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The Coins from the 2019 and 2020 Excavation Seasons of the German-Israeli Tell Izṭabba Excavation Project

Achim Lichtenberger and Oren Tal

Abstract: This report catalogues and contextualizes the coin finds from the 2019 and 2020 excavation seasons of the German-Israeli archaeological project on Tell Izṭabba (Beth Shean). The majority of the coins are Hellenistic and relate to the Seleucid settlement at the site. Although the sample size is small, it contributes to our understanding of the overall and turbulent settlement history.

Keywords: Coin finds, Seleucids, Tell Iztabba, Nysa-Scythopolis, Beth Shean

Zusammenfassung: Der Bericht katalogisiert und kontextualisiert die Fundmünzen aus den Grabungskampagnen 2019 und 2020 des deutsch-israelischen archäologischen Projekts auf dem Tell Izṭabba (Beth Shean). Der Großteil der Münzen ist hellenistisch und steht in Zusammenhang mit der seleukidischen Besiedlung des Ortes. Obwohl die Gesamtanzahl der Münzen klein ist, trägt sie doch zu unserem Verständnis der Siedlungsgeschichte der Stadt und ihrer turbulenten Geschichte bei.

Schlagwörter: Fundmünzen, Seleukiden, Tell Iztabba, Nysa-Skythopolis, Beth Shean

1. The site and the German-Israeli project

In 2019 and 2020, a joint German-Israeli team undertook fieldwork at Tell Izṭabba in the Beth Shean basin in the western Jordan Valley (Figs 1 and 2). In February 2019 magnetic prospections were carried out at the site, and in September 2019 and February 2020 excavations took place in selected areas¹.

Tell Izṭabba is the site of the Seleucid founded settlement of Nysa-Scythopolis. It was established under King Antiochus IV (in the 160s BCE) and was destroyed by the Hasmonaean John Hyrcanus in 108/107 BCE². The site seems subsequently to have remained mostly abandoned until the Late Roman and Byzantine periods, when Christian buildings and a Samaritan synagogue were erected. The late Hellenistic and Roman settlement moved further south in the area of the biblical Tell Beth Shean, where a prosperous city developed.

The site of Tell Izṭabba has been subject to archaeological exploration since the 1950s. The most significant fieldwork was undertaken under the aegis of the Israel Antiquities

Authority in the 1990s, when the Late Antique structures in the western part of Tell Izṭabba and the Seleucid domestic buildings in the eas-

- The excavations form part of a German-Israeli research project 'Tell Iztabba (Nysa-Scythopolis): High-resolution Hellenistic Settlement Archaeology and the Reassessment of the Formation of the Decapolis, mainly funded by the German-Israeli Foundation for Scientific Research and Development (GIF Regular Program [grant I-150-108.7-2017]), to which we are grateful. The project was licensed by the Israel Antiquities Authority (G-70/2019; G-17/2020) and the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (A-014/19; A-020/20). We thank Diana Medellin Martinez (Laboratory for Conservation of Metallic Artifacts of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University) for cleaning the coins, as well as Stephan Heidemann, Cathy Lorber and Danny Syon for commenting on selected coins, and Yoav Farhi for reviewing an earlier version of the manuscript. Thanks also go to Donald T. Ariel for helpful comments and registering the coins at the Israel Antiquities Authority. For project reports cf. Ebeling – Edrey – Harpak – Lichtenberger – Tal 2019; 2020; Lichtenberger – Meyer – Tal 2020; Orendi – Lichtenberger – Tal 2021; Jackson-Tal – Lichtenberger - Tal 2021.
- ² For an historical overview of Hellenistic Nysa-Scythopolis and a research history of the site cf. the above-noted project's reports, with further bibliography.

