

The Numismatic Department at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem

In 1969, four years after the inauguration of the Israel Museum, it was decided to establish an official Numismatic Department under the curatorship of Ya'akov Meshorer. The purpose of this department was, and still is, to exhibit the important numismatic material of the ancient land of Israel, with a particular emphasis on Jewish coinage, while building a comprehensive collection of coins with a focus on those that circulated or were struck in the land over the ages.

Prof. Meshorer built the Israel Museum's coin collection from scratch and systematically assembled its coins within a relatively short period of time in comparison to other public collections. While most of the Museum's archaeological departments rely on excavated finds on loan from the Israel Antiquities Authority, Meshorer realized that he would have to adopt a different approach, as most coins discovered in excavations survive in relatively poor condition and are therefore unsuited to museum needs. He thus sought out private collections with choice exemplars of representative coins, and over the years, succeeded in acquiring many of these coins for the Israel Museum and in assembling a large and impressive collection. Prof. Meshorer headed the department until 1993, when I succeeded him.



*Prof. Ya'akov Meshorer, founder of the Israel Museum Numismatic Department
© courtesy The Israel Museum, Jerusalem*

In recognition of Prof. Ya'akov Meshorer's unique achievements, the Numismatic Department together with many of our friends and donors, created in 2002 the Ya'akov Meshorer Numismatic Prize. The laureates of this prize include Dr. Andrew Burnett (2002); Dr. Michel Amandry (2006); Prof. Michael Metcalf (2008); and Prof. Alla Kushnir-Stein (2013).



*The Ya'akov Meshorer Numismatic Prize medal
Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Peter Lanyi*

Today, our collection includes 35,054 items, among these:

- 1,650 Greek coins
- 3,503 Ancient Jewish coins
- 4,468 Roman provincial city coins
- 5,104 Islamic coins



*The first coin recorded in the Israel Museum Numismatic Collection:
A Hasmonean prutah of Judah Aristobulus (Yehudah), 104-103 BCE, IMJ Inventory No. 71.1
Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Peter Lanyi*

The holdings of the Numismatic Department are based primarily on generous donations from the following sources:

- The Sholem Asch collection of Jewish coins and Roman provincial city coinage, donated by Victor Carter through the help of Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek.
- The Meir Rosenberger collection of Roman provincial city coinage, comprising coins struck in thirty-nine different cities during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, donated by Rena and Robert Lewin.

- The L. Werner collection of Jewish coins, Roman provincial city coinage, and an outstanding group of *Judea Capta* issues, donated by the Israel Government Coins and Medals Company.
- The Abraham Bromberg collection of ancient Jewish coins, including some of the rarest and best preserved Jewish coins in the world.
- The Kurt Stern collection of Greek silver and gold coins.
- The Paul Balog collection of Islamic gold, silver, and bronze coins; the coins are of a very high quality and include a large number of unpublished and rare coins from throughout the Islamic world, as well as four original dies.
- The extensive Sidney Olson collection of scripophily related to British Mandate Palestine and the State of Israel in the twentieth-century.
- The Jonathan Rosen collection of Greek hoards, the most important of which is a large hoard of archaic Greek coins including Ionian staters and smaller denominations found together with *Hacksilber*, as well as his extensive collection of local Persian Period coins including Philistian, Samaritan, and Judean issues.
- The Chaim Kaufman collection of Hasmonaean coins.
- The Marian and Abraham Sofaer collection of Roman provincial city coinage; the collection was divided between the Israel Museum and our twin and supportive institution, the American Numismatic Society, New York, which published the entire collection.
- The David Hendin collections of Phoenician and Ascalonian coinages, modern fakes, and Levantine weights.
- The Dan Barag collection of local coins of the Persian through Mamluk Period.



The jewel of the crown of the Israel Museum collection – a unique quarter Sheqel with the Aramaic legend yhd.

