

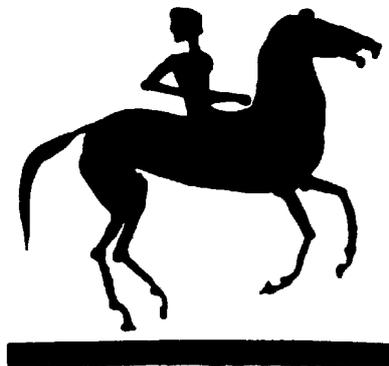
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Begründet von Werner Fuchs

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MICHAEL SHENKAR

The Coin of the »God on the Winged Wheel«

The coins minted in Judea during the Achaemenid period are a valuable source of information for the history of this region in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE¹. These coins bear the ancient Hebrew legends »YHD«, »YHWD« and various figurative representations which were widespread in the Eastern Mediterranean in the first millennium BCE². The most interesting and significant example of the coins usually ascribed to this group is a silver drachm of unknown provenance which has been kept in the British Museum since the eighteenth century (Taf. 7, 1)³.

* I am very grateful to the members of The Israel Numismatic Society and especially to Dr. Rechel Barkai, Haim Gitler and Prof. Dan Barag for their valuable comments, remarks and support.

Abbreviations:

Barag (1993) = D. Barag, Bagoas and the Coinage of Judea, in: T. Hackens – G. Moucharte (ed.), *Actes du IXe Congrès International de Numismatique I*, Brüssel 8–13 septembre 1991 (1993) 261–265.

Gitler – Tal (2006) = H. Gitler – O. Tal, *The Coinage of Philistia of the Fifth and Fourth Centuries BC. A Study of the Earliest Coins of Palestine* (2006).

Kienle (1975) = H. Kienle, *Der Gott auf dem Flügelrad. Zu den ungelösten Fragen der "synkretistischen" Münze BMC Palestine S. 181, Nr. 29*, *Göttinger Orientforschungen VI*, 7 (1975).

Meshorer (1982) = Y. Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage I. Persian Period Through Hasmonaeans* (1982).

Meshorer (1997) = Y. Meshorer, *Treasury of Jewish Coins* (1997) (Hebrew).

Meshorer – Qedar (1999) = Y. Meshorer – Sh. Qedar, *Samarian Coinage* (1999).

Mildenberg (1979) = L. Mildenberg, *Yehud: A Preliminary Study of the Provincial Coinage of Judaea*, in: O. Mørkholm – N. M. Waggoner (ed.), *Greek Numismatics and Archaeology. Essays in Honor of Margaret Thompson* (1979) 183–196.

Mildenberg (2000) = L. Mildenberg, *On the So-Called Satrapal Coinage*, in: O. Casabonne (ed.), *Mecanismes et innovations monétaires dans l'Anatolie Achéménide. numismatique et histoire. Actes de la Table Ronde Internationale d'Istanbul, 22-23 mai 1997, Varia Anatolica XII*, 2000, 9–21.

¹ For brief historical introduction and background, see: E. Stern, *The Persian Empire and the Political and Social History of Palestine in the Persian Period*, *The Cambridge History of Judaism* 1, 1984, 70–88; G. Widengren, *The Persian Period*, in: J. H. Hayes – J. M. Miller (ed.), *Israelite and Judaean History* (1977) 489–538; I. Eph'al, *Syria-Palestine under the Achaemenid Rule*, *CAH* 4, 1988, 139–164; P. R. Ackroyd, *Israel under Babylon and Persia* (1970) 162–344; L. I. Levine, *Jerusalem. Portrait of the City in the Second Temple Period (538 b.c.e.–70 c.e.)* (2002) 3–45. : L.L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period vol. I: Yehud: A History of the Persian province of Judah*, 2004. See also a collection of articles in: O. Lipschits, G. N. Knoppers, R. Albertz, *Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century B.C.E.*, 2007.

² Meshorer (1982) 21. In general they demonstrate the influence of three main traditions – Greek, Achaemenid and Jewish: S. N. Gerson, *A Transitional Period Coin of Yehud. A Reflection of Three Cultures*, *IsrNumJ* 15, 2006, 34; The basic studies of this group of coins are: Mildenberg (1979) pl. 21. 22; Meshorer (1982) 13–34 pl. 1–3; Meshorer (1997) 11–29. See also: P. Machinist, *The First Coins of Judah and Samaria: Numismatics and History in the Achaemenid and Early Hellenistic Periods*, in: H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, *Continuity and change. Proceedings of the last Achaemenid History Workshop*, 6.–8. April 1990, Ann Arbor, Michigan, *Achaemenid History* 8 (1994) 365–379; L. Mildenberg, *Yehud und šmryn. Über das Geld der persischen Provinz Juda und Samaria im 4. Jahrhundert*, in: H. Cancik (ed.), *Geschichte, Tradition, Reflexion. Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag* (1996) 119–146.

³ Henceforth, BM drachm.

From the first publication in 1814⁴ this coin has attracted much attention from numismatists, archaeologists and historians. It is probably the only coin to have become the subject of a special monograph whose author admits that he has failed to find a satisfactory solution to all the problems presented by this coin⁵. The reason for such close attention was most likely the image of a divinity seated on a winged wheel on the reverse thought then (and still thought by many) to be a unique and unparalleled representation of the God of Israel (Yahweh).

