Israel Numismatic Research

12 | 2017

Published by
The Israel Numismatic Society

Israel Numismatic Research

Published by the Israel Numismatic Society

Volume 12 *2017*

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Numismatic Evidence of Greek Mercenaries at Tel ʻAkko

Danny Syon
Israel Antiquities Authority
dsyon@israntique.org.il

Abstract
A large group of bronze coins, with a peculiar corrosion pattern, were found in excavations near Tel ʻAkko. Aided by gamma radiography prior to cleaning, the quality and quantity of their identifications were enhanced. They were bronze satrapal coins from western Asia Minor, dated to the early fourth century BCE. That information, together with the North Aegean and Attic imported pottery, and the temporary nature of the structures suggest, when combined with historical sources, that the site was a camp occupied by Greek mercenaries during one or more attempts by the Persians to reconquer Egypt.

In the course of 2006 and 2007, an extraordinary excavation was conducted northwest of Tel ʻAkko, directed by Amani Abu Ḥamid (2013 [preliminary report]). In Stratum IV a series of unusual structures were discovered, some constructed mostly of broken amphora fragments (Fig. 1) and some of complete amphoras standing upright, their bottoms stuck in the fine, dark marshy soil (Fig. 2). Although the pottery recovered from this stratum dated to the Persian and Early Hellenistic periods, one large group stood apart. This group consisted of local transport amphoras from the Persian period, Attic and Aegean pottery vessels dated to *c*. 425–380 BCE and North Aegean transport amphoras, dated to the first half of the fourth century BCE.[1]

1 I am indebted to Amani Abu Ḥamid and Gérald Finkielsztejn for allowing me to use this information.

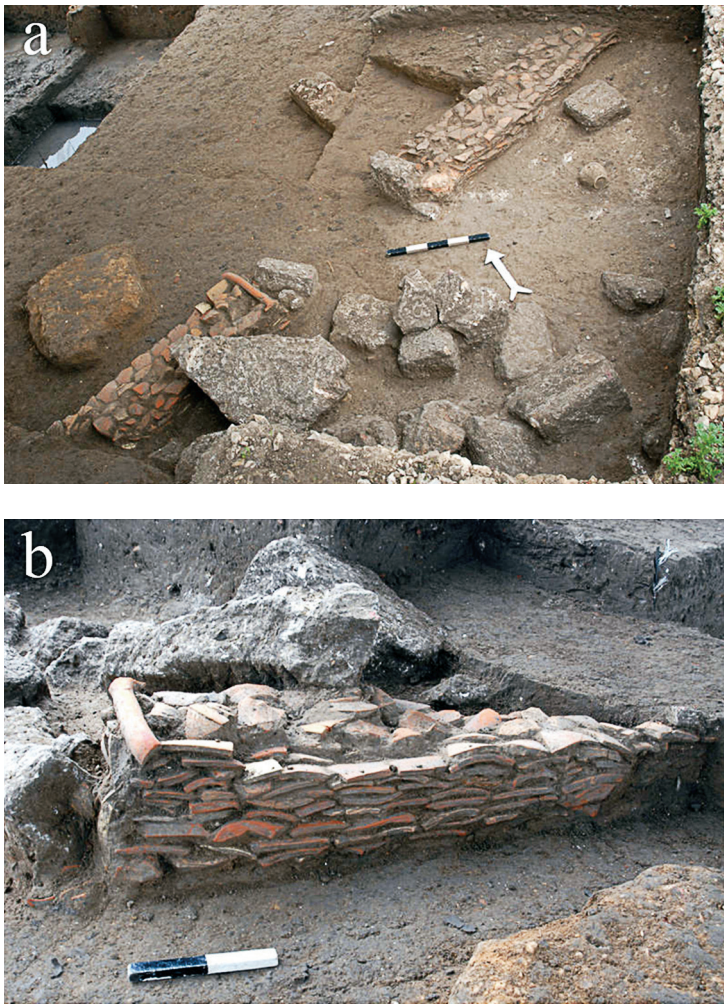

Fig. 1. Walls constructed of amphora fragments. a. view from above; note ‘jambs’ of stone either side of the entrance; b. detail