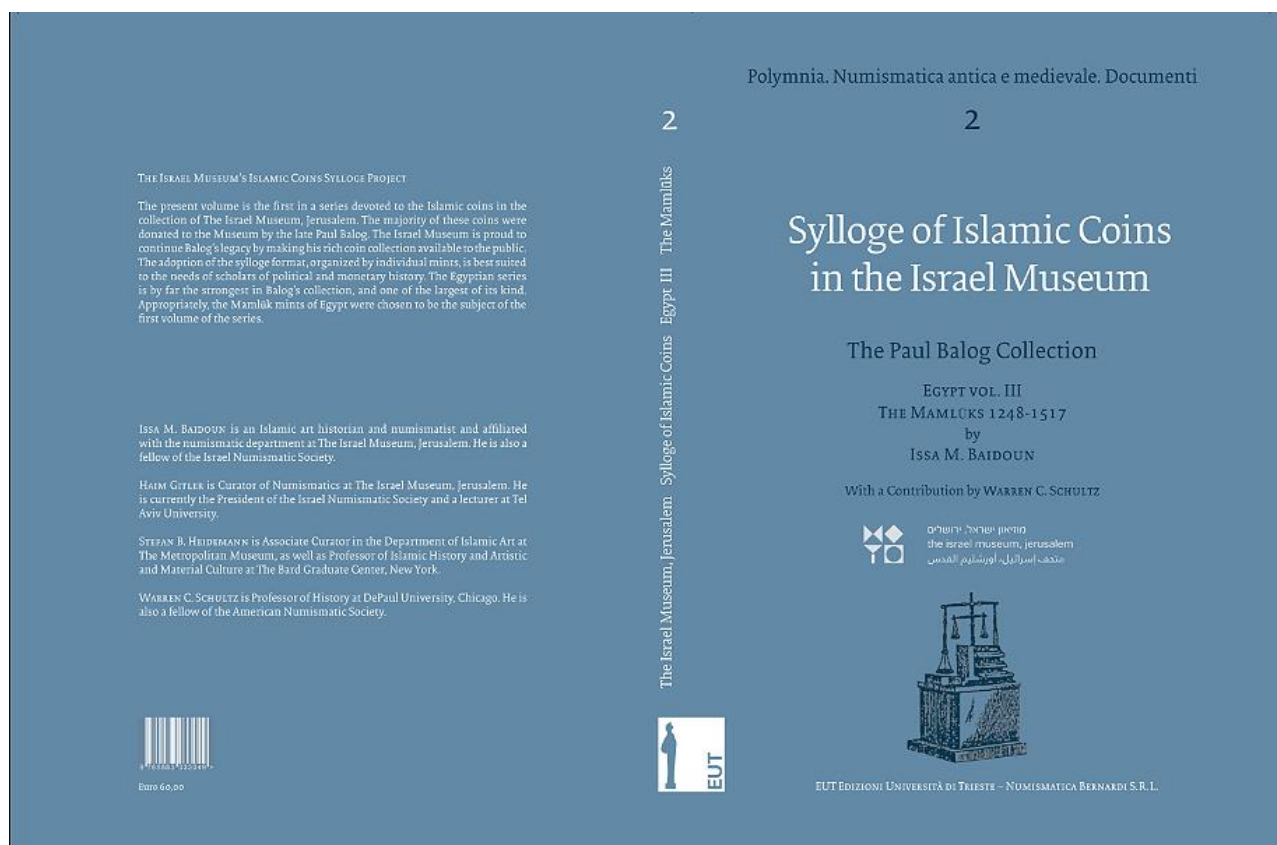
This is the earliest coin minted in Judah during the late Persian Period (ca. 400 BC).

Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Vladimir Naikhin

In addition to these generous donations, and to enhance specific aspects of the Archaeology Wing exhibitions, we have also received long-term loans from: the Israel Antiquities Authority, with a particular emphasis on recent finds; the Institute of Archaeology of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; the Bank of Israel; and private collections.

The holdings of the Israel Museum Numismatic Department have been the subject of many important scholarly publications. Notable among these are Ya'akov Meshorer's *Ancient Jewish Coinage* (New York 1982) and *A Treasury of Jewish Coins* (Jerusalem/New York 2001); Haim Gitler and Matthew Ponting's *The Silver Coinage of Septimius Severus and His Family 193–211: A Study of the Chemical Composition of the Roman and Eastern Issues* (Milan 2003); and Haim Gitler and Oren Tal's *The Coinage of Philistia of the Fifth and Fourth Centuries BC: A Study of the Earliest Coins of Palestine* (Milan 2006).

More recently, the Numismatic Department has inaugurated the series *Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the Israel Museum* based on the Paul Balog collection. The first volume of this series, published in 2011, focuses on the Mamlūk coins of Egypt (1248–1517) – by far the strongest group in Balog's collection. The projected six-volume series is a joint project involving Issa M. Baidoun (formerly a member of the Israel Museum staff and now employed by the Hebrew University) as the chief author of the series, Stefan B. Heidemann (Hamburg University) as head of the project and its scientific advisor, and Haim Gitler (Israel Museum) as advisor and co-editor. The first volume included a contribution by Warren C. Schultz (DePaul University, Chicago).



Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the Israel Museum, The Paul Balog Collection, Egypt Vol. III, The Mamlūks 1248–1517
Photo © University of Trieste

A recent addition to the team is Reuven Amitai (Hebrew University), now fully involved in the planning and writing. The series is published by the University of Trieste, edited by Bruno Callegher. The first

volume was generously funded by Giulio Bernardi; forthcoming volumes are supported by the German-Israeli Foundation for Scientific Research and Development (GIF).

To date, only three other institutions have published the Islamic coins in their collections (the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and Jena and Tübingen Universities, Germany), underscoring the importance of this venture.

Finally, it should be noted that the Numismatic Department of the Israel Museum is deeply concerned with numismatic education, its curators involved in the teaching of numismatics at Israeli universities. In addition, the Israel Museum functions as the headquarters of the Israel Numismatic Society and also hosts the annual lecture series of the Israel Numismatic Society Jerusalem Branch.