The coin weights 3.29 gr. The diameter is 15 mm and the axis is 12 o'clock. The obverse represents a bearded man in three-quarter profile, wearing a Corinthian helmet. On the reverse, a bearded figure appears seated on a winged wheel, facing to the right. The body is partly covered by a long, flowing garment and a bird of prey (probably a falcon) is perched on the extended left hand. In the lower right corner is an object, resembling a grotesque, bearded face or, probably, a mask. Above the seated figure are three Aramaic letters.

A path breaker of Near Eastern numismatics, G. F. Hill, read the letters as »YHW«⁶. Following the discovery of the bronze coins which later formed the »YHD« group, Sukenik proposed that here too the letters should be read as »YHD« – the name of the Persian province Judea⁷. His opinion was widely accepted by scholars and the BM drachm was classified and studied as »The First Jewish Coin«. However, the reading of the last letter is controversial and three alternative interpretations are possible. It could be read not only as »D«, but also as »W« and even »R«⁸. A recent study proposes a return to Hill's original reading⁹.

OBVERSE

The identification of the head on the obverse is, of course, very important for the understanding of the coin. Despite its uniqueness, it has near parallels in contemporary numismatic material. The apparent resemblance to coins minted in Cilician Tarsos in the first quarter of the fourth century BCE was noted by Pilcher at the beginning of the last century¹⁰. Bearded images are also found on coins belonging to the Achaemenid satraps Pharnabazos and Datames (Tarkamuwa), but wearing Attic rather than Corinthian helmets (Taf. 7, 2). The heads on the coins of both generals are very similar which brings into question their interpretation as portraits of Pharnabazos and Datames.

⁴ T. Combe, *Veterum populorum et regum numiqui in Museo Britannico adservantur* (1814) 242 No. 5. pl. xiii 12.

⁵ Kienle (1975) 72.

⁶ G. F. Hill, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Palestine in the British Museum* (1914) xxxvi–lxxxvii, 189 n. 29.

⁷ E. L. Sukenik, *Paralipomena Palaestina I: The Oldest Coins of Judea*, *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 14, 1934, 178–182 pl. I–II.

⁸ See discussion in: Kienle (1975) 3–12.

⁹ Gitler – Tal (2006) 230.

¹⁰ E. J. Pilcher, *The Coin of Gaza and the Vision of Ezekiel*, *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 30, 1908, 46.

Moysey in his study dedicated to these coins thinks that the portraits are identical and should be seen as a representation of the god Ares or as a collective image of a mercenary¹¹. But there are also other opinions¹². In most cases, it is very difficult to identify certain heads on the so-called »Satrapal coinage« as actual portraits of satraps¹³. Even the attribution of these coins to the authority of the satraps is disputed¹⁴.

The BM drachm is by no means the only example of figurative and even, anthropomorphic images on the »YHD« coins. Apart from low-quality imitations of Athenian tetradrachms¹⁵, there are portraits of Persian kings¹⁶ and a head of a young man¹⁷. Many such motifs are also found on the coinage of Philistia¹⁸ and Samaria¹⁹. In Samaria particularly some examples show an image of a bearded man wearing an Attic helmet (Taf. 7, 3. 4)²⁰.

In attempts to identify the personage on the BM drachm, several candidates have been proposed by scholars: the Sicilian chthonic deity Hadranos, Minos, the legendary founder of Gaza, Ares or a collective image of a mercenary²¹. In his detailed study on Jewish coinage, Meshorer proposed that the image on the BM drachm was a portrait of Bagoas, governor of Judea during the reign of Artaxerxes II (404–359 BCE), who is mentioned in Flavius Josephus (Ant. XI 297–301)²².

¹¹ R. A. Moysey, *The Silver Issues of Pharnabazos and Datames from the Mint of Tarsus in Cilicia*, *American Numismatic Society Museum Notes* 31, 1986, 7–61 pl. 1–5.

¹² Barag notes that they could just as well be interpreted as a collective image of a strategos: Barag (1991) 263. On coinage of Pharnabazos and Datames see also: G. Le Rider, *Le monnayage perse en cilicie au IVE siècle*, *NumAntCl* 26, 1997, 151–169; J. D. Bing, *Datames and Mazaesus: The Iconography of Revolt and Restoration in Cilicia*, *Historia* 47, 1998, 41–76; F. de Callataj, *Les monnayages ciliciens du premier quart du IVE s. av. J.-C. Mecanismes et innovations monétaires dans l'Anatolie Achéménide: numismatique et histoire*, *Varia Anatolica* XII, 2000, 93–127; O. Casabonne, *Conquete perse et phenomene monetaire: l'exemple cilicien. Mecanismes et innovations monétaires dans l'Anatolie Achéménide: numismatique et histoire*, *Varia Anatolica* XII, 2000, 21–93; J. Wiesehöfer, *Takumuwa und das Farnah, Achaemenid History* XIII, 2003, 173–185.

