

A Representation of the Inauguration Ceremony of the Restored Temple? A (Tentative) Reinterpretation of the Bar Kokhba Tetradrachm*

Jonathan (Yonatan) Bourgel
Université Laval; jonathan.bourgel@fts.ulaval.ca

■ Abstract

The coinage of Bar Kosiba (Bar Kokhba), the leader of the Second Jewish Revolt (132–135/6 CE), has long been acknowledged as a source of data for understanding the ideology and goals of the rebel regime he headed. In particular, the imagery and legends on Bar Kosiba's tetradrachms have been the subject of many interpretations and controversies. This article proposes that the facade of the temple on the obverse of Bar Kosiba's tetradrachms and the four species on its reverse side are complementary symbols, joined together to represent the future inauguration ceremony of the restored temple. Furthermore, this imagery on the tetradrachms may have been intended to respond to the coins issued to commemorate the founding of the colony of Aelia Capitolina on the site of Jerusalem.

* I am grateful to Yonatan Adler and peer reviewers for helpful suggestions and valuable comments. Any errors or inadequacies are mine alone. I would like to dedicate this article to the late Aharon Oppenheimer, my mentor and friend, whose guidance and knowledge have deeply inspired me.

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■ Keywords

Bar Kokhba, Second Jewish Revolt, tetradrachm, Sukkot, Jerusalem temple, Aelia Capitolina.

■ Introduction

The Second Jewish Revolt against Rome (132–135/6 CE) led to the emergence of a short-lived independent Jewish state in Judea headed by Shimon Bar Kosiba (Bar Kokhba).¹ The rebel government established a functional administration in the territories under its control, and two of the duties it took charge of were coinage and weights and the leasing of state land. Remarkably, minting authorities managed to issue a large quantity of silver and bronze coins, struck in various denominations with a great variety of types and legends,² by overstriking coins that were already in circulation before the revolt. Because of the paucity of literary sources for the Second Revolt, evidence from coinage has proved invaluable in understanding the ideology and goals of Bar Kosiba's regime. In this respect, the iconography and legends on Bar Kosiba's silver tetradrachm, which was the highest denomination of coins produced by the rebels, have been a topic of special interest in current research as well as a subject of much controversy.

The first part of this article describes the motifs and inscriptions on Bar Kosiba's tetradrachms and their variations over the years and presents the main hypotheses that have been advanced to interpret them. In the second part of this article, I propose that the combination of the temple facade on the obverse of the tetradrachms with the four species used during the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) on the reverse was intended to represent and proclaim the future inauguration ceremony of the restored temple. This interpretation may also explain some of the other symbols embossed on the coin. To conclude the article, I suggest that Bar Kosiba's tetradrachms not

¹ While in early Christian sources (see the discussion below, under "A Representation of the Descent of Heavenly Fire or of the Glory of God?") the leader of the revolt is referred to by the nickname Bar Kokhba, the discovery in the Judean desert of documentary papyri from the period of the Second Revolt has shown that his original name was Simeon ben (or bar) Kosiba. This name appears under various orthographies in the documents in question: שמעון בן כוסבה (e.g., Mur 34; Ada Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic, Hebrew and Nabataean Documentary Texts from the Judaean Desert and Related Material A* [Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 2000] 175); שמעון בר כוסבה (e.g., 5/6Hev 49; Yardeni, *Textbook*, 156); שמעון בר כשבה (e.g., 5/6Hev 05; Yardeni, *Textbook*, 661); שמעון בן כשבה (e.g., 5/6Hev 05; Yardeni, *Textbook*, 661); שמעון בר כוסבה (e.g., 5/6Hev 53; Yardeni, *Textbook*, 170); שמעון בר כן[ן]שבה (e.g., 5/6Hev 05; Yardeni, *Textbook*, 371); שמעון בן כס/שבה (e.g., 5/6Hev 61; Yardeni, *Textbook*, 180) and שמעון בן כוסבא (e.g., XHev/Se 30; Yardeni, *Textbook*, 183). Bar Kosiba's official title was Nasi Israel; on this, see: Yigael Yadin et al., ed., "Appendix A: Bar Kokhba's Title נשיא ישראל 'Premier of Israel,'" in *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters: Hebrew, Aramaic and Nabataean-Aramaic Papyri* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society; Hebrew University of Jerusalem: Shrine of the Book, 2002) 369–72.

² According to Ya'akov Meshorer, Bar Kosiba's coins are "the climax of minting of Jewish coinage in Antiquity"; see Ya'akov Meshorer, *A Treasury of Jewish Coins from the Persian Period to Bar Kokhba* (Jerusalem: Yad ben-Zvi Press, 2001) 164.

only reflected the main goal of the rebel authorities (the desire to reconstruct the temple), but it may also have been a response to the coins struck by Hadrian in celebration of the inauguration of Aelia Capitolina on the ruins of Jerusalem.