Naturally, the main purpose of the Numismatic Department at the Israel Museum is to exhibit historically important coins in a way that conveys their significance. This has been done not only by changing the permanent display from time to time but also by mounting temporary exhibitions on specific subjects. The current permanent exhibition of coins – the Coin Gallery – was inaugurated on July 25, 2010 in conjunction with the reopening of the renewed Israel Museum. It displays 54 coins in a circular gallery, denoting in its shape a coin. The coins are set in bended-glass showcases with inner LED lighting, enabling the visitor to focus on each coin and enjoy its beauty.



*Dr. Haim Gitler installing electrum coins in the Coin Gallery
Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Yaniv Schauer*



The entrance to the Coin Gallery at the Israel Museum
 Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Haim Gitler

Important temporary exhibitions presented over the years include: *Imaginative Coins and Fantasy Shekels*; *The Production of Coins in the Ancient World*; *Coins of Israel, Old and New* (in cooperation with the Bank of Israel); *City Coins of Eretz Israel and the Decapolis*; and *The Coins of Aelia Capitolina - Roman Jerusalem*.

In 1997, the exhibition *More than Money* (<http://www.imj.org.il/coins/>) dealt with the interest in ancient Jewish coins by some of Judaism's most illustrious figures beginning in the eleventh century. In 2004, *The Coin of Coins: A World Premier* displayed to the public, for the first time, the famous Aitna tetradrachm, a masterpiece of Greek art from the collection of Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, Brussels, as part of a collaborative effort between the Israel Museum and Prof. François de Callataÿ, Head of Department, Royal Library of Belgium.



The Coin of Coins: A World Premier, Spring - Fall 2004 (Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Haim Gitler)
The Aitna tetradrachm, ca. 465-460 BCE (Photo © Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, Brussels, by François de Callatay)

In 2012, the exhibition *White Gold: Revealing the World's Earliest Coins* (<http://www.imj.org.il/exhibitions/2012/WhiteGold/>) presented an assemblage of 500 electrum coins, the largest group of this coin-type ever shown to the public in one show. This exhibition was complemented by an international numismatic congress, which hosted the 19 leading scholars in the field from around the world.



View of the temporary exhibition, White Gold: Revealing the World's Earliest Coins
 Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Elie Posner

At the end of 2013, the Numismatic Department completed the photography and digitalization of its entire collection, including written descriptions in both Hebrew and English. It is expected that during 2015, the Israel Museum will make this database available on-line, enabling scholars and aficionados worldwide to search its holdings.

Last but not least, the Numismatic Department of the Israel Museum works to maintain strong ties with numismatic departments in museums around the world through international loans and traveling exhibitions. Examples include an exchange of exhibitions between the National Museum of Mexico and the Israel Museum, on behalf of the Bank of Israel, and an exhibition of Jewish coins in Germany - *Das Heilige Land* - in cooperation with the Staatliche Münzsammlung München.

In this spirit, we are grateful to the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, especially Sabine Haag, Michael Alam, and Klaus Vondrovec, for welcoming us within their walls and enabling us to share our coins with their museum's public in the context of *Münze und Macht im antiken Israel*. I also would like to thank Anne Lykke, and the Department for Numismatic Studies as well as to the Department of Geography and Regional Research at Vienna University for their valuable input.

Finally, I wish to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to Yaniv Schauer, Associate Curator of Numismatics at the Israel Museum, for his unstinting efforts in making this project possible and to James Snyder, Director of the Israel Museum, for strongly supporting this collaborative enterprise with our Viennese colleagues.

Dr. Haim Gitler
Tamar and Teddy Kollek Chief Curator of Archaeology
Curator of Numismatics
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

The Israel Museum is the largest cultural institution in the State of Israel and is ranked among the leading art and archaeology museums in the world. Founded in 1965, the Museum houses encyclopedic collections ranging from prehistory through contemporary art and includes the most extensive holdings of Biblical and Holy Land archaeology in the world, among them the Dead Sea Scrolls. Over its first 50 years, the Museum has built a far-ranging collection of nearly 500,000 objects through an unparalleled legacy of gifts and support from its circle of patrons worldwide.



Main entrance to the Israel Museum

© Timothy Hursley, courtesy The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

The Museum's 20-acre campus, which underwent comprehensive renewal in 2010 designed by James Carpenter Design Associates and Efrat-Kowalsky Architects, features the Billy Rose Art Garden, the Shrine of the Book, and more than 204,500 square feet of exhibition space.



Eastern view of the Museum

© Timothy Hursley, courtesy The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

The Museum also organizes programming at its off-site locations in Jerusalem at the Rockefeller Archaeological Museum, where it presents archaeological artifacts from the land of Israel; and at its historic Ticho House, a venue for exhibitions of contemporary Israeli art.

The Museum is celebrating its 50th anniversary throughout 2015, with a year-long program devoted to an exploration of Israel's aesthetic culture in the 50 years before and after its founding.