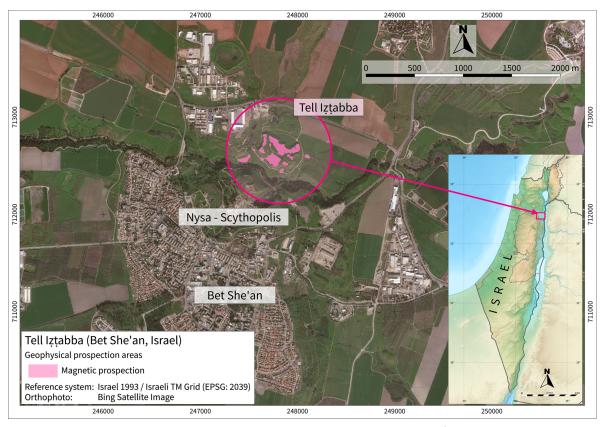


Fig. 1: Location of Tell Izṭabba (Small map: Eric Gaba and NordNordWest (GFDL/CC-BY-SA 3.0) (copyright: German-Israeli Tell Izṭabba Excavation Project)



Fig. 2: Tell Izṭabba (East), looking southwest (copyright: German-Israeli Tell Izṭabba Excavation Project)



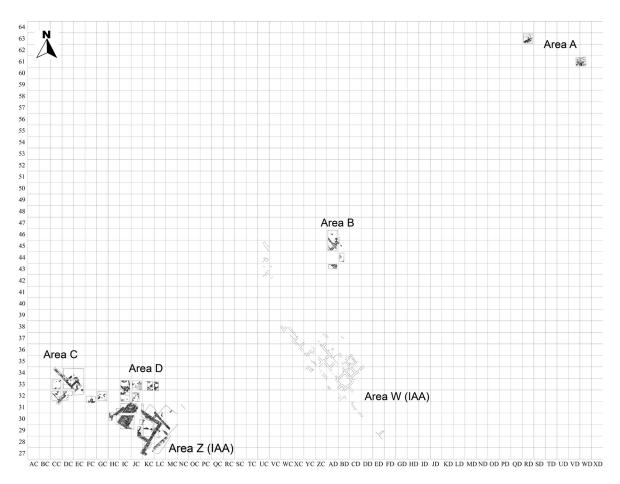


Fig. 3: Plan of Tell Izṭabba (East) (copyright: German-Israeli Tell Izṭabba Excavation Project)

tern part of the mound were excavated. The results of these excavations are currently in the process of publication³. The new German-Israeli project, directed by the authors, seeks to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the Seleucid settlement at Tell Izṭabba (East). In the course of our two seasons of excavations four areas (A–D) were explored **(Fig. 3)**.

In Area A, mostly Byzantine remains were found and excavated; while Areas B and C yielded Hellenistic domestic remains, as did Area D, in which a significant Byzantine building and a few Roman architectural remains were also uncovered. In the following, we present a catalogue of the coins found during the two excavation seasons and provide a preliminary contextualization. The number of coins is of course too limited to draw far-reaching conclusions; and, indeed, the as yet unpublished coin catalogue of the Israel Antiquities Authority exca-

vations is much larger (numbering around 450 coins)⁴. However, since the 2019–2020 excavations funded by the German-Israeli Foundation constituted only the first phase of a multi-year project, we present the results of this initial phase of the project with the purpose of expanding the published corpus of coin finds. The coins have been identified as follows:

⁴ The coins will be published by Yoav Farhi, Jerusalem (Farhi Forthcoming).



³ See Mazor – Atrash – Finkielsztejn 2018.

Ptolemies		1
Seleucids	Total	22
	Seleucus IV (187–175 BCE)	1
	Antiochus IV (175–164 BCE) or Demetrius I (161–150 BCE)	1
	Antiochus VII (138–129 BCE)	1
	Alexander II Zabinas (128–122 BCE)	4+10 (hoard)
	Antiochus VIII (121/0–97/6 BCE)	1
	Antiochus IX (114/113–95 BCE)	1
	Seleucid unidentified	3
Civic	Ptolemais (Ake)	4
Hellenistic unidentified		2
Late Roman and Byzantine		6
Abbasids		2
Total		27+10 (hoard)

2. Hellenistic occupation and coins

The Hellenistic coins from the German-Israeli Tell Iztabba excavations mostly belong to 2ndcentury BCE Seleucid bronze currency. This accords with the assumed foundation of the Seleucid settlement under Antiochus IV. Most of the coins originate from Seleucid domestic strata. A few earlier coins, from Seleucus IV and the Ptolemies, possibly relate to older currency that was still in circulation. A similar situation is encountered at neighboring trans-Jordanian sites. These include Gerasa of the Decapolis, established at the same time as Nysa (Tell Iztabba), where some older Ptolemaic coins were found⁵; Decapolitan Gadara, where some Ptolemaic coins were excavated, although the majority of the Hellenistic material is from the post-Antiochus IV period⁶; and Pella, another neighboring center of the Decapolis with an analogous foundation history and featuring a similar distribution of Hellenistic coin finds⁷.

