

COIN MINTING IN AKKO

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The importance and economic status of 'Akko stem from its port — one of the most important ports along the Levantine coast. It had a special significance in the maritime trade between Egypt and Syria following the need for ship anchorage and intermediate ports between the two kingdoms. 'Akko is situated between Tyre in the north and the Dor, Jaffa, Ashqelon and Gaza in the south. The strategic location of the city between Egypt and Syria caused it to be seized by the successive powers that ruled the southern Levant. In the Roman era, its importance was equivalent to that of the port of Caesarea.

During the Persian era, Phoenician 'Akko flourished as a subordinate to Sidon. At that time silver obols were minted and the currency was Darius' gold coins (darics) as well as tiny silver obols from local mints.

There were trade relations between 'Akko and Athens before and following the conquests of Alexander the Great, who led his army through it in his journey southwards in 333 BCE. The residents of 'Akko welcomed Alexander and opened the gates to him and his army, fearing that otherwise he would destroy their city.

The city flourished under Alexander's rule, who even allowed the operation of a mint in the city and the mint of an autonomous coin in his name. Thus 'Akko became the first city in the southern Levant where municipal silver coins were minted that entered international trade and this is where its long history as a mint begins. The reverse of Alexander's silver coins that were minted in 'Akko bear the image of Zeus seated, holding a bird and under his arm is the caption "'Akko" in Phoenician script. The obverse bears a portrait of Alexander the Great. Many Greeks have emigrated to 'Akko in the trail of Alexander the Great among whom were merchants and sailors.

Alexander the Great's conquests have brought about a monetary reform, because the coins minted by him and in his name pushed the coins minted in Athens, Persia and Sidon out of circulation. His coins were used as the era's "dollars" in the entire region by the population in 'Akko and the Land of Israel, in the regional trade and possibly in the international trade as well (I did not find evidence about Alexander's coins from the 'Akko mint circulating in other countries). 'Akko as an important maritime center was involved in the region's international trade. Many gold, silver and bronze coins were minted in 'Akko during the reign of Alexander the Great and even after his death.

After Alexander's death and the conflicts among his successors, 'Akko was ruled by the Ptolemies. Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246 B.C.) renamed 'Akko Ptolemais, a name that was retained through to the Byzantine era and on the latest city coins minted in 256 CE. The city turned into the region's capital and its importance rose. A monogram made up of the city's letters ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΣ appears on coins that were minted in the city at that time: ΠΠ.



A tetradrachm of Ptolemy III minted in 'Akko

That same Ptolemy minted silver coins in the city from 253 BCE. The head of Ptolemy I appears on the obverse while the reverse carries the Greek inscription "of king Ptolemy" and an Egyptian eagle standing on a thunderbolt providing the coin with validity and authority. The mint was run directly by the Ptolemaic administration. It is important to point out that the Ptolemaic kings instituted a closed monetary area in all the places they governed, an area that had a different standard and weight than elsewhere. Ptolemaic minting in 'Akko continued until the days of Ptolemy V.

After the battle of Paneion (Paneas) in 200 BCE the Seleucid kingdom under Antiochus III took over the reign in 'Akko. In that period royal Seleucid coins from Antioch were the currency in 'Akko but small bronzes were minted too. Seleucus IV continued minting in 'Akko, while his successor, Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), during whose reign the Hasmonean revolt broke out, minted large amounts of small bronze coins in 'Akko as well as silver coins. In fact, this was a quasi-autonomous issue.



A bronze of Antiochus IV

In addition to minting Seleucid coins in Antioch, in the middle of the second century BCE the Seleucids allowed the minting of quasi-autonomous coins of bronze and silver with the King's portrait at the rest of the port cities in the Land of Israel, in Jaffa, Ashkelon and Gaza. The coins from 'Akko coins bear the inscription "Of the Antiochenes in Ptolemais". For silver, the Seleucids used the Phoenician weight standard in the mint of 'Akko, continuing the Ptolemaic weight system. There were two monetary zones in the Seleucid Kingdom; one according to the Attic standard and the other according to the Phoenician. Attic weight silver was minted 'Akko, but the coin finds show that these were minted for the northern Seleucid regions and not for local use.



An Attic weight tetradrachm of Antiochus VIII

Most of the Seleucid coins in 'Akko were minted by Antiochus IV, Demetrius II, Antiochus VIII and Antiochus XII. Towards the end of the Seleucid period, when the kingdom started to crumble and the central administration weakened, different areas of the kingdom made independent moves. Autonomous minting in 'Akko increased from about 132 BCE, taking advantage of the political situation of the kingdom.

The Seleucid Kingdom gradually stepped down from the political arena and the Romans, during whose reign 'Akko was a big port city with autonomous authorities, became the ruling power. The maritime connection between Judaea and Rome was through 'Akko, whose inhabitants were still Phoenicians and Greeks. The city minted many bronze coins with Greek inscriptions. Julius Caesar visited it in 47 BCE. Sometimes the ancient name of 'Akko: AKH appears on coins from the Augustan era.

The Romans turned the city into a colony. Claudius rebuilt the city and renovated its harbor; its residents became Roman citizens and were exempted from tax. Veterans of the Roman army were settled in the colony as well. Roman colonies used Latin as the official language, so now coins with Latin inscriptions were minted in the city. Inscriptions on coins of other cities were in Greek.

