



Cecilia Meir  
*ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROJEECTS OF  
THE ERETZ ISRAEL MUSEUM*

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## **ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROJECTS OF THE ERETZ ISRAEL MUSEUM**

**Cecilia Meir**

*Eretz Israel Museum*

*Kadman Numismatic Pavillion*

The subject of my lecture today is the display of coins which I organised, as a part of the permanent exhibition in the Museum of Antiquities of Jaffa, a branch of the Eretz-Israel Museum.

The city of Jaffa derives its importance from the ancient port built on its shores some 3,500 years ago.

The excavations of ancient Jaffa, from the early fifties to the early seventies unearthed about 900 coins from all periods of occupation as well as a hoard of 800 small coins retrieved in 1949.

The earliest coins we found date from the Persian period (4th cent B.C.E.). They attest to the Sidonian settlement of Jaffa at that time. After Alexander's conquest in 332 B.C.E., Jaffa became a Greek city, ruled at first by the Ptolemies who operated a royal mint in Jaffa for almost 100 years. Later on the city was ruled by the Seleucids. The Seleucids lost Jaffa in 135 B.C.E. to the Hasmonaean Maccabees, who made it the port for Judaea. In the days of the Hasmonaean and the Herodean from 135 B.C.E. to 70 C.E. a Jewish community was founded in Jaffa as a Roman city. In the 7th cent. C.E. Jaffa was conquered by the Arabs, who governed it until it fell to the Crusaders in the 11th cent. The city was devastated in the battles fought between the Crusaders and the Muslims, although the port continued to operate through the Mamluk and into the Ottoman period.

As mentioned above, all of the 800 coins of the hoard found in Jaffa are of a very small size (11-12 mm.) and belong to the star/anchor type, of the Hasmonaean King Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.E.). The hoard was sent to Jerusalem, to the Department of Antiquities, for conservation and keeping.

Jerusalem is located in the mountains far from the humid coast. Its dry climate preserved the coins in a remarkably good state.

Unfortunately, most of the 900 coins which were unearthed in the stratigraphic excavations conducted by Dr. Kaplan were not sent to Jerusalem but remained in Jaffa by the sea. Consequently these coins were in a very poor state of preservation. They had been kept in paper envelopes, till last year when I started to work on them. About 200 small coins of the late Roman period were in a regrettably poor condition and were not worth investing any conservation efforts. Therefore I left them as they were.

The rest of the coins were in different states of preservation. Some of the coins were in good condition with a preserved patina and I could identify them without any special effort. Those I didn't clean. Others needed only a very light mechanical cleaning to identify them, some needed more work. However, among the most hard to clean was a group of 20 pieces of what I thought then, were pieces of mineralized stones. I could not tell if there was a coin underneath the encrustation or not. I could only tell they were so round, so probably, with good luck, I thought, I would be able to find coins underneath the encrustation.

I started cleaning them by mechanical means with a scalpel and a pin pick under a microscope. Little by little pieces of bronze appeared with parts of a galley or a chariot. At the end of the process I had to use chemicals because the mechanical cleaning was not sufficient. As I had already two clean Sidonian coins from Straton I (slide) the Sidonian King from the 4th cent. B.C.E., and since historical sources reveal that during this period Jaffa was given to Sidon, in exchange for the fleet which the Sidonians placed under the command of the King of Persia, I concluded that the poorly preserved coins were the coins of King Straton I. In most of the coins I cleaned, only parts of the design were recognizable. However it was evident to me that they were struck by one and the same die. I maintain that these coins were part of a small hoard, since all of them came from the same location site although they were found in different excavation seasons.

These coins confirm the history of Jaffa being a Sidonian colony during this time.

When I finished cleaning all the coins by removing only the corrosion and trying to preserve all the valuable information on them, I selected some for the exhibition. Coins which had been cleaned by chemicals were treated with several coats of Benzotriazol to protect them.

Now the exhibition of the Jaffa Museum includes the hoard of the 800 coins and a choice of another 300 coins, from the Persian to the Ottoman period demonstrating how the city passed from hand to hand changing rulers frequently.

The exhibition hall is air conditioned to cope with the humidity problems and each display case has a certain quantity of silica gel to minimize the RH levels. The rest of the coins were transferred to Jerusalem, to the Department of Antiquities. There, they are kept in open plastic trays specially designed for coins in metal cabinets which are placed in a store-room with controlled air conditioning day and night.