¹³ According to Mildenberg (2000) 9. 12: »it cannot be proven that a head is an actual portrait even if it is accompanied by a name«, »without an inscribed name or a factual source to support these attributions, one can only guess who is depicted, whether it be living person, an actual Persian dignitary, or a generalized image of the office rather than the person.« On the »Satrapal coinage« see also: D. Pandermalis, *Untersuchungen zu den klassischen Strategenköpfen* (1969); C. Harrison, *Coins of the Persian Satraps* (1982); H. A. Cahn, *Dynast oder Satrap?*, *SchwMüBl* 25, 1975, 84–91; H. A. Cahn, *Le monnayage des satraps: iconographie et signification*, *REA* 91, 1989, 97–105; L. Mildenberg, *Über das Münzwesen im Reich der Achämeniden*, *AMI* 26, 1993, 58–60.

¹⁴ Mildenberg thinks that the coins of the satraps »were probably not produced on the orders of the satraps, but only in their time« Mildenberg (2000) 12 n. 15. He goes as far as to conclude that »the so-called “satrapal coinage” has no basis in historical reality«, *ibid.* 15.

¹⁵ Meshorer (1997) pl. 3, 2–12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* pl. 3, 16 a–f.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* pl. 3, 13. 25. 26.

¹⁸ Gitler – Tal (2006).

¹⁹ Y. Meshorer – Sh. Qedar, *The Coinage of Samaria in the Fourth Century BCE* (1991); Meshorer – Qedar (1999).

²⁰ Meshorer – Qedar (1999) n. 73. 80.

²¹ See the discussion of these suggestions with references in: Kienle (1975) 25–29.

²² Meshorer (1982) 27. In his Hebrew publication, Meshorer does not cite this suggestion, but notes that in his opinion this is the portrait of a governor of Judea or of a general who was in command of the Persian forces in the province. See: Meshorer (1997) 13.

Barag, on the other hand, thinks that it was another Bagoas, the general of Artaxerxes III, who issued this coin and put his portrait on it²³. The figure of Bagoas demands a closer look²⁴. First of all, »Bagoas« (Bagōhī) is a well-known Persian name. The historical sources attest three people named »Bagoas« who are connected to fourth century BCE Palestine:

1. »Bagoas, governor of Judea« – addressee of the letters of the Jewish settlers in Elephantine, dated to 408 BCE²⁵.
2. Bagoas, strategos of Artaxerxes (»the strategos of [other] Artaxerxes«), mentioned by Josephus in connection with the murder of Yeshua by his brother Yohanan the High Priest. During these dramatic events, Bagoas imposed heavy taxes on Judea and desecrated the Temple by entering the Holy of Holies. However, from the historical context of Josephus's narrative it is not clear which Achaemenid king Bagoas served – Artaxerxes II or Artaxerxes III²⁶.
3. The eunuch Bagoas, the all-powerful courtier of Artaxerxes III, whose brilliantly successful career is described by Diodorus Siculus (XI 47. 4). At one stage of his life he served in 343 BCE as supreme commander of the Persian military expedition against the rebellious Egyptians. In 339/8 BCE, at the peak of his political power, Bagoas poisoned both Artaxerxes III and his successor, enthroning Darius III. However, he went too far in attempting to murder also the new King of Kings, he was out-witted and forced to drink his own poisoned wine²⁷.

Bagoas of the Elephantine correspondence can not be the eunuch of Artaxerxes III because of the wide chronological gap between the two, but who is the Bagoas of Josephus²⁸? Was it Bagoas of Elephantine who continued to hold the office of governor of Judea under Artaxerxes II²⁹ or the eunuch of Artaxerxes III³⁰?

²³ Barag (1991) 265; D. Barag, The Coin of Bagoas with the Figure of God on the Winged Wheel, *Qadmoniot* 99/100, 1993, 97–100 (Hebrew).

²⁴ It seems too simplistic to treat Bagoas as general of Artaxerxes III and governor of Judea as in: D. V. Edelman, Tracking Observance of the Aniconic Tradition through Numismatics, in: D. V. Edelman, *The Triumph of Elohim. From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (1995) 195.

²⁵ A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (1923) 108–122 n. 30–31.

²⁶ The date and the historical value of this account are uncertain, see: L. L. Grabbe, Josephus and the Reconstruction of the Judean Restoration, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106, 1987, 235–236. Widengren thinks that there is evidence in the text allowing one to date these events to the reign of Artaxerxes II. However he does not provide it, G. Widengren, *The Persian Period*, in: J. H. Hayes – J. M. Miller (eds.), *Israelite and Judaeon History* (1977) 501.

²⁷ M. Dandamayev, Bagouás, *Encyclopedia Iranica* II (1987) 418–419.

²⁸ In general, see: C. C. Torrey, The Two Persian Officers Named Bagoas, *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 56/3, 1939, 300–301; L. L. Grabbe, Who was the Bagoas of Josephus (*Ant.* 11. 7. 1, 297–301)?, *Transeuphratène* 5, 1992, 49–61; G. W. Ahlström, The History of Ancient Palestine from the Palaeolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Suppl.* 146, 1993, 894; H. G. M. Williamson, *Studies in Persian Period History and Historiography* (2004) 21.

²⁹ For this view, see: K. Gallig, *Studien zur Geschichte Israels im persischen Zeitalter* (1964) 161; L. L. Grabbe, Who was the Bagoas of Josephus (*Ant.* 11. 7. 1, 297–301)?, *Transeuphratène* 5, 1992, 54–55; P. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander. A History of the Persian Empire* (2002) 1005.

³⁰ H. G. M. Williamson, *Studies in Persian Period History and Historiography*, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 38, 2004, 89.