■ Description of the Tetradrachms

Bar Kosiba's administration issued three denominations of silver coins: the *sela* (tetradrachm), the *shekel* (didrachm; equivalent to half a *sela*), and the *zuz* (drachma or Roman denarius; equivalent to one quarter of a *sela*). The tetradrachms, which were struck during the four-year uprising, exhibit a single type for each side, with variations over time.³ On the obverse of the tetradrachms from the first year is depicted the facade of a tetrastyle building adorned with fluted columns that have bases and capitals, upon which rests an entablature made of either two or three horizontal strips.⁴ This edifice, which stands on a thin base and has a flat roof, has been almost unanimously identified as a representation of the temple of Jerusalem.⁵ Much of the discussion focuses on whether it is a realistic image of the sanctuary⁶ or a schematic representation of it.⁷ This issue is part of a more general debate about the extent to which monuments on ancient coins reflect their models and whether or not they should be used to reconstruct ancient buildings.⁸

³ Leo Mildenberg, *The Coinage of the Bar Kokhba War* (Aarau: Sauerländer, 1984) 32.

⁴ See, e.g., Ya'akov Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage* (2 vols.; New York: Amphora, 1982) 2:plate 20:1–1c.

⁵ Alternatively, the structure on the obverse of the tetradrachm has been identified as a synagogue (cf. Adolf Reifenberg, *Ancient Jewish Coins* [3rd ed.; Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1963] 60 n. 163), or as the tabernacle (George F. Hill, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum, Palestine [Galilee, Samaria, and Judaea]* [London: Order of the Trustees, 1914] 284). According to Aryeh Kindler, it is not a representation of the temple facade, but of the holy of holies (Aryeh Kindler, "The Coins of Bar Kokhba's War," in *The Bar Kokhba Revolt* [ed. Aharon Oppenheimer; Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar. Center, 1980] 159–77, esp. 162 [in Hebrew]).

⁶ Alice Meshuam has stated in this respect that "architecture on coins always represents an actual building" (Alice Meshuam, *Coins and Temple: A Study of the Architectural Representation on Ancient Jewish Coins* [Leeds University Oriental Society; Leiden: Brill, 1966] 2). For Michael Avi-Yonah, the facade on Bar Kosiba's tetradrachm is a representation of the Jerusalem temple as remodeled by Herod (Michael Avi-Yonah, "The Facade of Herod's Temple: An Attempted Reconstruction," in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* [ed. Jacob Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 1968] 326–35, esp. 328). In the same vein, David Hendin more recently noted that "the temple was destroyed only around 60 years earlier, so stories and perhaps drawings of it were fresh" (David Hendin, "Current Viewpoints on Ancient Jewish Coinage: A Bibliographic Essay," *CurBR* 11 [2013] 246–301, esp. 289).

⁷ See, e.g., Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, 2:140; idem, *Treasury*, 144. For David M. Jacobson, the facade on Bar Kosiba's tetradrachm is a schematic representation of the Jerusalem temple based on a free rendition of a sanctuary appearing on a denarius of Emperor Domitian (David M. Jacobson, "The Temple on the Bar-Kokhba Tetradrachms," *Numismatic Circular* 116 [2008] 6–8). In this respect, it should be emphasized that temple facades are not uncommon on Roman coins; on this subject, see Stefan Ritter, "Buildings on Roman Coins: Identification Problems," *Jahrbuch für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte* 67 (2017) 101–43.

⁸ The idea that buildings on ancient coins are accurate depictions of actual monuments has long been widely accepted (see, e.g., Meshuam, *Coins and Temple*, 2). However, a shift in the way this

On the center of the temple's facade, between the inner pillars, is inserted a square design made up of dots, with two dots in the middle and a semicircular top; the whole structure appears to stand on two short legs. This item has been variously interpreted as the double door to the building itself,⁹ the ark of the covenant (seen from one of the narrow sides),¹⁰ a Torah shrine with the scrolls of the Law within it,¹¹ or the shewbread table.¹² The reverse side of the tetradrachms always shows a representation of the four species used during the Feast of Tabernacles; it depicts a centrally placed *lulav* consisting of three bundled branches (date palm, willow,

issue was approached occurred in the 1990s with scholars such as Andrew Burnett, who maintains that the representations are interpretations of the engravers rather than completely precise representations of buildings (Andrew Burnett, "Buildings and Monuments on Roman Coins," in *Roman Coins and Public Life under the Empire: E. Togo Salmon Papers II* [ed. George M. Paul and Michael Ierardi; Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press: 1999] 137–64; see also Ritter, "Buildings," 101–2). According to Ritter, "It is now widely agreed that architectural representations on coins reflect the appearance of their respective prototypes only in a very general way" (Ritter, "Buildings," 137). See also Stefan Krmnicek and Nathan T. Elkins, "Dinosaurs, Cocks, and Coins: An Introduction to 'Art in the Round,'" in *"Art in the Round": New Approaches to Ancient Coin Iconography* (ed. Nathan T. Elkins and Stefan Krmnicek; Rahden: Marie Leidorf, 2014) 7–22, esp. 9–10.