There are, however, also differences. One notable difference is that of the comparatively large number of coins of Alexander II Zabinas found at Tell Izṭabba, and for which the coin hoard – not included in this report – still needs to be counted. However, this high proportion of coins from Alexander II Zabinas has been

dealt with elsewhere⁸. Another apparent difference to the coins found in the aforementioned Decapolis cities, is the termination of Seleucid coins under Antiochus IX at Tell Iztabba following the Hasmonean destruction. The latest coin found in the German-Israeli excavations dates to 111/110 BCE, shortly before the destruction of the settlement by John Hyrcanus in 108/107 BCE. Although the capture of the city is reported by Josephus in Ant. 13,280 (see also War 1,66), the absolute date for the site's destruction comes from the evidence of the Rhodian stamped handles retrieved from the site. Prior to our own expedition three other excavations had been carried out at the site, yielding a total of over 360 stamps, with the majority being Rhodian. The latest Rhodian stamp recovered from the site is related to the latest eponym of Period V, namely 108 BCE⁹. This evidence would seem to coincide

- ⁵ Lichtenberger Raja 2020, 379.
- ⁶ Noeske 2013, 139.
- Sheedy Carson Walmsley 2001, 6.
- ⁸ Lichtenberger Tal 2020. For the textile remains attached to the coins from the hoard cf. Shamir Lichtenberger Tal 2021.
- ⁹ Mazor Atrash Finkielsztejn 2018, 19.



with the latest coins recovered during the Israel Antiquities Authority excavations (R. Bar-Nathan and G. Mazor): namely, Antiochus IX coins, of <u>SC's 2388 type</u> (below cat. no. 10), which are known from the Seleucid era 201, 202 and 204 (= 108/107 BCE), in contrast to the total absence of coins from Antiochus VIII's third reign in Antioch (109–96 BCE)¹⁰.

Noteworthy among the Hellenistic coins are the four civic coins from Ptolemais (Ake). In neighboring Pella, too, the Hellenistic civic coins are predominantly from Ptolemais¹¹, suggesting direct trade links between Pella and this Mediterranean harbor city, which was easily accessible via the Jezreel Valley. Civic coins from Ptolemais have also been found in Gerasa, as have coins from other Phoenician cities such as Tyre¹².

3. Late Roman and Byzantine occupation and coins

The gap in coin finds between Antiochus IX and the Late Roman period matches what is known archaeologically to date about Tell Izṭabba. In the Roman period, this area was not part of the rebuilt Greco-Roman city but was occupied by necropoleis¹³. To date, no tombs have been found in the plateau's eastern part of Tell Izṭabba, where the German-Israeli excavations were carried out, suggesting that there was little Roman occupation in this area. However, this assumption should be treated with caution, as during our 2020 excavations we also reached possible Roman strata¹⁴.

In Area D, the German-Israeli Tell Izṭabba Excavation Project unearthed Late Roman and Byzantine structures¹⁵, and although the nature of these structures has not yet been determined with certainty, they seem to have been related to the ecclesiastical and monastic buildings uncovered in the western part of the mound, as well as to construction of the Byzantine-period fortifications that cross Tell Izṭabba from east to west.

4. Early Islamic coins

The absence of Umayyad coin finds during the German-Israeli Tell Iztabba Excavation Project is noteworthy. This might suggest that the area was at least partly abandoned in the Late Byzantine period and before the earthquake of 749 CE¹⁶. It can be assumed that the Islamic conquest of the region may have led to a decline in ecclesiastical and monastic activity in this area, but also the transfer of the provincial capital of Jund al-Urdunn to Tiberias probably contributed to a significant loss in importance. The splendid Abbasid dirham of 804 CE and the Abbasid cast fals, found at the site, do little to alter this picture of sparse early Islamic activity, since these isolated coin finds belong to the post-749 CE occupation of the Beth Shean area.

