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Genuine Imitations: Jewish Use of Pseudo-Coins

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IN October 1979, Ya'akov Meshorer delivered a paper before the American Numismatic Society in New York City entitled "False Shekels from the Renaissance", as the David M. Bullowa Memorial Lecturer.¹ The subject of fantasy coinages, deriving in some way from biblical, aggadic and other rabbinic sources, had long interested him and on this occasion, he described to a general audience a modest number of such "imaginative" pseudo-coins which bore Hebrew inscriptions. His interpretive framework was broad and he did not attempt to assign specific dates to specific pieces, though he suggested that the majority were post-Renaissance. Professor Meshorer was not the first scholar of biblical antiquity to consider the place of such fantasies in numismatics. J.H. Hottinger in the 17th century, F.P. Bayer in the 18th century, F. Madden, T. Reinach and M.A. Levy in the 19th century, and G.F. Hill, S. Raffaelli, M. Narkiss, and B. Kisch in the 20th century, and indeed many others, including, recently, H. Gitler at the Israel Museum, have touched upon such items in the course of systematic study of ancient Jewish Coinage.² Hill and Kisch have specifically focused on the so-called Goerlitz Shekels, also known as False Shekels or Shekel Medals. M. Narkiss has given the most complete listing and explanation to date of what he termed "imaginary coins". Thus far, however, relatively little effort has been made to address the question of which coins may have been made by or specifically for Jews, and to distinguish those from the great majority of such pseudo-coins, which are believed by all authorities to have been made by and for Christians. The present essay attempts to identify the few of those coin-like fantasies which may indeed have been made by or for Jews, or at least with close attention

¹ Lecture Oct. 13, 1979. *Coin World*, Nov. 27, 1979, p.73-76.

² J.H. Hottinger: *Cippi Hebraici*, Heidelberg, 1659, 159 pp., iv plates, index; 1662, 188 pp., VI plates, index. F.P. Bayer: *De Nummis Hebraeo-Samaritanus*, Valencia, 1781, 245 pp., ill. xxi, index; 1790, 210 pp., ill., xxiv, index. M.A. Levy: *Geschichte der Jüdischen Münzen*, Leipzig, 1862, 163 pp., ill. F.W. Madden: *History of Jewish Coinage*, London, 1864, 350 pp., ill.; Idem, *Coins of the Jews*, Boston, 1881, 329 pp., ill. Th. Reinach, *Les monnaies juives*, Paris, 1887, 74 pp., ill., *Jewish Coins*, (translated by Mary Hill, with appendix by G.F. Hill), London, 1903, 77 pp., ill. + xii, plates. S. Raffaelli: *Jewish Coins*, Jerusalem, 1913, 199 pp., 35 plates. G.F. Hill: The False Shekels, in *The Medallist Portraits of Christ, The False Shekels, The Thirty Pieces of Silver*; Oxford, 1920, pp. 78-90, Figs. 54-62. M. Narkiss: *Hebrew Imaginary Coins, Mizrah u-Maarav*, 2, Fasc. 2, 1928, pp. 103-114, 1 plate (Hebrew). *Coins of Palestine I, Jewish Coins*, Jerusalem, 1936, pp. 86-89, 148-149, Pl. 10 (Hebrew). B.Kisch: *Shekel Medals and False Shekels*, reprinted from *Historia Judaica* 3, No.2, (1941), 39 pp., xi plates. H. Gitler: More than Money, at <http://2002.imj.org.il/coins/learn.html>.

to Jewish traditions. It is necessary to note at the outset that the anonymity of the issuers of such items and the very low esteem in which such pieces were long held by classical numismatists, coin dealers and collectors alike makes it virtually impossible to establish with certainty the identification of the circumstances or intention of their production and publication.