Barag, who supported the latter view, suggested that the image of a bearded man on the BM drachm could be the portrait of this Bagoas³¹. But Bagoas the general of Artaxerxes III was a eunuch³² and did not have a beard³³.

Another significant detail of the image, which could help with the identification, is the Corinthian helmet. Barag notes that this is the Greek type of helmet, but sees no reason why a Persian general would not wear it³⁴. At the same time, there is no known portrait of a Persian warrior wearing a Corinthian helmet³⁵. The typical head-dress of the Persian warrior is kyrbasia (sometimes also called by the Turkic term bashlyk), a hood wrapped round the chin³⁶. It is noteworthy that the general/warrior on the coins of Pharnabazos and Datames always wears the Attic helmet which was popular and widespread in the Western satrapies of the Achaemenid Empire in that period. The Corinthian helmet was in use on the battlefield in mainland Greece until the fifth century BCE and later it appeared mainly in art and various ceremonies³⁷.

If the head on the coin represents a real person and not a deity or some personification, it is reasonable to suggest that this man was probably of Greek origin. The images on the BM drachm and on the coins of Pharnabazos and Datames seem to emphasize the military aspect of these people as strategoi³⁸ and this is not accidental.

In the fourth century BCE the use of Greek mercenaries by the Achaemenid kings reached its peak³⁹. All large Persian armies, including those formed in Cilicia (Tarsos) and Palestine (Acre) had a considerable number of Greek mercenaries, usually commanded by a professional Greek officer⁴⁰. Some of these adventurous men even made an outstanding career at the Persian court and held high offices in the Imperial provincial administration.

³¹ Barag (1991) 264.

³² Barag notes that »Bagoas (Bagoses) of Josephus seems to be the infamous eunuch Bagoas, a general of Artaxerxes III«, *ibid.*

³³ On eunuchs and eunuchism see: V. L. Bullough, *Eunuchs in History and Society*, in: S. Tougher (ed.), *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond* (2002) 1–19. Briant thinks that not all the people who are referred to as »eunuchs« in Greek sources were actually castrates. He suggests that in some cases this word refers to a title at the Achaemenian court. However, he does not produce any argument: P. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander. A History of the Persian Empire* (2002) 268–277. On the other hand, Diodorus describes Bagoas as »a eunuch in physical fact, but a militant rogue in disposition« (XVII, 5, 3). He opposes the »feminine« nature of the eunuch to his »masculine« militant qualities which means that, for Diodorus, Bagoas was obviously a castrate and therefore could not have a beard. Another interesting story which confirms that eunuchs at the Achaemenid court did have beards is reported by Ctesias (FGrH 688 F15(54)). The eunuch Artoxares, wanted to seize the throne and plotted against the king, so he asked his wife to make a beard for him so he would look like a man. His wife, however, betrayed him and he was arrested and executed.

³⁴ Barag (1991) 264 n. 13.

³⁵ B. A. Litvinsky, *Helmet*, *Encyclopedia Iranica* XII, 2007, 176–180.

³⁶ For many examples, see: N. Sekunda – S. Chew, *The Persian Army 560-330 BC* (1992).

³⁷ A. M. Snodgrass, *Arms and Armor of the Greeks* (1967) 94. The Corinthian helmet appears on the coins of Byblos and of several Greek cities: J. Elayi, *Les symboles de la puissance militaire sur les monnaies de Byblos*, *Revue Numismatique* XXVI, 1984, 43.

³⁸ Barag (1991) 263–264.

³⁹ H. W. Parke, *Greek Mercenary Soldiers* (1970) 164–169; L. P. Marinovič, *Greek Mercenaries in the fourth century BCE and the Crisis of Polis* (1975) 98–122 (Russian); M. Trundle, *Greek Mercenaries: From the Late Archaic Period to Alexander* (2004) 44–46. On Greek mercenaries, see also: G. F. Seibt, *Griechische Söldner im Achaimenidenreich* (1977); H. F. Miller, *The Practical and Economic Background to the Greek Mercenary Explosion*, *GaR* 31, 1984, 153–160; P. McKechnie, *Greek Mercenary Troops and Their Equipment*, *Historia* 43, 1994, 297–305.

⁴⁰ On Greek mercenary generals, see recent survey: M. Trundle, *Greek Mercenaries: From the Late Archaic Period to Alexander* (2004) 147–159.

The best example is the career of Mentor of Rhodes who, together with the eunuch Bagoas, was entrusted with the suppression of the Egyptian revolt in 343 BCE⁴¹. As a reward for his services and achievements Mentor was later appointed governor of the coastal areas of Asia Minor (Diod. Sic. XVI 50, 7). This was the highest position ever held by a Greek mercenary in the Achaemenid administration⁴². His career demonstrates that the leaders of the Greek mercenaries who entered the Persian administration often achieved very high office in the Imperial government and even served as satraps of certain regions.

It is, then, plausible that the BM drachm could have been minted by a Greek mercenary general who held some administrative or military position in the fifth satrapy of Abar-Nahara in the fourth century BCE⁴³. This coin was probably part of a very limited minting intended to pay salaries to local mercenaries in the Persian army, which were recruited for the campaign against Egypt⁴⁴.