⁹ Eugen Merzbacher has depicted the figure as follows: "Viersaulige Tempelfaçade, in der Mitte eine verschlossene Pforte" ("Untersuchungen über althebräische Münzen," *Zeitschrift für Numismatik* 4 [1877] 350–65, esp. 353). This interpretation, though, has been seriously questioned, especially since the item in the center of the facade has feet, which does not fit the depiction of doors; see, e.g., Meshuam, *Coin and Temple*, 7; Mildenberg, *Coinage of the Bar Kokhba War*, 33.

¹⁰ One of the main arguments in support of this theory is the resemblance between the item on Bar Kosiba's tetradrachms and later recognizable representations of the ark of the covenant on the painted frescoes of the Dura-Europos synagogue (3rd cent. CE). According to this interpretation, the two dots in the middle of the item are rings or carrying poles. See, e.g., Paul Romanoff, *Jewish Symbols on Ancient Jewish Coins* (New York: American Israel Numismatic Association, 1971) 40; Mildenberg, *Coinage of the Bar Kokhba War*, 33–42; Elisheva Revel-Neher, "An Encore on the Bar Kokhba Tetradrachm: A Re-vision of Interpretation," in *Follow the Wise: Studies in Jewish History and Culture in Honor of Lee I. Levine* (ed. Zeev Weiss et al.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2010) 189–205.

¹¹ According to this interpretation, the two dots in the middle of the item are scrolls containing laws. See, e.g., Baruch Kanael, "Ancient Jewish Coins and Their Historical Importance," *BA* 26 (1963) 38–62, esp. 61; Reifenberg, *Coins*, 60; Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: Pantheon, 1964) 9:69.

¹² According to this interpretation, the two dots in the middle of the item are staves for carrying. See Dan Barag, "The Shewbread Table and the Facade of the Temple on the Coins of the Bar Kokhba War," *Qadmoniot* 20 (1987) 22–25 (in Hebrew); Steven S. Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 150; Hanan Eshel and Boaz Zissu, *The Bar Kokhba Revolt: The Archaeological Evidence* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi, 2019) 128. Rachel Hachlili has deemed this proposal "possible but still not very feasible" (Rachel Hachlili, *The Menorah: Evolving into the Most Important Jewish Symbol* [Boston: Brill, 2018] 9). Jacobson has seriously questioned this proposal on the grounds that the shewbread table was not an actual shrine: "by contrast, the feature shown in the same position in images of Pagan temples on coins is not an offering but an object of devotion, usually a cult statue." Furthermore, Jacobson notes that the shewbread table possessed long legs and a flat top and that "it certainly did not terminate in a semicircular profile, according to the depiction on a coin of Mattathias Antigonus . . . and in the relief showing the great seven branched candlestick on the arch of Titus in Rome" ("Temple," 8).

and myrtle) and a small *etrog* (a citrus fruit) to the left of the *lulav*.¹³ This design remains unchanged on the tetradrachms issued in the following years.¹⁴ The legends on the tetradrachms issued in the first year of the revolt are in Paleo-Hebrew and read ירושלם (Jerusalem)¹⁵ on the obverse and שנת אהת לגאלת ישראל (Year One of the Redemption of Israel) on the reverse.

In the second year of the revolt, changes were made to the obverse of the tetradrachms. The temple is now depicted as standing on a structure made of two horizontal parallel lines, between which is inserted a row of short vertical lines.¹⁶ This structure has been sometimes described as the *soreg* (the fence that surrounded the inner sacred courtyards),¹⁷ a portico,¹⁸ or a staircase.¹⁹ Likewise, above the temple appears a four-pointed design (a plus sign),²⁰ that was later changed to a six-pointed²¹ or an eight-pointed figure,²² and which has been described either as a star or a rosette.²³ At some point during the second year, the legend “Jerusalem” was replaced by the name “Shimon” (שמעון).²⁴ Likewise, a new inscription was embossed on the reverse, reading in an abbreviated form, “Year II of the Freedom of Israel” (ש ב להר ישראל).