TERMINOLOGY

In numismatics, the terms *forgery*, *fake* and *false* generally connote coins made with the intent to deceive recipients or users, whether the coin is to circulate as currency or as collectible artifact. *Imaginary* or *fantasy* coins generally carry the implication that only the ignorant would be likely to consider such an object "real". *Pseudo-coins* or *coin imitations* are, by definition, not genuine currency, but the intent of their makers is indeterminate. Medals, of course, make no pretense to monetary usage, current or past; even a moderately sophisticated numismatist would, presumably, be unlikely to confuse a coin and a medal. To these traditional numismatic terminologies must be added at least three other non-numismatic categories which belong to entirely different heuristics: *amulets*, wearable protective items irrespective of their form; *souvenirs*, which are meant to evoke an experience, usually in the present, but also of past events; and what one might term *educational aids*, usually for religious instruction, where the instructor understands that the item is not original but the student, perhaps, does not. *Copy* and *facsimile* are basically neutral terms that may often be used positively, imitation being a traditionally sincere mark of admiration, but also, alternatively, may serve as derogatives. This brief excursus is necessary because the various designations listed above, all of which have been used in the past to describe the coin-like objects under consideration here, have been weighted with value judgment; the genuine being prized while all other categories were treated with suspicion, if not actually despised. It should now be clear that, at least from the viewpoints of historians and many other social scientists, every artifact is in a very real sense as genuine or real as every other. Of course, a 17th or 19th century coin calling itself a shekel on its face is obviously not a shekel of the first century, but it is genuine in the sense of having been created and used for some purpose even as its "original" model was, albeit in a different time and place, and very likely for different purpose. At the present time, thanks to extensive publication of genuine ancient coinage, the danger of a scholar or a collector mistaking a pseudo-coin for an ancient coin is vanishingly small. Obviously, the hazard of forgeries directly duplicating and impersonating rare and valuable ancient coins remains, but this issue is not the focus of this essay.³ What terms should then be preferred in

³ Up until the early 20th century, the main treatment of imitation shekels and other pseudo-coins in the numismatic literature was primarily focused on warning readers

identifying the objects considered in the present article? No consensus has yet emerged in the modern numismatic literature, but the author will distinguish two categories, apart from ancient coins: *imitation shekels* (also, occasionally, *shekel-medals*, or, as appropriate, *Goerlitzer shekels*) and other *fantasy* or *imaginary coins* for which no actual, but usually literary models give inspiration. The term *pseudo-coins* seems reasonable for comprehending both groups.

IMITATION SHEKELS

Probably more than 95% of extant coin-like objects with Hebrew epigraphy, whose appearance or text classify them as pseudo-coins are imitations of the ancient Jewish shekel of the First Revolt, 66–70 C.E. Such imitations are often described indiscriminately as Goerlitzer shekels in both trade and collector literature of the late 19th and 20th centuries, but this is a misleading oversimplification. It is certainly a reasonable inference that many of the approximately one hundred fifty known varieties of imitation shekels were produced in Goerlitz, a city in eastern Germany, on the present German Polish border. As is well known, there is in Goerlitz a replica of Jesus' presumed sepulcher in Jerusalem, which has been a popular site of veneration, attracting Christian pilgrims from the late 15th century to the present day.⁴ It is also well documented that among the attractions in the treasury of this shrine were a series of coins believed to be examples of the thirty ancient silver coins for which Jesus was said to have been betrayed. At least since the 18th century, but probably as early as two hundred years earlier, struck and cast reproductions of these purported coins of Judas were sold to pilgrims. Unfortunately, documentation that might have established which of the many surviving imitation shekels were actually made in Goerlitz, or specifically to be sold in Goerlitz, is almost entirely lacking. Thus, while the earliest forms of these imitations, which are depicted in printed works and in paintings from the 16th century onward, may have derived from the Goerlitz pilgrimage, it is also entirely possible that the "coins" in the sepulcher treasury were themselves imitations which had originated elsewhere. Consequently, the sequence of filiation among the many types of imitation shekels, and the place where specific types were minted is far from certain. What is known is that large quantities of imitation shekels were manufactured and distributed to pilgrims elsewhere over succeeding centuries, in

against mistaking such fabrications, then termed forgeries, for genuine ancient coins. This aspect of numismatics remains of concern to collectors, dealers, curators and other scholars, but it is not the subject of the present paper. For a treatment of fake ancient Jewish coins, including shekels, meant to deceive collectors of the present and the recent past, see D. Hendin: *Not Kosher: Forgeries of Ancient Jewish and Biblical Coins*, New York, 2005.

⁴ Kisch, (above, n. 1), pp. 26–28. I. Ander and M. Winzeler: *Lausitzer Jerusalem: 500 Jahre Heiliges Grab zu Goerlitz*, Goerlitz-Zittau, 2005.

Prague, Hamburg, Munich, Nürnberg and probably many other Central European cities.⁵ There is also evidence that these objects were marketed and perceived by Christians as symbolic of Jesus' betrayal and, quite possibly by many, as actual ancient coins or relics. They are not infrequently found mounted and were doubtless used as amulets.

