wings, city-goddess stands l., wearing turreted crown and short chiton; her r. foot rests on small figure, l. hand rests on spear or standard and r. holds another small figure; inscr. above the temple wings: A V; in exergue: ECBOVC (Aurelia Esbus).

Late Roman

250. (1539—B.5:8, reddish-brown soil with *huwwar* flecks, along N balk of square.) *Constans I*, A.D. 343-350.
 Similar to no. 60 in the 1971 report.
251. (1525—D.3:24, top layer E of and level with Locus 21.) *Valentinian II*, A.D. 375-392.
 Similar to no. 12 in the 1968 report.
252. (1529—Tomb F.16:4, Arcosolium W of shaft over Locus 5.) *Honorius*, A.D. 395-423.
 Similar to no. 15 in the 1968 report.

Byzantine

253. (1531—G.1:5, tan soil, speckled with limestone pieces.) *Follis* of Anastasius I, A.D. 498-518.
 Similar to no. 17 in the 1968 report; official code no. A instead of E.
254. (1643 D.1:43, reddish mortar.) *Follis* of Justinian I, A.D. 539/40.
 Obv. Bust of Justinian I (527-565) facing, wearing cuirass, plumed helmet with diadem from which two pearls hang on either side; r. hand holds *globus cruciger*; shield showing horseman on l. shoulder; cross in r. field; around: DNIIVSTINI ANVSPPAVC; border of dots.
 Rev. M (prominent mark of value—40 *nummi*); within: A (official code no.); above: cross; l. segment: ANNO; r. segment: X-II-I (539/40; in exergue: KYZ (Cyzius); border of dots.

other peculiarities, and may be attributed confidently to the work of the false moneyer. We can be certain that they were not issued by the regular mints. It is less certain whether there may not have been irregular local mints in the provinces issuing imitations of imperial coins which might be tolerated . . . in general circulation" (ibid., p. xix).

¹¹ See George F. Hill, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Palestine: Galilee, Samaria and Judaea* (London, 1914), p. lxxviii, though no such coin is illustrated in the plates.

Ayyūbid (1171-1342)¹²

255. (1533—G.1:9, along N balk, a wide wall.) Aḏ-Zāhir Ghāzī (Ḥalab branch), 1186-1216.
Similar to no. 68 in the 1971 report.
256. (1642—G.3:12, topsoil.) Al-'Adil, 1196-1218.
Similar to no. 28 in the 1968 report.
257. (1530—G.1:1, topsoil.) Uncertain.
Obv. Within two horizontal lines across the field: *Al-Malik*; traces of borders, the outer dotted.
Rev. Arabesque; traces of border.

Mamlūk (1250-1517)¹³

258. (1520—A.6:4, two monolithic stones [pillar column and architrave].) Uncertain.
Obv. . . . /Ḍuriba bi-Dimashk; traces of border.
Rev. Obliterated.
259. (1519—A.6:4, see no. 258.) Al-Ashraf Sha'bān, 1363-1377.
Obv. Obliterated.
Rev. *As-Sultān al-Ma[lik]/al-Ashraf Nā [sir]* . . .
260. (1518—A.6:4, see no. 258.) Aḏ-Zāhir Barḳūk, 1382-1399.
Similar to nos. 91-94 in the 1971 report; pierced.
261. (1527—D.4:1, topsoil.)
Similar to the preceding.
262. (1532—G.1:5, tan soil, speckled with limestone pieces.)
Similar to the preceding.

Except for the Ešbus coin, none of the coins hitherto found bears any of the ancient mint names of Transjordan. The Nabataean coins were presumably struck at Petra.¹⁴ The rest of the non-Islamic coins still represent an extensive geographical range of provenance. Of the Islamic coins, the *Mamlūk fulūs* (nos. 257, 259-261, like nos. 41, 45 in the 1968 report and nos. 84-86, 91-94 in the 1971 report), were struck at Damascus. The coin evidence so far does not alter the conclusions on the occupational history of Heshbon made in the 1968 report.

Coins from the 1974 Excavations

The 1974 coins, 38 in number, add two significant points to the earlier reports. The first coin in this catalogue (no. 269) is the oldest coin hitherto found at Heshbon, dating from 246-221 B.C. and belonging to the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes. Another

¹² End of the Ḥamāh branch.

¹³ Bahri Mamlūk (1250-1382), Burḏjī Mamlūk (1382-1517).