5. Conclusions

In the above we have provided a few preliminary observations on the site's occupational history via its coin finds. Future publications and excavations are expected to further enhance our understanding of the site's occupational history through its material culture. The German-Israeli Tell Izṭabba Excavation Project is currently an ongoing research project; and we intend to continue excavations at the site in order to gain a better understanding of its economic basis and cultural interactions with other Mediterranean centers during its periods of successive occupation.

- G. Mazor, Y. Farhi, pers. comm.
- 11 Sheedy Carson Walmsley 2001, 6.
- ¹² Lichtenberger Raja 2020, 379.
- ¹³ NEAEHL, s.v. Beit Shean.
- ¹⁴ Ebeling Edrey Harpak Lichtenberger Tal 2020.
- Ebeling Edrey Harpak Lichtenberger Tal 2019; Ebeling – Edrey – Harpak – Lichtenberger – Tal 2020.
- On Beth Shean in the Early Islamic period and its loss in importance cf. Tsafrir Foerster 1997, 135–146 (p. 140 on the abandonment of Tell Iztabba).



6. Catalogue of the coins

(All coins are enlarged on plates 1–5 at the end of this article, pp. 49–53)

Ptolemies

Cat. no. 1) Area B



0 _____ 3 cm

L233; B2180 (IAA no. 178560) **(Fig. 4)** Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283/2–246 BCE), hemiobol, reformed coinage, c. 265–261/0 BCE; beveled flan; central cavities

Obv. Horned head of Zeus-Ammon r.

Rev. [ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ], eagle standing on thunderbolt to I.; spread wings; control between eagle's legs

Æ, Ø19 mm, 4.84 g; axis 12

Ref. <u>CPE Part I.2, 57, no. B239</u> (O between eagle's legs) or <u>59, no. B260</u> (O between eagle's legs)

Seleucids

Seleucus IV (187–175 BCE)



Cat. no. 2) Area B

L235; B2185 (IAA no. 178561) **(Fig. 5)** Seleucus IV Philopator, Antioch (187–175 BCE); serrated flan

Obv. Laureate head of Apollo r.; illegible monogram on l. field

Rev. BAΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΣΕΛΕΥΚΟΥ, Apollo standing I., holding arrow, leaning on tripod; Primary control on inner I. field AB; secondary control below it A; central cavity

Æ, Ø22 mm, 9.07 gr; axis 12 Ref. SC II, 15–16, no 1315.7

Antiochus IV (175–164 BCE) or Demetrius I (161–150 BCE)

Cat. no. 3) Area B





3 cm

L205; B2055 (IAA no. 178549) **(Fig. 6)** Antiochus IV Epiphanes or Demetrius I Soter, Tyre; beveled flan

Obv. Head of Antiochus IV r., diademed; central cavity

Rev. [...] (curving) r., [...] (curving) l., Palm tree \not E, \not O15 mm, 2.72 g; axis 12

Ref. <u>SC II, 85, no. 1462</u> or <u>SC II, 180, no. 1676</u>; see also Syon 2014, 128, table 5.23; cf. nos. 208–233

Antiochus VII (139/8-130/129 BCE)

Cat. no. 4) Area B





L211; B2089 (IAA no. 178555) **(Fig. 7)** *Antiochus VII Euergetes [Sidetes], Antioch*(139/8–130/129 BCE)

Obv. Lion head r., dotted border

Rev. [B] $A\Sigma I A E \Omega \Sigma$ ANTIOXOY in two lines, EYEPFETOY on I., vertical club; below (worn) date; control mark on outer I. field ligatured ΔI above an uncertain symbol

Æ, Ø15 mm, 2.23 g; axis 12 Ref. SC II, 368–369, no. 2068



Alexander II Zabinas (129/8–122 BCE)

Cat. no. 5) Area B



L201; B2006 (IAA no. 178544) **(Fig. 8)** *Alexander II Zabinas, Antioch (129/8–126/5 BCE); beveled flan*