Very large numbers of shekel imitations, not made in Goerlitz but clearly deriving from earlier Central European models, were manufactured in England in the mid-to-late 19th century and in the first part of the 20th century. Some distinctive English types were struck with the name of their manufacturer on the coin itself; others, sold in boxes or with inserted slips of paper which locate their distributors, may or may not have been actually minted in England. The box or insert labels sometimes make clear that such pieces were marketed as copies or facsimiles of "genuine" ancient shekels; at other times, the package insert misidentifies the shekels as genuine.⁶ A specific subtype of the English type of shekel was marketed and possibly also manufactured in New York in 1857.⁷ In cases where the advertising for these English types survives, an impression is given that they were meant to inspire piety, perhaps in schools, and as tokens of remembrance of Jesus' betrayal, but they seem not to have been treated as actual relics, mounted, or used for amuletic protection.

Imitation shekels, whether English or Continental, display a typical iconography, albeit with many variations (see Figs. A-F). Their obverses show a footed vessel with smoke rising from its top, a type which apparently derives from a misunderstanding of genuine shekels of the First Revolt. The latter had a footed cup-form vessel surmounted by the Hebrew date. The traditional imitations seem to have understood the ancient Paleo-Hebrew characters of the date as smoke, and the vessel itself as a censer from which the smoke issues forth, or alternatively as the "pot of manna". The reverses of imitation shekels show a leafing branch, rarely a tree, said by Christian commentators to be Aaron's rod which budded. This is a misunderstanding of the twig ending in three pomegranates found on ancient Jewish shekels of 66-70 C.E. The imitation coins almost invariably have the inscriptions שקל ישראל [Shekel of Israel] on the obverse side and ירושלים הקדושה [Holy Jerusalem] on the reverse. While these are correct with respect to the texts of the ancient shekels they seek to imitate, the letter forms are markedly different from their original models. Imitation shekels have square [Assyrian] אשורי characters, which are often corrupt in form, having presumably

⁵ Kisch (above, n. 1), pp.28-32; see P. Berghaus: Zu den Goerlitzer Schekeln und Aehnlichen Erdichteten Münzen, *Hamburger Beiträge zur Numismatik*, 12/13 (1958/59), pp. 199-203, Pl. 1:8 for an early 19th century Munich advertisement for an imitation shekel. Gitler, (above, n.1) illustrates an imitation shekel die in the Israel Museum, which appears to be linked to Nürnberg c. 1746.

⁶ See Hill, (above, n.1), p.82 for an advertisement insert for an English imitation shekel.

⁷ Kisch, (above, n.1), pp.29-30.

been copied by non-Jewish engravers or casters from earlier, already inaccurate pseudo-coins or book illustrations. Genuine ancient shekels display Paleo-Hebrew letter forms, of course.



Figs. A-F. English and Continental imitation shekels.

JEWISH USE OF IMITATION SHEKELS AND FANTASY COINS

While there is no positive proof that the above described imitation shekels were ever made for or actually used by Jews there are several lines of reasoning which lend credibility to such a speculation. First, is the requirement in *halakha* that first-born sons be redeemed using five silver shekels in the ceremony known as *pidyon ha-ben*. Biblical references remark on the shekel as a measurement of commercial weight but also speak of the *shekel ha-kodesh* as if it were a coin used for the temple tax. The Talmud and later rabbinic literature attempted to answer the question of what an ancient shekel coin might have looked like.⁸ Thus, the availability of silver imitation shekels for religious Jews, who probably had no idea of the appearance of a genuine ancient coin, might have either tempted some to use the self-declared "shekels" in *pidyon ha-ben*, or else to commission imitation shekels to be manufactured for their own use. Secondly, at Purim, there were various customs involving the shekel or half-shekel: exchanging gifts, giving money to the poor, paying a fee to the megilla reader and for use in children's games; all are attested and may have been the occasion for the creation of fantasy coins or imitation shekels by Jews.⁹ Thirdly, there were Jewish scholars whose research focused upon the many shekel references in halakhic literature and who may have been involved, as were learned Christian biblical students, in the consideration or sale of pseudo-antiquities along with their interest in the identification and publication of genuine articles.¹⁰ Finally, and most pertinent in the present context, is the fact that there exist some species of imitation shekels which, by reason of their unusual inscriptions, superior epigraphy or particular reference to rabbinic source material, may be of Jewish origin, or at least closely influenced by Jewish rather than general biblical antecedents. The first three categories above are, of course, reasons why pseudo-coins might have been useful to Jews or attested in literary sources. The fourth category, surviving coin-like artifacts which appear to have been made by Jews or with their culture in mind, is the main theme of this essay; specific examples and comments upon them are offered in the following listing.

CATALOGUE¹¹

1. A crudely cast and fractured 30 mm. bronze coin, weighing 13.4 gr. (Fig. 1). It combines the normal imitation shekel obverse type and legend with a reverse

⁸ Talmud Bavli: Baba Kama 97 b; Midrash Raba, Bereshit 99.