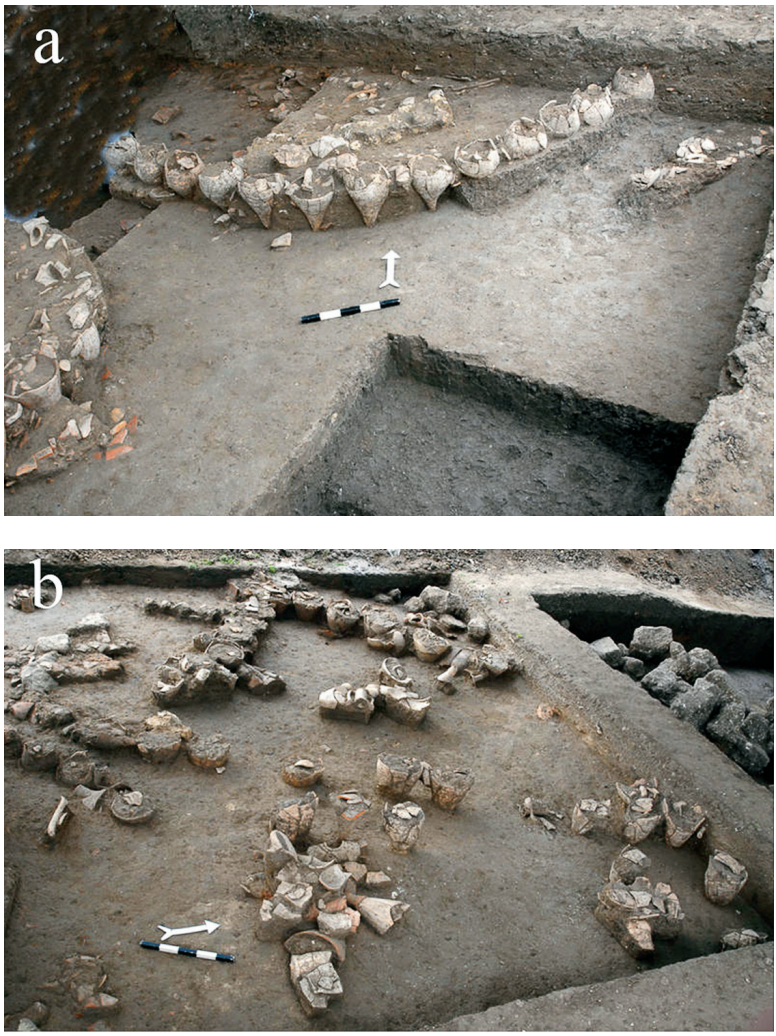

Fig. 2. ‘Walls’ of complete amphoras. a. curved; b. orthogonal

THE COINS[2]

Ninety-two coins were recovered in the course of the excavation. Many were found by me with the aid of a metal detector; the rest were found by the workers, either visually in the ground or during sifting. The coins span some 2,400 years, from the Persian period down to the mid-twentieth century. The shallow depth at which Persian-period remains were found and the disturbances observed prevent a precise evaluation of the context of each coin, and thus several Persian-period coins were found on the surface and in disturbed contexts and three Hellenistic coins were found in the Persian levels (see Table 1). All other non-Persian coins derive from the surface or from a disturbed context.

After two rounds of cleaning[3], 40 coins remained unidentifiable as to type or inscription. However, based on considerations of size, fabric and corrosion patterns, an ʻeducated guessʼ suggested that 30 of these date to the Persian period (see below), two can be attributed to Antiochus III, one is of Alexander Jannaeus and one is Late Roman. The chart in Fig. 3 includes the 34 coins under the headings Persian, Hellenistic and Roman periods respectively.

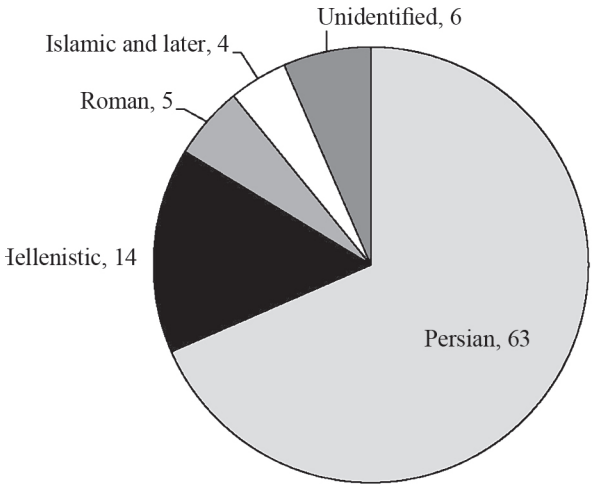

Fig. 3. General distribution of the coins

Apart from the Persian-period coins to be discussed in this article, 23 other identifiable coins were found as well, consisting of the usual mix normally found in ʻAkko, presented in Table 1.

