

CHAPTER NINE: THE TYRIAN SILVER-PLATED COIN OF 'UZZIMILK

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A Tyrian silver-plated coin was found with the bones of a child in L04-161 (B. 04-1623; figs. 87, 131; photographs by Zeev Radovan). The coin was found covered on both sides with a textile which was removed, only from the reverse side, in order to allow for its identification (for textile remains on coins see Shimony and Shamir 1994).

DESCRIPTION

MANUFACTURER: 'Uzzimilk (349-333/2 BCE);

DATE OF COIN: 346 BCE

OBVERSE: Deity, bearded, riding towards the right on a seahorse with curled wing, holding reins in right hand and an arched bow in left hand; below, two lines of waves and dolphin to right; dotted border.

REVERSE: Owl standing to right, head facing forward; over its left shoulder, crook and flail; [I]IIO in right field above the crook.

Silver-plated, 6.99gr., 21mm. pierced.

(*Cf.* Elayi and Elayi 2009: 112, no. 867, pl. 28: 867.)

DISCUSSION

This coin is of a known series of silver and silver-plated coins issued by the Tyrian mint under 'Uzzimilk from 347 to 332 BCE (Elayi and Elayi 2009: 114-118, nos. 887-916). This specific exemplar seems to bear the numeral 3 and thus should be dated to the third year of the king, 346 BCE.

Three issues should be noted regarding this specific exemplar: first, it is plated; second, it is pierced; and third, it was found in a burial.

This type of coin is known to be silver-plated, and chisel cuts have shown that coins of years 3, 13, and 17 of this king, are plated (BMC Phoenicia: 232, nos. 33, 38, 4). The manufacture of plated coins is known to have occurred from the Persian period onward and the reasons for plating coins were probably economic ones although other possibilities should also be taken in consideration (for examples and discussions regarding plated coins in the Persian period see Meshorer and Qedar 1991: 67; Gitler and Tal 2006: 312-313; Farhi 2009: 238; for plated coins in the Roman period see Farhi 2010: 177, 182). Regarding the plated coins of this king, Betlyon has stated, «The period was a poor one economically, as Phoenicia tried to recover from the devastating onslaught of the Persian mercenaries.» (Betlyon 1982: 58)

However, one cannot exclude the possibility that this textile belonged to a shroud. Pierced coins are known as stray finds, usually in tombs, (see for example: Seligman, Zias and Stark 1996:55 (Fig. 20:1), 57; Kol-Ya'akov and



FIGURE 131.

Farhi 2012: 100) and it is usually assumed that they were used as jewelry (for headdresses adorned with ancient and modern coins see Meir 2002). Pierced Tyrian coins are not so common and only seven were recorded by Elayi and Elayi out of more than 1800 specimens documented in their catalogue (Elayi and Elayi 2009: nos. 379, 823, 977, 1149, 1239, 1346, 1527; for no. 1149 see also BMC Phoenicia: 232, no. 36).

The find of coins in graves/burials is a known phenomenon, (Syon 2006: 125-126 (with further bibliography); Mazar 1994: 78; Seligman, Zias and Stark 1996:55 Fig. 20:2-3, 58-59; Kol-Ya'akov and Farhi 2012: 102. A close parallel to the find from the Achziv cemetery is the one from the cemetery of 'Atlit in which the bulk of the coins from the graves were Tyrian and Sidonian types from the 4th century BCE: Johns 1933: 57), which in some cases might be associated with the custom of providing the deceased with Charon's obol—the payment required by the boatman Charon for ferrying the soul across Acheron or Styx into the underworld—a widely-practiced funerary custom throughout the Greco-Roman world (Stevens 1991; Syon 2006: 125-127). In this case, the coins were placed in the mouth clenched between the teeth, on the eyes, or in the hand (Stevens 1991: 225; Syon 2006: 125-126). Thus, in the archaeological record, this custom can be recognized if a coin is found within the skull or held in the hand, or, if the bones have deteriorated or been reburied, in the reconstructed position of these body parts. In addition to Charon's obol, it was customary to place coins in tombs as offerings (Syon 2006: 125-126).

Since the burial from which the coin under discussion was not found *in situ* and since it is clear that no attention was paid to reposition or place the bones in any order when they were reburied, it is impossible to know the original location of the coin regarding the body. Thus it is impossible to determine whether this coin was used as Charon's obol or as a «burial offering», either as part of jewelry or by itself. The fact that the coin was covered on both sides with the same textile reduces the possibility that this textile was part of a shroud (see the discussion by Shamir below). Moreover, the textile seems to cover the hole which was pierced in the coin, and this might indicate that the coin was kept within a small bag made of cloth and was not worn as jewelry (by using the hole to hang it).

Thus it is possible to reconstruct a few stages in the «life» of this coin: after it was minted it probably circulated for some time in the commerce, until it was discovered to be silver-plated—and thus worth much less than a pure silver coin of the same type. This might have led to the piercing of the coin and using it as some kind of jewelry for some time. The last stage in the «life» of this coin was to place it in a small bag and bury it with the body, either as Charon's obol, or as a «burial offering» of some type (the practice of using worn and less valued coins as burial offerings or as Charon's obol is well documented in archaeology, see Syon 2006: 126).

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