REVERSE

The motif on the reverse of the coin is even more difficult to analyze. In fact, the only thing that is certain is that this is the image of a deity. The pose and the composition with a bird are widespread in representations of Zeus⁴⁵ and of various Eastern gods identified with the supreme Olympian in the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods⁴⁶.

However while Zeus is always depicted enthroned the deity on the BM drachm sits on a strange winged wheel. A similar object adorned with serpents, often serves as an attribute of an Eleusini-an chthonic god Triptolemos, but Triptolemos is always depicted as a beardless youth, holding a scepter, a wheat or barley ears and a plate of grain⁴⁷. The style of the deity on the BM drachm does not look Greek, but rather resembles Hellenized Eastern art⁴⁸.

⁴¹ See: H. W. Parke, *Greek Mercenary Soldiers* (1970) 166–169.

⁴² *Ibid.* 169.

⁴³ Stern proposes that this was probably the satrap of Abar Nahara himself: E. Stern, *The Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian Periods*, in: E. Stern – A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible II* (2001) 567.

⁴⁴ Stern who accepts the reading »YHD« obviously thinks that they were Judean: *Ibid.* 568. However see Mildenberg (2000) 12 n. 15, who thinks that »the coins cannot be proven to be special issues to pay mercenaries«.

⁴⁵ A. B. Cook, *Zeus. A Study in Ancient Religion I* (1914) 232–237; Kienle (1975) 34. The bird is part of iconography of Zeus. However, there is one minor difference. While generally the bird looks at the seated Zeus, on the BM coin it turns to the opposite direction. See: Kienle (1975) 43–44. It is worth noting that it was recently proposed to understand the iconography of Iranian pre-Islamic coins not as part of the Greek tradition, but from an Iranian point of view see: V. S. Curtis, *Religious Iconography on Ancient Iranian Coins*, in: J. Cribb (ed.), *After Alexander. Central Asia before Islam. Proceedings of the British Academy* 133 (2007) 413–434. In this study Curtis proposes that the bird on the outstretched hand of a Parthian king, Phraates III, was not associated by the Iranians with the symbol of Zeus but with the Avestan veranga, the royal falcon: *Ibid.* 423.

⁴⁶ See the example of Baal of Tarsos on the coins of Pharnabazos: Barag (1991) fig. 4.

⁴⁷ Kienle (1975) 36–37.

⁴⁸ Mildenberg (1979) 184. The interaction and mutual penetration of Greek and Eastern cultural and artistic traditions had already begun in the Achaemenid period, long before Alexander the Great; see for example: M. A. R. Colledge, *Greek and non-Greek Interactions in the Art and Architecture of the Hellenistic East*, in: A. Kuhrt (ed.), *Hellenism in the East. The interaction of Greek and non-Greek Civilizations from Syria to Central Asia after Alexander* (1987) 134–136.

Scholars have suggested identifying the deity on the winged wheel as Dionysus, Baal of Tarsos or the ancient Sicilian god Hadranos⁴⁹. However, since the late nineteenth century the most popular version has been that the deity was a unique image of the God of Israel⁵⁰. In their new study Gitler and Tal support this opinion, but propose an attribution to the Jews of Idumea or some gentile groups that included Yahweh in its pantheon⁵¹. The two Israeli scholars base this suggestion on the close artistic similarity between the BM drachm and coins minted in Philistia in the fourth century BCE⁵².

It is evident that this drachm fits better in the corpus of Philistian coins than in the »YHD« group. There is probably some evidence for the existence of the cult of Yahweh in Idumea in the Achaemenid period⁵³. However, we do not possess such evidence for the coastal cities of Philistia.

Mildenberg proposed that the seated figure might represent an abstract concept of divinity which would be commonly and easily understood by the populations of the Western part of the Achaemenid Empire⁵⁴. It seems that the biblical prohibition against images of the god influenced his interpretation; although Mildenberg observes that the situation was probably different in the Achaemenid period⁵⁵. There are many anthropomorphic and even deity-like images on the »YHD« coins.

The seated figure on the BM drachm does not have any exact parallels in Greek art. It seems rather that it should be approached in terms of Achaemenid art. The combination of a deity with a wing and a round object (wheel/ring/disk) resembles the Achaemenid »Figure in the Winged Disk«⁵⁶ (Taf. 7, 5). This symbol appears since the reign of Darius I (522–486 BCE), on his Behistun inscription, and its interpretation is still a subject of much controversy⁵⁷. Since the »Figure in the Winged Disk« is evidently based on the iconography of the great Assyrian god Aššur⁵⁸ (according to some, also

⁴⁹ See discussion with references in: Kienle (1975) 30–39.

⁵⁰ B. Kanael, *Ancient Jewish Coins and their Historical Significance*, *BibAr* 26, 1963, 41; Barag (1991) 264; D. V. Edelman, *Tracking Observance of the Aniconic Tradition Through Numismatics*, in: D. V. Edelman (ed.), *The Triumph of Elohim. From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (1995) 204. *passim*. See also: E. Blum, *Der 'Schiquz schomem' und die Jehud-Drachme BMC Palestine*, S. 181, Nr 29, *Biblische Notizen* 90, 1997, 13–27; S. Petry, *Die Etngrenzung JHWHs*, 2007; J. Kutter, *nūr ilī. Die Sonnengottheiten in den nordwestsemitischen Religionen von der Spätbronzezeit bis zur vorrömischen Zeit*, 2008, 409 who emphasize his solar and heavenly aspects.