¹⁴ Hill, *Arabia*, p. xii.

coin (no. 278), besides the Ebus coins (no. 249 in the 1973 report and no. 280 in this report—the 2nd being in extremely poor and hardly recognizable condition), is the first to mention any of the ancient mints of Transjordan. It is a coin of *Arabia Provincia*, founded in A.D. 106, after the fall of the Nabataean Kingdom. The coin belongs to the reign of Hadrian (A.D. 117-138) and was probably struck at Bostra, which at first issued coins for the entire province with the province name—APABIA—on the reverse.¹⁵

As might be expected in the lower strata, fewer Islamic and more pre-Islamic coins were found in the last two years. Among some observations, one may note the ever increasing number of Nabataean coins, 20 to this date, which may warrant a special study.

An Umayyad *fil*s (no. 291), like no. 21 in the 1968 report, was struck at *Aelia* (Jerusalem). Among the Mamlūk coins, two silver *dirhamayn* and a *half-dirham* were found (nos. 296, 298, 301). The mint names on these, as on most other Islamic coins, fall outside the flan.

The 38 coins are catalogued as follows:¹⁶

Ptolemaic

269. (2050—D.3:93, a very sandy, gravelly soil layer.) Ptolemy III, 246-221 B.C.

Obv. Head of Zeus Ammon r.

Rev. Two eagles on thunderbolts, facing l.; inscr. l.: [ΠΤΟΛΑΕΜ]ΑΙΟΤ;
r.: obliterated [ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ]; between legs of eagle on l.: Θ;
border of dots.

Maccabean

270. (1730—C.5:66, hard light brown soil with plaster sherds and ash pockets.) Uncertain.

Obv. Obliterated.

Rev. Traces of two cornucopias.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. xxii-xliv, 14-44.

¹⁶ Some discernible marks made the following identifications of very poor coins possible: no. 302 (2105, C.5:81) is Late Roman, similar perhaps to no. 16 in the 1968 report; no. 303 (2057, D.4:62) is Umayyad, owing to some traces of the Moslem profession of faith in *Kufi*; nos. 304-305 (1711, A.9:10 and 2039, G.9:3) are Byzantine *folleis* showing traces of large M; no. 306 (1733, C.3:59) is worn beyond recognition.

Phoenician

271. (1768—B.4:211, blackish-brown, thick clay layer.) Tyre, A.D. 64-109.¹⁷
 Obv. Similar to no. 1 in the 1968 report.
 Rev. Palm tree with two bunches of fruit; obliterated inscr. in the field.

Nabataean

272. (1947—C.6:15, a double wall connecting Wall 2 and Wall 4.) Aretas IV, 9 B.C.—A.D. 40.
 Similar to no. 2 in the 1968 report, but 3d line of rev. inscr. off the flan.
273. (1739—D.3:67, hard surface of *huwwar*.)
 Similar to the preceding, but rev. inscr. obliterated.
274. (1805—D.3:80, predominantly brown soil layer in the eastern third of the square [NS].)
 Similar to the preceding, but 3d line of rev. inscr. off the flan.
275. (1740—D.3:57c, 2d uncontaminated layer in Locus 57, cistern.)
 Obv. Bust of Aretas Philopatris r., laureate, with long hair; border of dots.
 Rev. Two crossed cornucopias; one or two unintelligible letters between them.
276. (2101—G.10:14, brown soil, loose on top, firmer toward bottom.) Rabbel II, A.D. 71-106.
 Obv. Busts of Rabbel and Gamilath (his sister and queen) r.
 Rev. Similar to no. 3 in the 1968 report.

Provincial Roman

277. (1767—D.3:78, soil layer semi-arbitrarily separated from Locus 71.) Judaea; Pontius Pilate, A.D. 30-32.
 Similar to no. 5 in the 1968 report, but obv. inscr. and rev. obliterated.
278. (1743—D.4:41, some *huwwar* rocks, fairly loose, with loose brown soil sloping to W balk.) Arabia; Hadrian, A.D. 117-138.
 Obv. Bust of Hadrian r., laureate, undraped; around: [AVTOKPAT KAICAP T]PAIANOC ADPIANOC C; border of dots.
 Rev. Bust of Arabia r., wearing turreted crown and flowing mantle; each arm holding a small seated figure of a child; in exergue: APABIA; traces of border.
279. (1713—D.2:44, clearing debris of winter erosion.) Aelia Capitolina; joint principate of Antonius Pius and Marcus Aurelius, A.D. 146-161.
 Obv. Bust of Pius (138-161) r., bearded, laureate, and draped; obliterated inscr. around.
 Rev. Bust of Aurelius (161-180) r., bareheaded and draped; around: AVRELIO CAES AVG; in exergue: CA[C] (Colonia Aelia Capitolina).¹⁸

¹⁷Hill, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Phoenicia* (London, 1910), pp. 258-259.