2 The coins were cleaned at the IAA laboratories by Lena Kuperschmidt and Hila Rosenstein and photographed by myself.

3 Six coins remain uncleaned.

Table 1. Non-Persian period coins

No.	Minting Authority	Mint	Date	Obv.	Rev.	Reference	Comment	IAA
1	Civic	Anaphe, Cyclades	3rd–2nd c. BCE	Apollo facing	Skyphos		See text	106594
2	Antiochus III	ʻAkko	200–187 BCE	Head r.	Apollo leaning on bow	*SC* I:416, No. 1096		106585
3	Antiochus III	Same	Same	Same	Same	Same		106586
4	Antiochus III	Same	Same	Same	Same	Same		106587
5	Antiochus III	Same	Same	Same	Same	Same		106588
6	Antiochus III? Possibly an imitation		200–187 BCE	Head r.	Apollo seated on omphalos			106589
7	Antiochus III?						Identification based on size and fabric	
8	Antiochus III?						Same	
9	Seleucid?		2nd c. BCE	Head r.	Unidentifiable			106590
10	Civic	ʻAkko	*c*. 169–164 BCE	Jugate heads of the Dioscuri	Cornucopia (traces)	Seyrig 1962: No. 3		106592
11	Civic	Same	Same	Same	Same	Same		106591
12	Civic	Same	late 2nd c. BCE	Head of Zeus r.	Zeus (?)	Cf. Syon 2004:81, No. 8		106593
13	Alexander Jannaeus	Jerusalem	80/79 BCE and later	Star	Anchor	*TJC*:210, Group L		106595
14	Alexander Jannaeus?						Identification based on size and fabric	
15	Roman?		2nd–3rd c. CE	Bust r.	Figure			106596
16	Roman?		Same	Head r.	Unidentifiable			106597
17	Late Roman		401–403 CE	Head r.	Constantinople	Cf. *RIC* X:248, No. 85		106598
18	Late Roman		5th c. CE	Head r.	Illegible			106599

No.	Minting Authority	Mint	Date	Obv.	Rev.	Reference	Comment	IAA
19	Late Roman						Identification based on size and fabric	
20	Arab-Byzantine		*c*. 660–690 CE	Emperor facing	**M**			106600
21	Umayyad?		8th c. CE?	Effaced	Two lines of Arabic inscription			106601
22	Mustafa III	Miṣr	1757–1774 CE	Tughra				106602
23	State of Israel		1949				10 *prutot*	

A single coin (Table 1: No. 1, unfortunately from the surface) deserves comment here. In the meager literature it is attributed to the island of Anaphe, in the Sporades chain of the Aegean. This little-known Greek state issued a small trickle of coins during the early fifth century, and again in the third–second centuries BCE. However, a closer dating and attribution of these coins is at present impossible (Hoover 2010:189–190). To the best of my knowledge, it is the first provenanced coin from this mint to be discovered in Israel, and is apparently very rare.[4] Because of its poor state of preservation, an identical coin is illustrated in Fig. 4.

Fig. 4. Coin of Anaphe (2:1 scale). CNG, E-Auction 246, December 15, 2010, Lot 85

Coins of the Persian Period[5]

The frustratingly poor state of preservation of the coins prevented detailed identification of the majority. In fact, the attribution of the group of 30 otherwise unidentifiable coins to the Persian period rests solely on the similarity in diameter to that of coins that were identified, and on a peculiar corrosion pattern observed on all the coins of this group (Fig. 5). This pattern was not observed on any of the later, identified, coins.

Fig. 5. The typical corrosion pattern on the coins from the Persian period: a. uncleaned coin; b. cleaned coin (2:1 scale)

4 I found only three specimens listed: https://www.acsearch.info/search.html?term=anaphe&category=1-2&en=1&de=1&fr=1&it=1&es=1&ot=1&images=1&currency=usd&thesaurus=1&order=0&company; accessed April 8, 2017.