⁵¹ Gitler – Tal (2006) 230.

⁵² *Ibid* 70.

⁵³ Thus on an ostrakon from the Idumean settlement Khribet el-Kom Lemaire reads: »BYT YHW«, »house (temple) of Yahweh«, see: A. Lemaire, *Nouvelles inscriptions araméennes d'Idumée* (2002) n. 283; A. Lemaire, *New Aramaic Ostraca from Idumea*, in: O. Lipschits (ed.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (2006) 416–417. »House of Yahweh« is also mentioned in many inscriptions dated to the seventh century BCE: E. Stern, *Religion in Palestine in the Assyrian and Persian Periods*, in: B. Becking (ed.), *The Crisis of Israelite Religion* (1999) 248; E. Stern, *The Religious Revolution in Persian-Period Judah*, in: O. Lipschits (ed.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (2006) 200.

⁵⁴ Mildenberg (1979) 184.

⁵⁵ *Ibid* n. 7.

⁵⁶ This was already noted by Kienle: Kienle (1975) 51–52, 56.

⁵⁷ See basic presentation in: M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism II. Under the Achaemenians*, *Handbuch der Orientalistik II* (1982) 103–105.

⁵⁸ C. J. Gadd, *Achaemenid Seals. Types*, in: A. Upham Pope (ed.), *Survey of Persian Art. From Prehistoric Times to the Present I* (1967) 384; M. C. Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art*, *Acta Iranica* 19, 1979, 172.

Shamash)⁵⁹ and it often appears above Achaemenid royal inscriptions which mention Ahuramazda, it has traditionally been considered to represent the supreme god of the Achaemenid dynasty⁶⁰. The winged disk with a human bust probably originated in Neo-Assyrian art in the third quarter of the eighth century BCE⁶¹. Although, unlike the deity on the BM drachm, it usually has two wings, some very interesting examples of a wingless human bust with a tail are known (Taf. 8, 6). A wing, attached to a human or beast, serves as a symbol of the divine or supernatural, and it is very widespread in Achaemenid art⁶².

We also find the image of a winged deity (Ahuramazda?) on some types of coins from Samaria. The deity is shown in a rather simplified way and the disk which generally serves as a base for the figure is sometimes missing (Taf. 8, 7–10)⁶³.

The winged disk was not something new for Judea, Samaria and Philistia. In fact, by the time the Achaemenid Empire was formed, it had already represented important deities in the Near East for more than a millennium⁶⁴. The winged disk on the »LMLK« jar handle stamps (circa 700 BCE) in Judea was in all probability the symbol of Yahweh⁶⁵. This means that it was already acknowledged

⁵⁹ D. Collon, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum. Cylinder Seals V: Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Periods*. (2001) 79–80; T. Ornan, *A Complex System of Religious Symbols: The Case of the Winged-disc in First-Millennium Near Eastern Imagery*, in: C. E. Suter (ed.), *Crafts and Images in Contact. Studies on Eastern Mediterranean Art of the First Millennium BCE* (2005) 212–213. See recent detailed discussion on the origin of this symbol and its meaning in: P. H. Merrillees, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum. Cylinder Seals VI. Pre-Achaemenid and Achaemenid Periods* (2005) 115–117.

⁶⁰ For example: R. Ghirshman, *Iran* (1954) 160–161; C. J. Gadd, *Achaemenid Seals. Types*, in: A. Upham Pope (ed.), *Survey of Persian Art. From Prehistoric Times to the Present I* (1967) 384; M. Dandamaev – V. G. Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran* (1994) 342–343; M. C. Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art*, *Acta Iranica* 19, 1979, 172. Some scholars, probably following modern Zoroastrians and Pahlavi Zoroastrian literature, prefer to identify this symbol as a *fravaši* – the transcendental guardian spirit of an individual who protects him during his earthly life. On *fravaši*, see for example: M. Boyce, *Fravaši*. *Encyclopedia Iranica* X, 2001, 195–199. Other scholars tend to see in the »Figure in the Winged Disk«, the *khvarnah* of the Achaemenids, god-given glory, divine favour and fortune of the ruling dynasty: M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism II. Under the Achaemenians*, *Handbuch der Orientalistik II* (1982) 103–105; A. S. Shahbazi, *An Achaemenid Symbol II. Farnah „(God given) fortune“ symbolised*, *AMI* 13, 1980, 119–147. It seems that this opinion has been also influenced by the modern Zoroastrianism which regards Ahuramazda as an abstract transcendental Supreme Being who has no anthropomorphic shape. It might well be that in antiquity the situation was entirely different. We know that in the Sasanian period of »orthodox« and »state-Zoroastrianism«, Ahuramazda was depicted in anthropomorphic shape on the rock reliefs of the Persian kings. Thus, there is no sufficient historical reason to doubt that the »Figure in the Winged Disk« represents Ahuramazda, see also: P. Lecoq, *Un problème de religion achéménide: Ahura Mazda ou Xvarnah?*, *Acta Iranica* 23, 1984, 301–326.

⁶¹ P. H. Merrillees, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum. Cylinder Seals VI. Pre-Achaemenid and Achaemenid Periods* (2005) 115.