Obv. Head of Alexander II Zabinas r., diademed; fillet border

Rev. $BA\Sigma I\Lambda E[\Omega\Sigma]$ / $A\Lambda E[\Xi AN\Delta POY]$; Dionysus standing I. holding thyrsus

Æ, Ø21 mm, 6.48 g; axis 12 Ref. Cf. SC II, 453–454, no. 2229

Cat. no. 6) Area B

beveled flan



L205; B2052 (IAA no. 178548) **(Fig. 9)** *Alexander II Zabinas, Antioch (125–122 BCE);*

Obv. Head of Alexander II r., diademed; circular border

Rev. [BASIΛΕΩΣ AΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ] in two lines; two filleted cornucopiae, splayed and intertwined. In r., field, Σ ; in l. field, A

Æ, Ø20 mm, 6.95 g; axis 11 Ref. <u>SC II, 456, no. 2235.1e–1f</u>

Cat. no. 7) Area B



L209; B2090 (IAA no. 178551) **(Fig. 10)**Alexander II Zabinas; serrated flan; perhaps
Apameia on the Orontes (129/8–122 BCE),
however see comments in SC II, p. 459 regard-

ing this attribution.

Obv. Head of young Dionysus r., wreath with ivy, dotted border

Rev. $[BA\Sigma I \Lambda E\Omega\Sigma$ on r., $A\Lambda E\Xi AN\Delta POY$ on l.,] winged Tyche standing l., calathus on head, holding ship's tiller and cornucopia.

Æ, Ø19 mm, 5.42 g; axis 12 Ref. SC II, 458–459, no. 2242

Cat. no. 8) Area C



L357; B3269 (IAA no. 178562) **(Fig. 11)** Alexander II Zabinas; serrated flan; perhaps Apameia on the Orontes (129/8–122 BCE), however see comments in SC II, p. 459 regarding this attribution.

Obv. Head of young Dionysus r., wreath with ivy, dotted border

Rev. [B]ΑΣΙΛΕΩΑΣ on r., [ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ] on l., winged Tyche standing l., calathus on head, holding ship's tiller and cornucopia

Æ, Ø19 mm, 5.19 g; axis 12 Ref. SC II, 458–459, no. 2242

Antiochus VIII (121/0-97/6 BCE)

Cat. no. 9) Area B



L209; B2088 (IAA no. 178550) **(Fig. 12)** Antiochus VIII Grypus, Antioch (121/0–114/3 BCE)

Obv. Head of Antiochus VIII r., diademed and radiate

Rev. BA Σ I Λ [E $\Omega\Sigma$ /ANTIOXOY]; on r.; [E Π I Φ A-NOY Σ] on l. Eagle with closed wings stg. l.

Æ, Ø19 mm, 4.23 g; axis 12

Ref. Cf. SC II, 500-501, no. 2300



Antiochus IX (114/113-95 BCE)

Cat. no. 10) Area D





0 3 cm

L478; B4423 (IAA no. 178565) **(Fig. 13)** Antiochus IX Philopator; beveled flan; mint, probably in Phoenicia (111/110 BCE).

Obv. Bust of winged Eros r.; dotted border Rev. [BA Σ IΛΕ $\Omega\Sigma$ ANTIOXOY] in two lines on r., ΦΙΛΟΠΑΤΟΡΟ Σ on l.; Nike advancing l., holding wreath. In l., field, date, B Σ (202 = 111/110 BCE)

Æ, Ø19 mm, 3.99 g; axis 12 Ref. <u>SC II, 544, no. 2388.2/3</u>

Seleucids unidentified

Cat. no. 11) Area B





L233; B2179 (IAA no. 178559) Swollen flan (4 mm) Obv. Head of a Seleucid king r.

Rev. Worn

Cot no 13) Amas D

Æ, Ø15 mm, 2.93 g

Cat. no. 12) Area B





L202; B2011 (IAA no. 178545)

Obv. Worn Rev. Worn

Æ, Ø20 mm, 4.64 g

Cat. no. 13) Area B





3 cm

L232; B2189 (IAA no. 178558) **(Fig. 16)** Swollen flan (4 mm)

Obv. Worn Rev. Worn Æ, Ø15 mm, 1.92 g

Civic

Cat. no. 14) Area B





0 ______ 3 cm

L209; B2110 (IAA no. 178553) (Fig. 17)

Ptolemais (Ake), 169–164 BCE(?)
Obv. Jugate busts of the Dioscuri r.