5 I am grateful to Jarosław Bodzek, who kindly read a draft of this manuscript and suggested useful additions and corrections.

Radiography

X-Radiography is routinely used for analyzing ancient artifacts, usually for determining material and shape of corroded and/or concreted objects before cleaning and conservation (Shearman and Dove 1997) and also for detecting fakes (Craddock 2009:28–32).

Initially only 44 coins from the excavation were cleaned, seven of which were dated to the Persian period (Cat. Nos. 1, 8, 10, 11, 14, 16, 17). Because of the rarity of such coins in Israel and the potential importance of the entire group in the context of the excavation, 36 of the uncleaned coins with the peculiar corrosion pattern were submitted to gamma radiography in order to determine whether any other coins could be dated to the Persian period.[6] Two cleaned coins were added as control pieces. An inherent problem with such radiography is the fact that the resulting image shows the obverse and the reverse superimposed (Fig. 6b). Thus, coins, one side of which is relatively well preserved but the other side is worn, are more likely to yield positive results. In our case, 22 coins could be identified to some degree (Table 1, column **a**, see below for the types). Because the reverse of Type 2 is practically identical to the obverse of Type 1, Type 1 was identified by the presence of some element of the reverse, usually the 'loop' (Fig. 6), whereas Type 2 was identified by the presence of an element that could be part of a head.

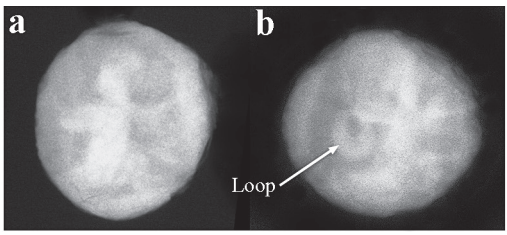

Fig. 6. Radiographs: a. Uncleaned coin, showing 'Great King' running in incuse square (Cat. No. 28); b. Cleaned control coin, showing superimposed image of both the 'Great King' obverse and part of the loop characteristic of Type 1 reverses (Cat. No. 1; 2:1 scale)

Subsequent to the radiography 32 of the 36 radiographed coins were cleaned (Table 1, column **b** with the identifications after cleaning shown in Table 1, column **c**. The catalogue shows the final identifications, noting that positive identification on the radiograph carried more weight than identification after cleaning, because in some cases the cleaning process removed details visible on the radiograph.

6 The radiography was carried out at the Soreq Nuclear Research Center by Yitzhak Hershko and Benny Breitmann to whom I extend sincere thanks.

Table 1. Radiographed coins

a. Identification on radiograph	**b.** Subsequently cleaned?	**c.** Identification after cleaning	**Locus**	**Basket**	**Cat. No.**
'Great King'+ Type 1	✓	Type 1	920	9076	2
Type 1	✓	Type 1	905	9022	9
Type 1	✓	Type 1?	1000	10004	7
Type 1	✓	Type 1?	1002	10020	13
Type 2	✓	Type 2	904	9044	15
Type 2	✓	Type 2?	900	9005	23
Type 2	✓	Type 2?	615	6093	18
Type 2	✓	Only incuse square	705	7030	33
Type 2?	✓	head	900	9003	26
'Great King'	✓	Type 2?	904	9045	19
'Great King'	✓	Type 2?	732	7152	21
'Great King'	✓	Type 1 or 2	713	7044	30
'Great King'	✓	Type 1 or 2	915	9054	31
'Great King'	✓	Type 1 or 2	904	9040	28
'Great King'	✓	No identification	612	6059	
'Great King'?	✓	No identification	900	9009	
'Great King' + incuse square	✓	Type 1 or 2	1004	10034	29
Head	✓	Type 2	612	6058	24
Incuse square	✓	Type 1	905	9011	5
Incuse square		No identification	704	7024	
Incuse square	✓	No identification	710	7039	
Incuse square		No identification	741	7163	
No identification	✓	Type 1?	904	9039	12
No identification	✓	Type 2	900	9006	22
No identification	✓	Type 1 or 2	904	9041	27
No identification	✓	Type 2	1000	10005	20
No identification	✓	No identification	427	4094	
No identification	✓	No identification	610	6045	
No identification		No identification	700	7036	
No identification		No identification	903	9015	
No identification	✓	No identification	904	9042	
No identification	✓	No identification	904	9043	
No identification	✓	No identification	904	9046	
No identification	✓	No identification	905	9020	
No identification	✓	No identification	926	9169	
No identification	✓	No identification	1108	11017	

The statistics show that: (1) for about two-thirds of the coins radiographed, some element could be identified on the radiograph and (2) most of the coins that had some recognizable feature in the radiograph could be positively identified after cleaning (Fig. 7). Thus this method can be used to advantage for large batches of uncleaned coins. It is cost effective when compared to the cost of cleaning a large number of coins that appear to be poorly preserved, many of which are likely to remain unidentifiable after cleaning.