⁶² *Ibid.* 114 figs. 12 b; 15–18.

⁶³ Meshorer – Qedar (1999) 51–52 n. 84. 100 pl. 18:124. The same motive also appears on a recently published type, see: Y. Ronen, *Twenty Unrecorded Samarian Coins*, *Israel Numismatic Research* 2, 2007, pl. 1:5.

⁶⁴ See: T. Ornan, *A Complex System of Religious Symbols: The Case of the Winged-disc in First-Millennium Near Eastern Imagery*, in: C. E. Suter (ed.), *Crafts and Images in Contact. Studies on Eastern Mediterranean Art of the First Millennium BCE* (2005) 207–241.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 232.

as a representation of the supreme local deity even before the Achaemenids. It is possible that the image of the »God on the Winged Wheel«, influenced by the iconography of Ahuramazda⁶⁶ and Zeus, was transformed into an image of a supreme local deity, easily grasped by the local population. The grotesque bearded face/mask in the lower right corner is probably the most enigmatic detail of the composition. Scholars have argued that it could be an image of the Egyptian god Bes⁶⁷, of Penuel, »The Face of God«⁶⁸, or of Silenus. However, there is as yet no satisfactory and acceptable identification⁶⁹.

DATE AND MINT

Because of its relatively low weight and the fact that the portrait is in three-quarter profile the BM drachm is generally dated to 380–360 BCE⁷⁰. »Three-quarter« representations instead of full profile were a known phenomenon in the Eastern Mediterranean in the first half of the fourth century BCE⁷¹. Barag proposed that the coin was minted by Bagoas between 345–343 BCE⁷².

Since the provenance of the coin is unknown, its mint cannot be securely determined. If we accept the reading of the inscription as »YHD«, it was probably minted in Jerusalem or in Gaza, as Barag proposes⁷³. Barag's proposal seems reasonable since the coins of Philistia are characterized by an eclectic style and the strong influence of Achaemenid art⁷⁴.

Three features of the »YHD« coins set them apart from issues of other regions of Palestine in the fourth century BCE: a special weight system, a denomination based on the shekel standard and the continuation of the mint into the Ptolemaic period⁷⁵. It is significant that the BM drachm does not fit into the shekel weight standard⁷⁶ which means that it was probably not minted in Judea⁷⁷.

⁶⁶ Bing proposed that the »God on the Winged Wheel« and the Baal of Tarsos were attempts to make the local deities similar to Ahuramazda: J. D. Bing, *Datames and Mazaeus: The Iconography of Revolt and Restoration in Cilicia*, *Historia* 47, 1998, 71–72. See also S. Petry, *Die Etngrenzung JHWHs*, 2007, 214 who thinks that it was influenced by the Persian perception of Ahuramazda.

⁶⁷ Mildenberg (1979) 184.

⁶⁸ Meshorer (1997) 25.

⁶⁹ See the detailed discussion in: Kienle (1975) 39–43.

⁷⁰ Mildenberg (1979) 184–185; Meshorer (1997) 26.

⁷¹ Mildenberg (1979) 185.

⁷² Barag (1991) 265.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ H. Gitler, *Achaemenid Motifs in the Coinage of Ashdod, Ascalon and Gaza from the Fourth Century BC*. *Transeuphratène* 20, 2000, 73–89. However, see: C. Uehlinger, »Powerful Persianisms« in *Glyptic Iconography of Persian Palestine*, in: B. Becking (ed.), *The Crisis of Israelite Religion* (1999) 177 who thinks that Philistian cities »remained almost unaffected by Achaemenid iconographical schemes«.

⁷⁵ Y. Ronen, *Some Observations on the Coinage of Yehud*, *IsrNumJ* 15, 2006, 28–32.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 29.

⁷⁷ According to Gitler and Tal it was minted in Philistia or Idumea: Gitler – Tal (2006) 230.

X-Ray Fluorescence analysis gave the following results⁷⁸:

BM drachm	Philistian coinage	Samarian coinage
Silver 93%	94.3%	91.8%
Copper 6%	3.6%	6.1%

The high percentage of copper admixture in the BM drachm, which can hardly be accidental, is almost identical to the composition of the Samarian coins.

All these observations allow me to suggest that this coin was probably minted in Samaria⁷⁹. The iconography and the style of Samarian coinage are very similar to those of Philistia; they also show the considerable influence of Greek and especially Persian artistic tradition⁸⁰. It has been observed recently that »Samarian coinage is literally full of ›Persianisms‹, surpassing by far any other mint in the region in this respect«⁸¹. Bodzek thinks that the coins of Samaria probably reflect the »ideology of the Achaemenid aristocracy« and that some designs are influenced by Greco-Persian art⁸². It is in the Samarian coinage that the closest parallels to the BM drachm can be found: a bearded warrior/general wearing a helmet and an image of Ahuramazda.

If the reading »YHW« is correct, I would like to propose that the god of Samaria, »Samarian Yahweh«, worshipped on Mount Gerizim, probably is the deity depicted on the BM drachm. His cult is attested in various historical sources and in inscriptions uncovered during the excavations of the Mount Gerizim temple⁸³. In the Hellenistic period Samarian Yahweh was probably identified with Zeus. Josephus tells us that the Samaritans sent a letter to the Seleucid king Antiochus III in which they asked his consent naming their temple on Mount Gerizim the Temple of Zeus Hellenius (Antiq. XII 257–264). In the same passage Josephus also observes that the Samaritans were »a colony of Persians and Medes«. This could provide yet another confirmation for a connection between Ahuramazda, Zeus and the Samarian Yahweh.