⁹ Narkiss (1928), (above, n. 1), p.110, No.18.

¹⁰ Azariah de' Rossi: *Me'or Enayim*, 1573.

¹¹ The specimens described in this catalogue were examined by the author and reside in a private collection with the exception of those which are specifically attributed to the collections of the Israel Museum and the Hermitage.

which has had the usual leafed branch replaced by an inscription שלמה המלך [King Solomon]. Furthermore, the letter forms of this inscription, which are in a semi-cursive Jewish hand, are distinctly different from those of the remainder of the text which is in the Italian or Ashkenazi square form normally associated with the earliest (16–17th century) type of imitation shekels. In general, imitations and fantasy shekels which name Solomon or David on them, presumably following the reference in Baba Kama 97b, are earlier than the 18th century, by which time imitation Goerlitz-type shekels had become more standardized and were produced in larger numbers than previously. Apparently, this form of shekel has never been previously published.



1

2. A cast 32 mm. silver coin, weighing 10.3 gr. (Fig. 2). This specimen of an otherwise typical early imitation shekel is distinctive in having the letters גז [GTZ] placed below the foot of the chalice or censer. There is a large dot to the left of the ג [TZ] and there may or may not be a point above the ג. It certainly seems likely that the additional two letters, which are of typically Ashkenazi Jewish form, are meant as a reference to the city of Goerlitz which, by the time this after-cast was produced, must have been associated in the mind of the maker with so common a type of imitation shekel. In Germanic countries, it was common to have a mint-mark, often an abbreviation of the city of origin, placed at the lower rim of the obverse of a coin, often at the 6 o'clock position. This shekel variety has not been previously published.



2

3. A cast 30 mm. silver specimen in the collection of the Israel Museum (Fig. 3) is also of a typical imitation shekel, but here the abbreviation: ת"ת כ' אלף

presumably standing for תלמוד תורה כתה אלף [Torah School, Class Alef], indicates that this copy was specifically made for a Hebrew school. Presumably it was used as a prize for an exemplary student. In any case, however, the use of an imitation shekel for such a purpose in a Jewish community certainly confirms that such objects were known and used by Jews. Whether they would have known that the model from which this piece was copied was an imitation rather than an actual ancient Jewish coin is moot.



4. A 31 mm. silver coin, weighing 11.4 gr. (Fig. 4). This piece seems to have been struck by hand-held dies, without a collar, and has the split edges normally associated with ancient coins, but almost never found on imitation shekels. This type is also not known to have been previously published and is different in many ways from both ancient shekels and the entire range of known imitation shekels. The chalice lacks any smoke above and is of unusually elegant form. The field around it contains a dot, a circle and a triangular arrangement of three points, presumably representing the sun, moon and stars. The reverse image is also unique in that it displays a plant with three separate taller sprouts and two shorter ones, each emerging individually from a horizontal representing the earth and each ending in florets or fruits; perhaps they most resemble ripened grain. To the right of the plant is a hollow square with a short vertical stroke within it. The Hebrew text is also distinctive in several ways. The letter forms are simple, as if imitating the strokes of a cursive script rather than the more formal square hand previously noted. The letters ו and ר are unusually long, as if the engraver of the die were copying an idiosyncratic scribal hand on a piece of paper or parchment rather than, as is normally the case, duplicating an earlier imitation shekel. In addition, the text is not where it is expected: the plant side bears the שקל ישראל [Shekel of Israel] statement normally seen on the obverse, while the obverse with chalice has the reference to Jerusalem, usually shown on the reverse of imitation shekels. Furthermore, this inscription reads ירושלים הקדושים rather than ירושלים הקדושה [both meaning Holy Jerusalem]. It is unclear what is to be made of this extraordinary piece. Moons, suns and stars are fairly common as motifs on late medieval seals throughout Western Europe. The "ancient" technique of manufacture

raises the question whether this particular production might have been made not for the usual Christian pietistic reasons but in a humanistic Renaissance atelier, perhaps for a collector of antiquities, or to fool such a collector. The model for the iconography is certainly closer to the genuine ancient coin than to the standard imitation shekel, even if it is hard to see how someone looking at an actual ancient shekel could have come up with the present model.