¹⁸Cf. Hill, *Palestine*, p. 88, nos. 34, 35.

280. (2104—B.1:13, variegated brown-black soil covered by a *huwwar* surface of varying thickness, extending over the square.) Esbus (Heshbon); Elagabalus, A.D. 218-222.
Similar to no. 249 in the 1973 report, but in extremely poor condition. With the exception of part of the rev. (exergue: [ECB]OVC), inscr. is obliterated.

Late Roman

281. (1710—C.5, bulk trim.) Gallienus, A.D. 267.¹⁹
Obv. Bust of Gallienus (253-268) r., radiate and draped; around: [GA]LLIENV[S . . .]; border of dots.
Rev. Mercury standing l., holding purse and caduceus; around: FIDES A[VG]; in exergue: PXV (Tribunician year [A.D. 267]).
282. (1702—A.7:97, hard packed, light brown, gravelly soil on which mosaic foundation, Loci 94-96, was set and into which *ṭabun* foundation pit was cut.) Maximian, A.D. 296-305.
Obv. Bust of Maximian r., radiate and draped; around: IMP C M AV MAXIMIANV[S . . .].
Rev. Emperor standing r., holding *paragonium*, receiving Victory on globe from Jupiter, standing l., holding scepter; around: CONCONCOR[DIA MI]LITVM; in the field: KA (mark of value).²⁰
283. (1731—G.9:2, hard packed, grayish brown, gravelly soil layer.) Constantine I, A.D. 306-337.
Obv. Bust of Constantine I r., laureate and draped; around: IMP C CONSTANTINVS P F AVG.
Rev. Three standards; around: S P Q R OPTIMO PRINCIPI.
284. (1736—G.5B:31, soil layer W of Wall 15 and running up to it.) Valens, A.D. 364-378.
Obv. Bust of Valens r., with pearl diadem and cuirass; around: D N VALEN. . . .
Rev. Emperor advancing r. with standard in l. hand and dragging a captive with the r.; around: GLORIA ROMANORVM.
285. (2058—G.5F:1, arbitrary soil layer all over the square above rock tumble from reservoir wall.)
Similar to the preceding, but inscr. is obliterated.
286. (1701—A.5:77, hard packed, light brown, gravelly soil on which mosaic 73 installation was founded, Loci 74-76, into which foundation pit for *ṭabun* A.7:73 was dug, extending down to bedrock.) Theodosius I, A.D. 378-395.
Obv. Traces of bust, r.
Rev. Victory advancing l., dragging a captive; around: [SALV]S REIP[VBLICAE]; in exergue: SMAN (Antioch).

¹⁹ See Percy H. Webb, *Valerian to Florian*, vol. 5, pt. 1 of *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, ed. by Harold Mattingly et al. (London, 1962), 184-185, no. 607.

²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, pt. 2, p. 610, nn. 1, 2.

287. (2059—C.3:53, reddish-brown soil with chunks of *huwwar*.) Uncertain.
Obv. Bust r., laureate and draped; blundered inscr. around.
Rev. Sol standing l., radiate head, draped, holding a crown (?);
around: SOLI INVICTO [COMITI]; obliterated inscr. in exergue.

Byzantine

288. (2042—A.9:76, hard packed white plaster surface, with red dirt, small stones, and limestone chips, SW corner of square.) *Nummus* of Justinian I, A.D. 527-565.
Obv. Bust of Justinian I r., with pearl diadem and cuirassed.
Rev. *Chrismon*.
289. (1811—D.1:74, reddish brown to almost tan, firmly packed soil.) *Follis* of Tiberius II, A.D. 580/1.
Obv. Bust of Tiberius II (578-82), facing, wearing consular robes and regalia, crown with a cross and two pearls hanging on either side; r. hand holds mappa, l. scepter with eagle surmounted by a cross; around: [OM] TIBCONS. TANTPPAV [I]; border.
Rev. M (prominent mark of value—40 *nummi*); above: cross; l. segment: ANNO; r. segment: U-II (year 7 from his becoming co-emperor in 574); in exergue: CON (Constantinople).