⁷⁸ Based on a lecture given by H. Gitler at a meeting of the Israel Numismatic Society Jerusalem branch on 16.01.08. For metallurgical analysis of some Philistian and Edomite coins see: H. Gitler, M. Ponting, O. Tal, Metallurgical Analysis of Southern Palestinian Coins of the Persian Period, *Israel Numismatic Research* 3, 2008, 13–29.

⁷⁹ Samaria was one of the biggest cities in Palestine in the Achaemenid period, probably much larger than Jerusalem. See: G. N. Knoppers, Revisiting the Samarian Question in the Persian Period, in: O. Lipschits (ed.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (2006). A. Zartal, Smryn Satrapy in the Persian and Hellenistic Periods, *Michael. Historical, Epigraphical and Biblical Studies in Honor of Prof. Michael Heltzer*, 1999, 75–98.

⁸⁰ See: Meshorer – Qedar (1999); Y. Meshorer – Sh. Qedar, *The Coinage of Samaria in the Persian Period. Book of Samaritans* (2002) 71–82 (Hebrew).

⁸¹ C. Uehlinger, ›Powerful Persianisms‹ in Glyptic Iconography of Persian Palestine, in: B. Becking (ed.), *The Crisis of Israelite Religion* (1999) 177–178.

⁸² J. Bodzek, Remarks on the Iconography of Samarian Coinage. Hunting in Paradeisos?, *Israel Numismatic Research* 2, 2007, 41.

⁸³ For example, the ostrakon with the inscription »YHW« in New Jewish script which was also in use in Samaria: Y. Magen – H. Misgav – L. Tsfania. *The Aramaic, Hebrew and Samaritan Inscriptions* (2004) n. 383.

SUMMARY

The BM drachm was probably minted in the first half of the fourth century BCE. Assuming that it bears an Aramaic and not a Hebrew inscription, it is plausible to suggest that it was produced by someone connected with the Achaemenid Imperial administration. Unlike the »Yehud coins«, many Samarians were issued with Aramaic legends⁸⁴. Judging by the head on the obverse this could have been a general of the Greek mercenaries, a strategos of the Persian army. He probably needed the money to pay new recruits on an expedition against Egypt⁸⁵. Since only one exemplar of this coin is known the issue was presumably very limited.

The riddles of this unique coin could be ultimately solved only by the inscription. If the reading »YHD« is accepted, the BM drachm would be a unique image of the God of Israel, and, despite its obvious divergence from the known »YHD« coinage, was minted in Jerusalem or in Philistia (Gaza) for Judea. But if the inscription reads »YHW«, an attribution to the Samaritan mint is plausible. In that case, it is an equally unique attempt to depict a Samaritan Yahweh. To design an image of a god who had no previous iconographic tradition⁸⁶ a master artisan combined the most powerful and widely known images of deities – Zeus and Ahuramazda to produce something eclectic and new. This seems the preferable conclusion, since the coin in question by weight, chemical composition and iconography, is much closer to Samaritan coinage than to any other.

⁸⁴ G. N. Knoppers, *Revisiting the Samaritan Question in the Persian Period*, in: O. Lipschits (ed.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (2006) 274–275.

⁸⁵ Like the issues of Pharnabazos and Datamas which were almost certainly prototypes for the BM drachm: B. Kanael, *Ancient Jewish Coins and their Historical Significance*, *BibAr* 26, 1963, 40.

⁸⁶ As was done for Aššur and Ahuramazda who also lacked an iconographic history: T. Ornan, *A Complex System of Religious Symbols: The Case of the Winged-disc in First-Millennium Near Eastern Imagery*, in: C. E. Suter (ed.), *Crafts and Images in Contact. Studies on Eastern Mediterranean Art of the First Millennium BCE* (2005) 212.



1. The unique drachm kept in the British Museum, after: Barag (1991) fig. 2.



2. Stater of Pharnabazos minted in Tarsos, after: Barag (1991) fig. 4.



3. Obolos struck in Samaria, after: Meshorer – Qedar (1999) No. 73 pl. 11. 73.



4. Obolos struck in Samaria, after: Meshorer – Qedar (1999) No. 80 pl. 12. 80.



5. The »Figure in the Winged Wheel«, relief from Persepolis, after: R. Ghirshman, *Persia from the Origins to Alexander the Great* (1964) fig. 247.



6. Neo-Babylonian (?) seal with a wingless deity on a »tailed wheel«, after: D. Collon, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum. Cylinder seals 5. Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Periods* (2001) n. 148.



7. Hemiobol struck in Samaria, after: Meshorer – Qedar (1999) No. 84 pl. 13. 84.



8. Obol struck in Samaria, after: Meshorer – Qedar (1999) No. 100 pl. 15. 100.



9. Obol struck in Samaria, after: Meshorer – Qedar (1999) No. IC-2.



10. Obol struck in Samaria, after: Y. Bodzek, *Remarks on the Iconography of Samaritan Coinage. Hunting in Paradeisos?*, *Israel Numismatic Research* 2, 2007 pl. 1 (3:1)