5. This specimen, while different from the preceding in style, size and detail, nonetheless shares several characteristics with it. This is a cast silver coin, with a 21 mm. diameter, but nearly 4 mm. thick, weighing 11.1 gr. and presents an appearance suggesting an antique coin (Fig. 5). This coin also has the textual characteristics referred to in No. 4 above, with obverse and reverse inscriptions exchanged and with the variant formulation *ירושלים הקודשים* [Holy Jerusalem] on the obverse. The epigraphy is considerably different from the usual, and if anything more normatively Jewish than on other imitation shekels. The plant on the reverse has a three-pronged appearance with finials that bear a closer resemblance to the flowers or pomegranates of a genuine ancient shekel than to any of the branches with leaves of the normal imitation shekel series, and the chalice on the obverse lacks any smoke. Therefore, this coin also suggests that its maker may have once seen a drawing of an actual ancient shekel which he used as a model rather than falling within the standard imitation shekel tradition.



6. A handsomely struck silver coin, 35 mm. in diameter, weighing 19 gr. (Fig. 6). This shekel has been signed by its engraver, I.B., who, as suggested, not unreasonably, by Kisch, may have been Iohann Buchheim 1654-1683, a medalist who worked in Breslau and for the Saxon court. However, it must be

noted that the initials IB were also used by a dozen other coin and medal engravers of the 17th and 18th centuries. While this coin or medal has the normal icons and texts of an imitation shekel, its elegance of design and execution set it apart from all other known types. Indeed, the extraordinary art lavished on its production, as well as its relative rarity, raise the question of why it was so carefully produced. That it was probably specially commissioned by a wealthy patron rather than produced *en masse*, commercially or institutionally, seems evident. There has even been speculation that the patron was Samuel Oppenheimer (1630–1703), a wealthy and powerful *Hofjude*, known to have lived in high style in Vienna, and of whom it was said that he had caused shekels to be made for the purpose of *pidyon ha-ben*. There is at present no corroboration, however, that this particular imitation shekel is to be linked to that tale.



7. A cast and crudely chased silver disc, 30 mm. weighs 12.5 gr.; this coin makes no pretense to art (Fig. 7). Its vaguely tree-form device on the reverse may indicate that some form of shekel coin or pseudo-coin might have provided an antecedent, but the presumed inscription below it is entirely illegible. On the other hand, a simple and bold שקל ישראל [Shekel of Israel] inscription is the only device on the obverse, a type, that is otherwise unpublished and unknown in the literature. The fairly modern Hebrew letter forms and absence of typical imitation shekel iconography make it unlikely that this coin was made for Christian purposes, rather tending to indicate that it was made for a Jewish use, possibly even specifically to serve in a *pidyon ha-ben* ceremony. This piece has not been previously published.



8. A cast silver coin, 27 mm., weighing 17 gr.; this piece is 4.7 mm. thick. As with specimen No. 7, this piece has nothing whatever in common with typical shekel imitations and bears no iconography at all apart from a crude Star of David on the obverse (Fig. 8). The inscription on that same side reads הקודש שקל [Holy Shekel, or Shekel of the Sanctuary], while the reverse is filled with a single word, ירושלים [Jerusalem], distorted into a circular array. That it is designated as a shekel of the sanctuary, a denomination used to indicate the temple tax obligation (Exodus 30:13), is intriguing. As a coin of significant silver weight, this specimen was presumably not a plaything; it may be noted, however, that several copies in bronze are also known. It hardly seems likely to have been made as a pseudo-coin in imitation of the antique. Whether it was somehow used in Jewish communal affairs, for a census, charity, or for *pidyon ha-ben* is, at this point, entirely speculative.¹²



8

9. A struck silver coin of 28 mm., weighing 8 gr. (Fig. 9). This odd coin bears no resemblance to the regular imitation shekel series. However, there are several features that make it possible that it was made with a Jewish purpose in mind. First, there is the use of a crowned profile bust to represent King Solomon who, as previously mentioned, was understood by the Talmud to have issued coins. He is supported by a shield of arms bearing six zodiacal symbols, among them *Aryeh* (Leo), *Dagim* (Pisces) and probably *Akrav* (Scorpio) and *Taleh* (Aries) as well. The zodiac, though not mentioned in the Talmud, was adapted for homiletic purposes by Jewish scholars and Cabbalists in the 15th and 16th centuries, and many references link the zodiac to the Holy Temple. The Temple itself appears to be depicted as the central figure on the reverse of the coin, probably in the form of the Dome of the Rock. The flat fabric and general aspect imitates early modern royal coinage of Western Europe. The inscriptions are quite explicitly historical rather than biblical: המלך בארץ ישראל שלמה [King Solomon in the Land of Israel] on the obverse, and שלשה אלפם בשנת [In the Year 3000] on the outer margin of the reverse. Immediately around the temple effigy is inscribed שקל הכשר [Kosher Shekel]. The

¹² An article by D.B. Honig, in *The Shekel*, 12, No. 4, July/Aug. 1979, pp. 3-5 describes and illustrates a similar bronze coin, but treats the subject sentimentally, adding no historical information.