Umayyad

290. (1737—A.8:1, surface and top soil, rock tumble, across entire square.)
Obv. Obliterated.
Rev. Central dot surrounded by a semicircle and three serrate circles.
291. (1946—C.7:34, medium brown, hard packed soil layer with *huwwar* chunks.)
Obv. *Lā ilāh illā 'llah/waḥda/h Ailā*; border.
Rev. *Muḥammad/Rasūl/Allah*; border.
292. (2062—C.8:3, light brown subsoil under C.8:2.)
Obv. Similar to no. 26 in the 1968 report, but no traces of border.
Rev. Obliterated.

Ayyūbid (1171-1342)²¹

293. (1769—C.6:11, loose, powdery gray soil.) Al-'Aziz 'Uṭḥmān (Egyptian branch), 1193-1198.
Obv. 'Uṭḥmān/al-Malik al-'Aziz; ornament beneath; border with illegible margin.
Rev. *suf* (continuation of the last line) /*Bin al-Malik an-Nāṣir* (last two consonants downward)/*Yū* (continued as the 1st line); border with illegible margin.
294. (1738—E.4:4, light grayish brown, very loose lens.) Al-'Adil, 1196-1218.
Obv. . . . /*ad-Dīn/al-Malik al-'A [dīl]* / . . . ; border of dots; traces of obliterated margin.
Rev. . . . /*Abū Bakr Bin* . . . / . . . ; border of dots; traces of obliterated margin.

²¹ End of the Ḥamāh branch.

295. (2061—C.8:3, light brown sub-soil under C.8:2.) Uncertain.
Obv. Obliterated.
Rev. Arabesque within circle.
- Mamlūk (1250-1517)²²*
296. (1735—A.9:7, fill dirt, sterile, in SW corner of square, with evidence of a doorway in extreme SW corner.) *Dirham* (2.61 gm.) of an-Nāṣir Muḥammad, 1293-1294, 1299-1309, 1310-1341.
Obv. . . . /*[Muḥamm]ad Rasūl Allah/[ār]salahu bi-'l-hudā/*
Rev. *As-Sulṭān al-Malik/an-Nāṣir Nāṣir ad-Dunyā/wa 'd-Dīn Muḥammad*
297. (1741—B.7:10, loose brown soil under Locus 3.)
Obv. *Allah* (continuation of 2d line) /*wa mā an-naṣr [illā min 'ind]* (continued as the 1st line) /*lā ilah illā [ʾllah Muḥammad]/* . . . ; traces of border.
Rev. . . . /*Nāṣir ad-Dunyā [wa]/'d-Dīn Muḥammad Bin Ḳa[lāūn]/*
298. (1924—A.9:34, hard packed brown dirt, with charcoal and white granules, SW corner of square.) *Dirham* (3.22 gm.) of An-Nāṣir Ḥasan, 1347-51, 1354-61.
Obv. . . . /*[Lā] ilah illā 'llah/[Muḥammad] Rasūl Allah ā/rsalahu bi-'l-hudā.*
Rev. *[As-Sulṭān al-Malik/[an-Nā]ṣir Nāṣir ad-Dun[yā/wa 'd-]Dīn Ḥasan [Bin] al-Mal[ik].*
299. (2063—C.6, balk trim.) Al-Manṣūr Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn Muḥammad, 1361-1363.
Obv. Obliterated.
Rev. *[As-Sulṭān al-Malik/[al-Manṣūr] Muḥammad; traces of border.*
300. (1712—C.6:22, hard packed brown soil with lighter brown clay, some orange soil, some *huwwar* and small stones.)
Similar to no. 41 in the 1968 report.
301. (1960—A.9:34, see no. 298.) *Half-dirham* (0.90 gm.). Uncertain.
Obv. . . . / . . . *illā 'llah Muḥammad/* . . . *Allah ārsalahu/* . . .
Rev. *Az-Zāhir* . . . / *as-Sulṭān al-Malik/* . . .

The 1974 coins yielded not only the oldest coin found at Heshbon (no. 278), but also two more specimens from the ancient mints of Transjordan (nos. 278, 280). No new conclusions on the occupational history of Heshbon through the coin evidence are in sight. A final report is planned to follow the excavations scheduled for the summer of 1976.

²² Bahri Mamlūk (1250-1382), Burdjī Mamlūk (1382-1517).