Rev. [ANTIOXE Ω N/T Ω N/EN/ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΔΙ];

cornucopia; in I. field, A Æ, Ø14 mm, 2.01 g; axis 12 Ref. Cf. CHL 8, nos. 68–74

Cat. no. 15) Area C



(Fig. 14)



L338; B3297 (IAA no. 178564) **(Fig. 18)** *Ptolemais (Ake), 169–164 BCE(?)*

Obv. Jugate busts of the Dioscuri r.

Rev. [ANTIOXE Ω N/T Ω N/EN/ Π TO Λ EMAI Δ I]; cornucopia

Æ, Ø13 mm, 1.21 g; axis 12

(Fig. 15) Ref. Cf. CHL: 8, nos. 68-74



Cat. no. 16) Area B





L202; B2013 (IAA no. 178546)

(Fig. 19)

Ptolemais (Ake), ca. 164–133 BCE Obv. Head of Zeus r., laureate

Rev. [ANTIOXEQ]N T[Ω N] / EN Π TO Λ EM[AI Δ I] / IEPA Σ A Σ [Y Λ OY]; Zeus standing I., holding ears of grain in r. and scepter in l.

Æ, Ø18 mm, 3.32 g; axis 12

Ref. Kadman 1961, 102–103, nos. 55–58

Cat. no. 17) Area B





(Fig. 20)

L203; B2023 (IAA no. 178547) Ptolemais (Ake), ca. 164-133 BCE

Obv. Head of Zeus r., laureate Rev. [ANTIOX]E Ω [N T Ω N / EN Π TO] Λ EM[AI Δ I] / IEPA Σ A Σ [Y Λ OY]; Zeus standing I., holding ears of grain in r. and scepter in l.

Æ, Ø19 mm, 2.39 g; axis 12

Ref. Kadman 1961, 102–103, nos. 55–58

Hellenistic unidentified

Cat. no. 18) Area B





L209; B2111 (IAA no. 178554)

(Fig. 21)

Obv. Worn Rev. Worn

Æ, Ø15 mm, 1.96 g

Cat. no. 19) Area B





L209; B2094 (IAA no. 178552)

(Fig. 22)

Obv. Worn

Rev. Worn; corroded surface

Æ, Ø11 mm, 1.34 g

Late Roman and Byzantine

Constantius II (351–361 CE)

Cat. no. 20) Area B





L232; B2175 (IAA no. 178556)

(Fig. 23)

Broken

Obv. [D N CONSTANTIVS] P F AVG; draped and cuirassed bust of Constantius II r.

Rev. [FEL TEMP RE]PARATIO; soldier spearing fallen horseman I.

Æ, \varnothing 17 mm, 1.79 g; axis 12

Theodosius I (379–395 CE) / Arcadius (383– 408 CE)

Cat. no. 21) Area A





L101; B1018 (IAA no. 178539)

(Fig. 24)

Uncertain mint, Nummus

Obv. Remnants of draped and cuirassed bust Rev. SAL[VS REI PVBLICAE]; Victory advancing I. dragging captive, in field I. ₽

Æ, Ø13 mm, 1.16 g; axis 12



(Fig. 25)

(Fig. 26)

Unidentified

Cat. no. 22) Area A



L103; B1016 (IAA no. 178540)

Late Roman-Byzantine?

Obv. Head r.

Rev. Standing figure

Æ, Ø9 mm, 0.72 g

Cat. no. 23) Area B



L201; B2002 (IAA no. 178543) Late Roman-Byzantine Obv. Bust r. Rev. Nike, holding wreath(?) Æ, Ø11 mm, 0.96 g

Cat. no. 24) Area B



L232; B2178 (IAA no. 178557)

Broken

Obv. Bust r.

Rev. Helmeted soldier?

Æ, Ø17 mm, 0.84 g; axis 12

Cat. no. 25) Area A



L103; B1017 (IAA no. 178541)

Byzantine?