Solomonic and temple/zodiacal references coupled with the use of the term kosher are all suggestive of a scholarly Jewish cultural sensitivity, perhaps in the Renaissance period. While some of the Hebrew letter forms are misshapen, many, such as the open, \aleph are reminiscent of a cursive hand, suggesting, once again, that a non-Jewish engraver may have been asked to copy a handwritten text presented to him as a model by a Jew. Because of the multiple historicizing features, one imagines that this pseudo-coin may have been conceived and created as a numismatic "antiquity" rather than as a practical object.¹³



10. A silver coin of 26 mm., weighing 14.6 gr. Though this specimen appears to be cast, the uniform flatness of its letter forms suggests that this type may well originally have been a struck coin. The city gate or wall with three towers is plainly labeled ירושלים עיר הקודש [Jerusalem, the Holy City] (Fig. 10). Because of some similarity between this picture and Hamburg's coat of arms, which has three (somewhat different) towers, and since literary sources mention a shekel which was widely distributed in Hamburg in the late 16th century, it has been suggested that this coin is a "Hamburg shekel". Unfortunately, the older reports never actually described the 16th Century shekel. There is currently no firm evidence that this particular coin was in fact made in Hamburg, or even nearby, but its form, method of manufacture and the fact that it was illustrated in books by the early 17th century, makes a 16th century date reasonable.¹⁴ The reverse is purely epigraphic, bearing the inscription

¹³ This piece is illustrated in Narkiss (1936), (above, n. 1), Pl. 10, but it is neither interpreted there, nor noted in his 1928 article. Gitler (above, n. 1) illustrates both gold and silver specimens, assigning the coin to the 16th-17th centuries, without specific discussion.

¹⁴ Narkiss (1928) (above, n. 1), pp. 108-109, notes that this coin was already published in Zurich in 1605 by C. Waser. Narkiss, impressed by the fact that towers were used by the Jews to represent Jerusalem in the Middle Ages, and commenting that such a triple tower appeared on the 14th century seal of the Jewish community in Seville and on a private seal of Todros Halevi of the same period, was inclined to think that this fantasy may be from as early as the 14th century. See also D.M. Friedenberg: *Medieval Jewish Seals from Europe*, Detroit, 1987, pp. 124-5, 130, 133.

דוד המלך וּבְנוֹ שְׁלֹמֹה הַמֶּלֶךְ [King David and his son King Solomon]. Once again, the linkage of Jerusalem on one side of the coin with David and/or Solomon on the other makes clear the relation to the classical Talmudic quotation, but whatever the actual function of such a coin may have been, it does not have the denomination of shekel as part of its apparatus.



11. A cast coin of bronze alloy, 52 mm., in the collection of the Hermitage, St. Petersburg. (Fig. 11¹⁵). A crowned head of a youthful King Solomon is shown on the obverse with the inscription שלמה המלך [King Solomon], and on the reverse, a rather detailed elevation of the Temple is depicted with the legend היכל שלמה [the Temple, or Palace, of Solomon]. Again, this pseudo-coin, known to have been published by the mid 16th Century, bears no specific indication of a monetary denomination.¹⁶



¹⁵ The photographs of this coin and the next two entries, Nos. 12 and 13, all specimens in the Hermitage, were kindly supplied by Dr.E.S. Shehukina, curator of the Medallie Section.

¹⁶ This coin type is depicted, quite accurately, as a line drawing in Gabriele Symeoni's *Les illustres observations antiques*, Lyon, 1558, p. 130, in the company of many other coins, some genuine, others fabrications, in the mid 16th century, an era which was the heyday of antique fantasy coin invention in Italy and France. See also John Cunnally, *Blunders, Hoaxes and Lost Masterpieces from the Numismatic Literature of the Renaissance* in *The Asylum*, Summer 2004, pp 240-241.

12. A cast silver coin of 28 mm., weighing 7.5 gr., also in the Hermitage (Fig. 12). The decoration on the obverse of this flat disc is simply a large Star of David surrounded by seven tiny stars and with a circular inscription: שלמה בן דוד מלך ישראל [Solomon, son of David, King of Israel]. The reverse has a single central star and two concentric circular texts: הכל הבלים הכל הבל [Vanity of Vanities; All is Vanity], and centrally, ירושלים הקדושה [Holy Jerusalem]. Again, the coin is not designated a shekel. This coin and the next are not certain to be of Jewish origin, but their epigraphy is confident and precise without being highly formal, characteristics which suggest a Jewish writer of the text if not a Jewish engraver. The particular focus on Ecclesiastes' well-known opening phrase is not immediately helpful in clarifying the purpose which such a pseudo-coin may have served, beyond the ascription of authorship of the entire biblical book to King Solomon.