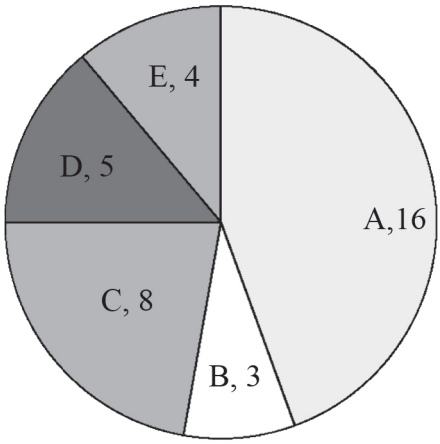

Fig. 7. a. Coins that were identified both on radiograph and after cleaning; b. Coins identified on radiograph but not after cleaning; c. Coins identified neither on radiograph nor after cleaning; d. Coins that were identified only after cleaning; e. Coins that were not cleaned

The Type 1 coins (Cat. Nos. 1–13)
Obv. The Persian Great King running to r., holding bow and spear.
Rev. An apparently random pattern of raised ridges and a granulated/stippled field between them. All in incuse square.
Æ, 12–13 mm, 1.29–2.31 g. Axis indeterminate.

This enigmatic coin type is known in silver and in bronze (Fig. 8). Some of the silver coins carry the name ΠΥΘΑΓΟΡΗΣ while some of the bronze coins bear the letters ΒΑ. Both are relatively rare, though the silver coins seem more common. The 13 bronze coins from ‘Akko practically double the number of known bronze specimens of this type.

Fig. 8. Type 1 coins: silver tetradrachm at top, bronze coin at bottom (Münzkabinett / Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, www.smb.museum/ikmk Nos. 18218541, 18218914)

The first and rather ingenious attempt to explain the reverse of this coin was made by Johnston (1967, with further references), who suggested that it represented a map of the hinterland of Ephesus in Ionia, making it the "Earliest Preserved Greek Map". Though this conclusion is debatable, so far only one other proposition has been put forward, that the type is just a reflection of the incuse design on the royal *siglos* (Bodzek 2011:185). The attribution of this type to Ionia — or at least to Western Asia Minor — seems assured on the basis of the weight standard of the silver coins, the Ionic form of the name ΠΥΘΑΓΟΡΗΣ and the provenance of some of the coins (Johnston 1967:86–88, with further bibliography). Based on a recent hoard from Miletus, the dating of this type can now be put in the beginning of the fourth century BCE, probably around 400–385 BCE (Weisser 2009), half a century earlier than previous estimates.

The Type 2 coins (Cat. Nos. 14–21)
Obv. Head in profile to r.

Rev. The Persian Great King running to r., holding bow and spear. On some specimens the type is in an incuse square.

Æ, 11–17 mm, 0.82–2.35 g. Where it can be determined, the axis is upright (six coins, Cat. Nos. 14–18, 20).

Type 2 coins are known primarily in silver, with a northwestern Asia Minor provenance, attributed in older literature to well-known Persian satraps, although more recent works prefer to attribute them only in a general way to satraps, because of their uncertain dating (Harrison 1982:251–252; Bodzek 2011:187–188; 2014:77–78).

A further five coins (Cat. Nos. 22–26) have a head on one side, but the other side is too corroded to discern the type. Statistically at least, these probably belong to Type 2 as well.

This type is not homogeneous, in that the head on the obverse carries various forms of a headdress. The heads on three coins (Cat. Nos. 15, 22, 23) are shown wearing a Persian headdress, variously called a tiara or *kyrbasia*[7] in its open form. One (Cat. No. 14) seems to have the tiara with the flaps tied under the chin. On another coin (Cat. No. 24) the headdress might be a helmet and on yet another (Cat. No. 16) it appears to be a simple diadem.