Broken

Obv. Worn

Rev. Worn

Æ, Ø14 mm, 0.35 g

Abbasids

Cat. no. 26) Area C



L332, B3161 (IAA no. 178563) **(Fig. 29)** Harun al-Rashid (786–809 CE), Medinat al-Salam, 187 AH (= 802/3 CE)

Obv. Center: لا الله الا الله وحده لا شرك له (There is no deity except | God. He is alone | He has no equal);

بسم الله ضرب هذا الدرهم بمدينة margin: السلام سنة سبع و تمنين و مئة

(In the name of Allah, this dirham was struck at Madinat al-Salam year seven and eighty and one hundred)

Rev. Center: محمد رسول الله (Muhammad | is the messenger of | God); محمد رسول الله ارسله بالهدى و دين الحق ليظهره على الدين كله و لو كره المشركون

> (Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, he has sent him with the guidance and the religion of truth to proclaim it over all religion even if the polytheists detest it)

(Fig. 27) Silver dirham, Ø24 mm, 2.94 g; axis 6 Ref. Savage 1999, 171, no. 1374

Cat. no. 27) Area A



(Fig. 28) L103; B1024 (IAA no. 178542) (Fig. 30)

*Presumably northern Syria, Jazira, al-Raqqa, 183 AH (= 799/800 CE)

Obv. Worn

Rev. Worn; three lines of illegible Arabic inscription, pentagram above
Æ Fals, cast, ∅19 mm, 2.48 g

Ref. Heidemann 2003, 118–120



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Fig. 10: Cat. no. 7



Fig. 11: Cat. no. 8



Fig. 12: Cat. no. 9



PLATE 3



Fig. 13: Cat. no. 10



Fig. 14: Cat. no. 11



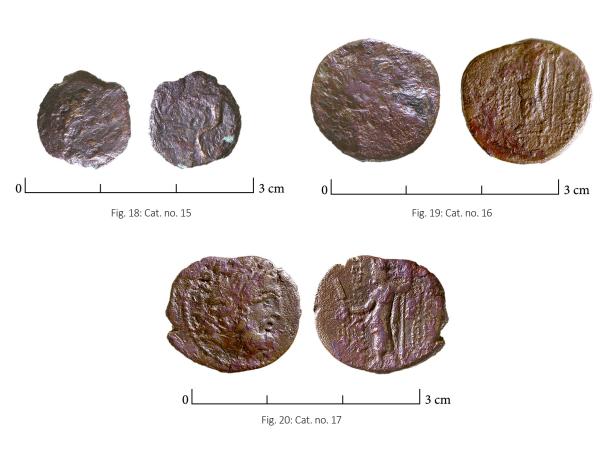
Fig. 15: Cat. no. 12



Fig. 16: Cat. no. 13 Fig. 17: Cat. no. 14



PLATE 4





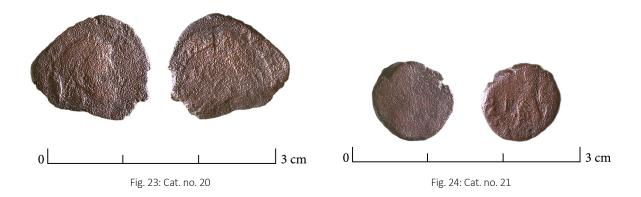


PLATE 5

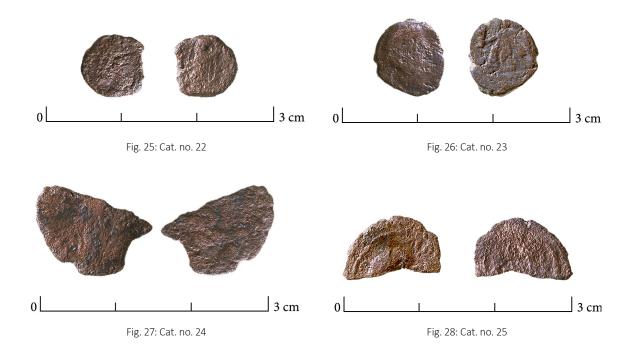






Fig. 30: Cat. no. 27