12

13. A cast silver coin of 21 mm. (Fig. 13). Although similar in general outline to the preceding specimen, this type is extraordinary in having vowel points for its text שלמה בן דוד מלך ישראל [Solomon, son of David, King of Israel]. The reverse is also similar to the last item; again, it has full vowel points to its outer text: הכל הבלים הכל הבל [Vanity of Vanities, All is Vanity]. The center says only ירושלים [Jerusalem]. This specimen is also in the Hermitage collection.



13

14. A cast silver alloy coin, 28 mm. in diameter, weighing 12.5 gr. (Fig. 14). This coin does not imitate a shekel, but rather calls itself a Half-Shekel. On the obverse, which pictures two parallel palm branches, the circular inscription is: מחצית השקל שנת אלפים תתקל [Half Shekel, Year Two Thousand Nine Hundred Thirty]. The reverse lacks any iconography, having an empty field around which is formed the inscription: אני שלמה מלך ישראל הייתי בירושלים [I Solomon was King of Israel in Jerusalem]. This latter text is a quotation from

Ecclesiastes 1:12, but with the name שלמה [Solomon] substituted for that of קהלת [Kohelet] in the verse. The year 2930 does not, of course, correspond to our current belief as the period of Solomon's rule in Jerusalem; that date would be closer to 2800–2830. Nevertheless, the date on this coin, as well as that on the previously described Solomonic pseudo-coin (No. 9), which gave his reign as being in 3000, are sufficiently close to have been credible to Jewish scholars in the modern but pre-scientific era. Since the Hebrew letter forms on this coin are good and the system of dating is typical of Jewish usage, there is little doubt that this type emerged from a Jewish environment. Narkiss believed that it was a plaything for use at Purim, but noted that he had never seen anything else like it.¹⁷



14

15. Cast but also hand engraved in silver, this rough specimen, 27 mm. in diameter and weighing 12.5 gr., is known only from the present example (Fig. 15). The side, which is cast, seems to have the word קדוש [Holy] within a beaded border. The reverse was also once cast, but was then engraved with letters, only some of which are intelligible: שלמה מלך ש(?) מ(?) שנים [King Solomon... Years]. This object is barely legible, but it is interesting that someone went to the trouble of casting a round silver coin with the word 'Holy' on it and, presumably, when the casting of the reverse side proved faulty, persisted in completing a pseudo-coin well within the traditional shape, size, weight and legend parameters we have repeatedly noted as having been used to create "coins" of King Solomon. One imagines that the maker had something more than fun on his mind, but we will probably never know what it was. No other copy resembling this coin is known to the author.



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¹⁷ Narkiss (1928), (above, n. 1), p.110, No.18.

16. This silver coin, 21 mm. in diameter and weighing 9.5 gr., shows a the bust of a crowned and bearded king on its obverse (Fig. 16). The legend on this side is not legible, but among the many corrupt characters are a few clearly Hebrew forms, among which are **ליאעש**. The reverse appears to represent a warrior standing and holding an upright spear in his left hand and something indistinct in his right. The reverse legend also makes no immediate sense, but three Hebrew characters are seen fairly clearly: **נ, מ, ו**, or **ו, י, ב**. In fact, on closer inspection, of these letters, they appear doubled, suggesting slippage of the die in striking the coin or of the punches in making the die. Once again, a silver pseudo-coin, undoubtedly representing Solomon or David has survived, apparently only in this single copy, but defies discovery of its origins in time, place or function.



17. A cast silver coin of 20 mm., weighing 7.2 gr. (Fig. 17) shows doubling of several letters which suggests that it reproduces an earlier struck coin type. This small piece, lacking any pictorial content, is again based on Baba Kama 97b, which answers the question "what did the coins of our patriarch Abraham look like?" as follows "an old man on one side, and a youth and maiden on the other". To this, Rashi added "old man and woman, that is Abraham and Sarah; youth and maiden, that is Isaac and Rebecca". The inscriptions follow this literary tradition precisely: the obverse text is **זקן וזקנה** [old man and old woman] and both above and below the first word appear two letters, **א** [A, for Abraham]; likewise, relating similarly to the second word, appear two **ש** [S, for Sarah]. The reverse continues with **בחור ובתולה** [youth and maiden] with **י** [I, for Isaac] and **ר** [R, for Rebecca] inscribed above and below their respective descriptions. Here, again, the function of such a small coin can only be guessed at, but the Talmudic association of its conception is beyond doubt. The letter forms on this coin are very similar to those found on No. 10, the type showing a city gate with three turrets; that fact and the information that both types appear in books by mid 17th Century sets their creation at about the same time, probably in the 16th century.