Five additional coins have the Great King type on one side, but with the other side obliterated (Cat. Nos. 27–31). These could belong to either Type 1 or Type 2. Finally, on two coins (Cat. Nos. 32–33) only an incuse square is visible. These too probably belong to either of these two types. Statistically at least, the 30 otherwise unidentifiable coins probably belong to these two types as well (Fig. 9).

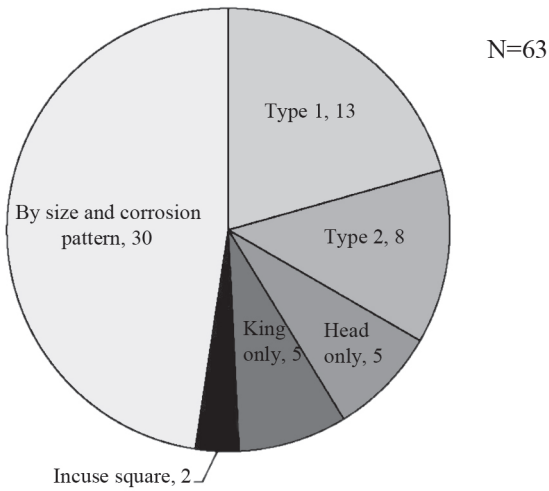

Fig. 9. The Persian period coins by type

ATTRIBUTION, DATING AND PROVENANCE

All the above mentioned coins are contemporaneous, as shown by eight coins that were found together in one amphora (Cat. Nos. 12, 15, 19, 27, 28 and three others that were not identifiable). They include one Type 1 and two Type 2 coins, as well as two coins showing only the Great King, and one on which only the incuse square is visible.

Although these coins show the ‘Great King’, they are not Royal Persian coins, which were minted only in gold and silver and their zone of circulation was limited

7 For a discussion on this type of headgear, see e.g., Harrison 1982:59–80; Dusinberre 2002:165–167 and Nieswandt 2012.

mostly to Asia Minor and part of the Greek world. So far, only two such coins have been recorded as provenanced in the southern Levant.[8]

These bronze coins are satrapal issues, known mainly from Western Asia Minor. Most satrapal issues are in silver, and these have received much more attention from numismatists in the past, although their authority, mints and dates continue to be elusive. The bronze issues are even more enigmatic, and apart from scattered mentions in old literature, the most recent studies by Bodzek (e.g., 2011 [esp. pp. 159–175]; 2014, both with further bibliography) are more in the way of overviews; accurate dates and attributions to specific satraps or other officials are still mostly lacking.

The Type 1 coins are apparently from Ionia (see above), but for the Type 2 coins and for the other uncertain coins a firm provenance cannot be offered at present. Koray Konuk (pers. comm.) believes this type could be attributed to Mysia and Troas just as well as to Ionia. Considering that both types seem to have arrived in ʻAkko simultaneously, their provenance is likely to be the same. Based on the Miletus hoard, all coins from this excavation may be dated to the early fourth century BCE.

THE CAMP OF THE PERSIAN ARMY

These coins join the pottery from Stratum IV of the excavation to offer a relatively closely dated context in the early fourth century BCE for a significant portion of the material from the excavation in the early fourth century BCE. This in turn allows for a possible link with one or more documented historic events, more fully discussed by Gambash (2014).[9]

In 405 BCE Egypt revolted against Persian rule and finally reached independence in around 401–399.[10] Shortly afterwards (*c*. 391) Euagoras I, king of Salamis in Cyprus revolted from the Persians as well. The Persian king Artaxerxes II (405/4–359/8) had attempted the reconquest of Egypt throughout his reign, without success. Allusions to one such failed attempt that lasted three years in the 380s is by Isocrates (*Paneg.* 140). This attempt may have been more or less contemporaneous with the offensive against Euagoras between 387 and 381.

Another major attempt is of special interest here. This began about a decade later, when the Persian satrap Pharnabazus assembled a large force of Persian troops, ships and a Greek mercenary force led by the Athenian general Iphicrates.

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8 A double *daric* from Samaria-Sebaste (Fulco and Zayadine 1981:199, Pl. 50:1). Another one is a stray find from Megiddo, now in a private collection (mentioned in Carradice 1987).