For example, one of the coins minted under Nero (about 53 CE) shows the emperor ploughing the city borders with a plow harnessed to a pair of oxen in a ceremony called *pomerium*, a symbol for the establishment of a new colony. The coin bears the inscription COLONIA PTOLEMAIS. The plaques on the standards bear the numbers of the four Roman legions based in Judaea: III, VI, X, XII. Some of these legions are mentioned in the writings of Flavius Josephus as taking active part in the Jewish war Galilee between the years 66–68 CE.



A coin commemorating the establishment of the *colonia Ptolemais* minted under Nero.

According to Josephus, upon the outbreak of the Jewish rebellion against the Romans, 'Akko's Greek residents murdered about 2,000 Jews. The city served as a base for the Roman legions that were brought in to suppress the Jewish rebellion. After suppressing the revolt in Galilee (66–67 CE), the Greeks celebrated their victory in 'Akko. During the revolt there was an increase in minting in Greece and in other cities. It is possible that the reason was the arrival of a number of Roman legions and the need for large sums of money to finance their upkeep. The Romans utilized the local currency of city coins.



A coin from the reign of Trajan with the name of the colony.

Hadrian rebuilt the colony of 'Akko-Ptolemais and minted a similar, undated "founder coin". The change is in the standards of the Roman legions that were active in Judaea at that time. This indicates the expansion of the colony's boundary or its shift to another part of town, such as expanding the area of the port, or expansion of the public areas. The coin was minted at the time of the Bar-Kokhba revolt (132–135 CE). Simultaneously Hadrian minted a large issue of a similar coin in Aelia Capitolina (Jerusalem) that depicts the founding of the colony Aelia Capitolina on the ruins of Jerusalem. At the same time Hadrian issued a coin that marked the founding of Caesarea.

Numerous coins were minted during the Roman period in 'Akko, amongst which were coins with special types. Three exceptionally interesting coins were minted under Elagabal (218–222 CE): one shows the acropolis, the city's fortress, and another unique coin that shows the port with a ship in it as seen from the sea. The third coin is features the zodiac.

Most of the coins minted under the Romans in 'Akko were bronze but for a short period silver provincial tetradrachms were minted under Caracalla, showing the relative importance of 'Akko. The obverse shows the emperor, while the reverse an eagle.



A tetradrachm of Caracalla. The 'Akko's mintmark is the caps of the Dioscuri.

It is unclear whether municipal coin minting was under Roman supervision or done entirely by the city authorities. It is noteworthy that minting of silver was limited by the amount of silver metal in the hands of the issuer, whereas with bronze coins large issues could have diminished their value and their purchasing power.

In the middle of the third century, under Gallienus (in 256 CE to be precise), minting ceased in 'Akko which was the last city to mint municipal coins. The inferior imperial silver antoniniani entered into circulation. In the Byzantine era no coins were minted in 'Akko.

'Akko surrendered to the Muslims in 636 CE. Under the Umayyad caliphate Mu'āwīyah built a fleet in the docks that were left standing in 'Akko from the Byzantine period to

conquer Cyprus and for voyages to North Africa. Ibn Tulun ruled 'Akko in the ninth century. He built the port that was later conquered by the Crusaders and whose remains can be seen to this very day. Bronze coins were minted in 'Akko in the Umayyad and 'Abbasid periods. In the eleventh century (the fatimid dynasty) a gold dinar was minted in 'Akko in the name of caliph Abu al-Qāsem. Silver dirhams and half-dirhams were also minted by the Muslims in 'Akko. During the early Islamic period the name 'Akko reappeared on its coins.

In 1104 'Akko was conquered Baldwin I, five years after the Crusader conquest of Jerusalem in 1099. The city was important throughout the reign of the Crusaders in the Holy-Land, fortified by walls and towers and was named Accon. In 1187 the city was captured by Salah ad-Din. In 1191 the city was recaptured by Richard the Lion Heart and Philip the King of France and became the capital city of the Kingdom of the Crusaders for one hundred years until 1291, as Jerusalem was no longer under their rule. The city was divided into quarters according to the cities where the Crusaders originated as well as quarters of the military orders: the Templars and the Hospitallers. The number of its residents reached 50,000. There was an important commercial quarter around the harbor, through which the Crusaders made contact with Europe.

Shortly after the third Crusade (1191), large quantities of bronze coins were minted in 'Akko with the inscription ACCON.

'Akko minted mainly two kinds of coins during the Crusader period. There were imitations of Muslim coins, including gold bezants, as well as western European denier types made of billon. The bronze *pougeoise* minted in 'Akko shows a *fleur de lys*, the emblem of the French royal house of Bourbon.



Crusader imitation of a Fatimid dinar.

The gold bezants imitated the dinars of caliph El-Amir from the twelfth century and were used in trade for big transactions. These imitative issues facilitated trade and economic activity between the two populations of Franks and Muslims and were minted in Jerusalem too in the twelfth century. Initially they carried an original Islamic formula, but after the Pope's representative visited 'Akko and expressed the pope's concern, the legend was changed to an inscription in Arabic mentioning 'the father, son and Holy spirit' and a cross was added too.

The local merchants in 'Akko who originated in Venice, Pisa, Genoa also minted small value lead tokens of lead in order to pay the local population for goods and services. With the capture of 'Akko by the Mamluk sultan al-Ashraf Khalil on May 18, 1291, coin minting in 'Akko ceased. Moreover, the city ceased to exist for the next 450 years.