18. Cast in silver, measuring 47 mm. and weighing 44.8 gr. (Fig. 18). The large module and elaborate programmatic composition of this coin distinguish it from all other imitation shekels. Its type is depicted in Hottinger's second edition of *Cippi Hebraici* (1662), a date which the manufacture of this imitation shekel must obviously precede.¹⁸ On the obverse side, depicting a footed vessel with three distinct clouds of smoke, is a circular inscription reading: יהוה שמר ישראל מלך גבור בירושלים [The Lord, Guardian of Israel, Powerful King in Jerusalem]. Narkiss, examining the specimen before him in the 1920s, and following Levy's reading of 1862, read כבוד [Honor] rather than גבור on the coin's obverse (Fig. 18). Elsewhere on the obverse field are a shofar and a mitered hat, as well as two Hebrew letters, ש and ב (or כ). Narkiss read these as a transposition of what he presumed to be a misunderstood transcription for בנת [Year 2], as would have been found on genuine ancient shekels. Kisch, on the other hand, read these as abbreviations for שופר [shofar] to the left, near the ram's horn, and כהן [Cohen, priest] to the right, near the miter-form hat. The reverse of this specimen shows a well-formed tree flanked by a vase and a tufted crown. The inscription here is שקל דוד נשאר כלם באוצר ציון בבית מקדש [The Shekel(s) of David All Remain in the Treasury of Zion, in the Holy Temple]. Again, there are supplementary letters ש, and ד. Narkiss reads them as שקל דוד [The Shekel of David]; Kisch agrees with the reading דוד, but, referring to the vase or urn nearby, assumes it to be filled with שמן [Oil].



¹⁸ This imitation shekel variety is the subject of an extended essay by S. Lyon: *Explanation and Observations on an Antique Medal*, London, 1810, 23 pp., 1 plate. The author, apparently a Hebrew teacher, was under the impression that a copy of this large coin was unearthed in Huntingdon a year earlier, and he attempted to interpret it with reference to a *gematria*. He reads כלם as בלם and proceeds to consider this as an extraneous word which, he holds, must therefore be a date. This date, he reckons as 2630, using ב as 2000, ל as 30 and ס not as 60, but as 600. He adds the 2630 to 2928, the presumable date of the Temple's construction, to arrive at 5558, or 1798 C.E., and then wonders

It is worth recollecting that this particular imitation shekel, like most of the standard shekel imitations and imaginative coins previously mentioned, was reproduced by casting and chasing. Different specimens consequently appear not only with re-tooled and often malformed letters, but even with entire words changed. Thus, corrupted readings (to say nothing of interpretations) may have developed over time in the course of re-reading and re-producing coin texts by means of sequential re-castings and re-toolings, operations which were surely executed mainly by workmen who did not know Hebrew. It is, therefore, difficult for any present viewer to be certain what the original form of this coin may have been, how authentically Jewish it may have seemed originally, or what the intent of its original designer may have been. Actually, such uncertainty of conception, production, transmission, reception and ultimately of meaning hovers over many of the pseudo-coins described in this essay. Existing specimens, therefore, probably should not be prematurely condemned as absurd fantasies, dismissed as the work of ignorant non-Hebraists or discarded as mere copies. As with many artifacts of historical process, textual documents no less than coins, particular surviving examples may simply be the somewhat altered versions of forms which were originally quite precise and plausibly Jewish. In any case, these coins are genuine enough; whether imitative or imaginative, they are prepared to speak to those willing to listen.

CONCLUSION

The listing above has attempted to gather together imitative and imaginary pseudo-coins on Jewish themes which were likely to have been made by Jews, for Jews, or with their immediate advice, and thus, in some practical way, to have been part of the Jewish historical or cultural experience. Such a trial listing is inevitably incomplete, but completeness was never its purpose. Rather, it is intended to stimulate interest in a numismatic zone that has long been marginal. The database being limited and available documentation very sparse, those speculative thoughts hazarded above cannot expect to remain unchallenged. Indeed, the author's hope is that those who may have additional information, both general and specific, will re-order what has until now been an intriguing but confusing field of inquiry.

what important event may be discovered in that recent year. He concludes, amazingly, that out of the sufferings of that year, a year in which revolutionary war roiled Europe, a better age is about to dawn for the Jews!