9 I am grateful to Gil Gambash and Michal Artzy for a fruitful interchange in 2012 about the results of Abu Ḥamid's excavation.

10 All historical details are from Briant 2002 and Kuhrt 2007.

After much procrastination, Pharnabazus finally attacked Egypt in 374 but failed again. According to Diodorus Siculus:

> During their term of office King Artaxerxes sent an expedition against the Egyptians, who had revolted from Persia. The leaders of the army were Pharnabazus, commanding the barbarian contingent, and Iphicrates the Athenian, commanding the mercenaries, who numbered twenty thousand.... When the Persian army had assembled at the city of Ace [ʻAkko] it numbered two hundred thousand barbarians under the command of Pharnabazus and twenty thousand Greek mercenaries led by Iphicrates. The triremes numbered three hundred and the thirty-oared vessels two hundred. The number of those conveying food and other supplies was great (Diod. Sic. 15:41.1–3).

This source points out the huge effort employed in supplying this force, apparently over several years. The Persians eventually succeeded to capture Egypt only in 343, in the reign of Artaxerxes III.[11]

The situation of the site close to the Persian period city on the tell raises the possibility that the site is in fact the expedition camp that served the Persian army and its Greek allies, the latter being predisposed to drink lots of wine. Assuming an initial camp of tents and a constant supply of wine, one can imagine that over many months of waiting, the enormous quantities of empty amphoras were used creatively to construct the pottery architecture observed in Stratum IV, maybe as protection around tents.[12]

Although ʻAkko is mentioned only in connection with one campaign, the city is so well situated in this respect that it is not unreasonable to suggest that this camp served more than one expedition, possibly also that against Euagoras and the earlier and later Egyptian campaigns; this could explain the chronological range of the finds.

Thus, the early fourth century assemblage could tie in with the earlier attempts before 374. One possible hint is a Samarian coin bearing the name of Pharnabazus, which, according to Bodzek, stylistically fits better with a date close to the first campaign (Bodzek 2004, esp. p. 28). As for the geographical range of the finds, they also fit rather well with the nature of the participants, made up of Persian troops and Greek mercenaries, apparently from western Asia Minor.

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11 The sojourn of Iphicrates in ʻAkko is mentioned also in Polyaenus III:9.56.

12 During my army service we used to unofficially improvise corrugated iron sheets around the tents for protection against winds.

CATALOGUE

Coins marked with an asterisk are illustrated in Fig. 10.

No.	Locus	Reg. No.	Diam. (mm)	Wt. (g)	Axis	IAA	Obverse	Reverse	Date	Mint	Reference and remarks
Type 1											
1*	701	7134	13	1.83		106552	The Persian Great King running or kneeling to r., holding bow and spear	Random pattern of raised ridges and a granulated/stippled field between them. All in incuse square	Early 4th c. BCE	Ionia?	
2	920	9076	13	2.23		106553	Traces of Great King	As No. 1			Radiographed
3*	736	7231	13	1.37		106557	As No. 1	As No. 1, but the incuse square not identified			
4	901	9187	13	1.42		106554	Unidentifiable	As No. 1			
5	905	9011	13	2.01		106555	Unidentifiable	As No. 1			Radiographed
6	926	9170	12	2.31		106556	Unidentifiable	As No. 1			
7	1000	10004	12	2.07		106558	Unidentifiable	As No. 1 (seen on radiograph). Incuse square not identified			Radiographed
8	915	9067	13	1.18		106559	Unidentifiable	As No. 3			
9	905	9022	12	1.98		106560	Unidentifiable	As No. 3			Radiographed
10	612	6052	13	1.29		106561	Unidentifiable	As No. 3			
11	905	9026	12	1.30		106562	Unidentifiable	As No. 3			
12	904	9039	13	2.23		106563	Unidentifiable	As No. 3			Inside amphora Radiographed
13	1002	10020	12	2.01		106564	Unidentifiable	As No. 1 (seen on radiograph). Incuse square not identified			Radiographed

No.	Locus	Reg. No.	Diam. (mm)	Wt. (g)	Axis	IAA	Obverse	Reverse	Date	Mint	Reference and remarks
Type 2											
14	925	9167	11	1.50	↑	106567	Head r. (with beard or tiara with flaps tied under chin)	The Persian Great King running to r., holding bow and spear	Early 4th c. BCE	Western Asia Minor?	
15	904	9044	13	2.09	↑	106569	Bearded head r. with tiara	As No. 14			Inside amphora Radiographed
16*	613	6090	12	1.32	↑	106565	Head r. (with diadem?)	As No. 14			
17	746	7185	10	1.39	↑	106566	Head r.	As No. 14, but in incuse square			
18	615	6093	13	1.84	↑	106573	Head r. (with tiara?)	Possibly as No. 14			Radiographed
19	904	9045	13	1.84		106568	Head l. (?)	Possibly as No. 14			Inside amphora Radiographed
20	1000	10005	17	1.94	↑	106580	Head?	As No. 14.			Radiographed
21	732	7152	13	2.35		106579	Head?	Possibly as No. 14			
Possibly Type 2											
22	900	9006	12	1.40		106572	Head r. with tiara	Unidentifiable; in incuse square			Radiographed
23	900	9005	13	1.97		106571	As No. 22	Unidentifiable			Radiographed
24	612	6058	12	2.03		106570	Head r. with helmet or tiara	Unidentifiable			Radiographed
25	743	7172	11	0.82		106582	Head r.	As No. 22			
26	900	9003	12	1.80		106583	Head?	Unidentifiable			Radiographed

No.	Locus	Reg. No.	Diam. (mm)	Wt. (g)	Axis	IAA	Obverse	Reverse	Date	Mint	Reference and remarks
Type 1 or 2											
27	904	9041	12	2.44		106576	Unidentifiable	As No. 14.			Inside amphora Radiographed
28	904	9040	12	1.96		106578	Unidentifiable	As No. 14.			Inside amphora Radiographed
29	1004	10034	14	2.03		106577	Unidentifiable	Great King (seen on radiograph)			Radiographed
30	713	7044	14	1.97		106574	Unidentifiable	Great King r.			Radiographed
31	915	9054	12	1.34		106575	Unidentifiable	Great King r.?			Radiographed
32	615	6095	11	0.81		106581	Unidentifiable	As No. 22			Inside amphora
33	705	7030	10	1.34		106584	Unidentifiable	As No. 22			Radiographed

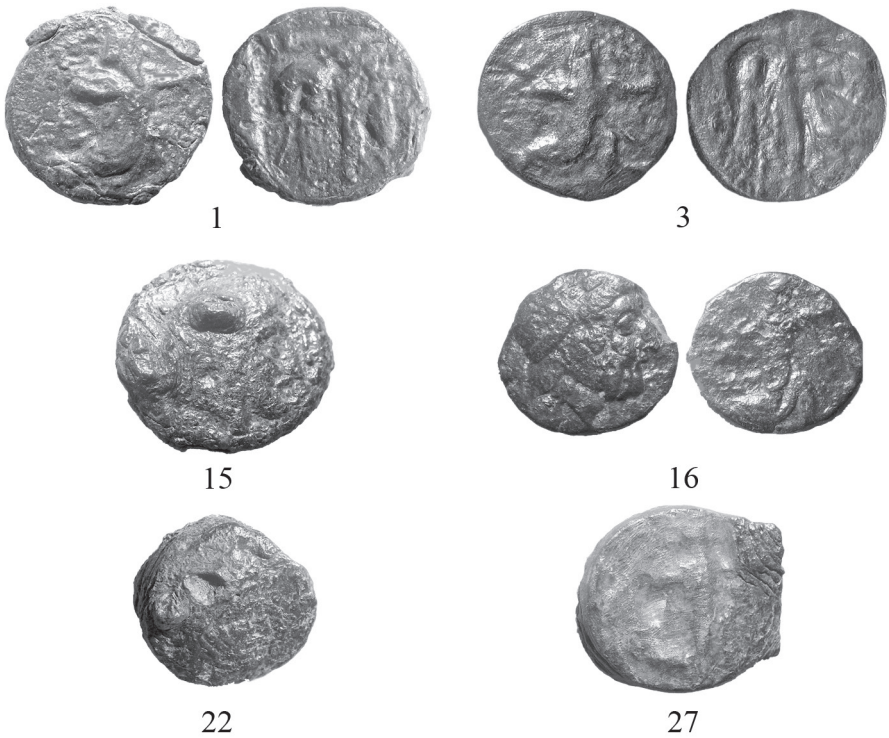

Fig. 10. Selected coins (2:1 scale)

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