The star-like design continues to appear on the obverse of most of the tetradrachms from the third year (fig. 1, below); however, it is absent on some of the dies from this year, where it is replaced by a wavy line made up of half circles topping the roof of the temple.²⁵ This linear design has been interpreted as a part

¹³ See, e.g., Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, 2:138; Mildenberg, *Coinage of the Bar Kokhba War*, 123.

¹⁴ On the reverse of one undated tetradrachm, the *etrog* is missing, but according to Meshorer this was due to an oversight by the cutter who forgot to engrave it (*Treasury*, 158).

¹⁵ The idea that the mention of Jerusalem on Bar Kosiba’s coins is proof of the rebel’s conquest of the city is now widely considered improbable (for this position, see, e.g., Baruch Kanael, “Notes on the Dates Used during the Bar Kokhba Revolt,” *IEJ* 21 [1971] 39–46). The legends referring to Jerusalem are thought to be slogans and expectations for the conquest of the city (see, e.g., Mildenberg, *Coinage of the Bar Kokhba War*, 31). See also the discussion below, under “A Representation of the Placing of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies?”

¹⁶ See, e.g., Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, 2:plate 21:12–13b.

¹⁷ Cf. Josephus, *J.W.* 6.124 (Josephus, *The Jewish War: Books 5–7* [trans. Henry St. J. Thackeray; LCL 210; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928] 412); *Ant.* 15.417 (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* [trans. Henry St. J. Thackeray; LCL 410; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963], 202); *m. Mid.* 2:3. See, e.g., Martin J. Price and Bluma L. Trell, *Coins and Their Cities* (London: Vecchi, 1977) 177–79; Jacobson, “Temple,” 8.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, 2:151.

¹⁹ For a reference, see Hendin, “Viewpoints,” 291.

²⁰ See, e.g., Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, 2:plate 21:13.

²¹ See, e.g., *ibid.*, plate 22:16.

²² See, e.g., *ibid.*, plate 25:51.

²³ See the discussion below, under “A Representation of the Descent of Heavenly Fire or of the Glory of God?”

²⁴ See, e.g., Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, 2:151; Eshel and Zissu, *Bar Kokhba*, 128.

²⁵ See, e.g., Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, 2:plate 25:53–53c.

of the temple entablature,²⁶ or as the golden vine hung above the entrance of the sanctuary.²⁷ In the third year, the legend on the obverse remains “Shimon,” while the inscription placed on the reverse simply says, “To the Freedom of Jerusalem” (לחרות ירושלים), with no date.²⁸

■ The Facade of the Sanctuary and the *Lulav* as Complementary Symbols of the Inauguration Ceremony of the Restored Temple

It is therefore obvious that the most characteristic and constant feature of the imagery on Bar Kosiba’s tetradrachms is the combination of a representation of the Jerusalem temple facade with the four species²⁹ from the Feast of Tabernacles.³⁰ As shall be

²⁶ See, e.g., Mildenberg, *Coinage of the Bar Kokhba War*, 44.

²⁷ Josephus, *J.W.* 5.207–210 (LCL 210: 262–64). See, e.g., Joseph Patrich, “The Golden Vine, the Sanctuary Portal and Its Depiction on the Bar-Kokhba Coins,” *JJA* 19/20 (1993–94) 56–61.

²⁸ A number of scholars have drawn attention to changes in the legends found on Bar Kosiba’s tetradrachms. According to Meshorer, the date was intentionally omitted from the last series of Bar Kosiba coins because “counting was considered a bad omen” (*Ancient Jewish Coinage*, 2:154). Likewise, in Meshorer’s opinion, the inscription “ירושלים” (Jerusalem) on the tetradrachms was replaced by the leader’s name “שמעון” (Shimon), either because Bar Kosiba was aware that the conquest of Jerusalem would not occur soon or “because of his inflated ego” (*Treasury*, 158). Mildenberg has interpreted this last change differently: he believes Bar Kosiba sought to make his personal name and the city name “interchangeable proclamations of the rebel states” (*Coinage of the Bar Kokhba War*, 31).

²⁹ It should be noted that the “four species” motif as such was not an innovation of Bar Kosiba’s minters. Variations of this theme appear on all three denominations of the bronze coins from the fourth year of the Jewish War (69–70 CE). On the reverse of the largest of these coins is displayed an *etrog* (citrus) flanked on either side by a *lulav* (date palm, willow, and myrtle tied in a bundle), together with the inscription שנת ארבע חצי (Year Four Half). On the obverse is a seven-branched palm tree between two baskets of fruit (most likely dates), together with the inscription לגאלי ציון (To the Redemption of Zion) (see, e.g., Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, 2:plate 19:27–28). A smaller coin of this type has on its reverse a pair of *lulavs* surrounded by the inscription שנת ארבע רביע (Year Four One Quarter) and on its obverse an *etrog* with the inscription לגאלי ציון (see, e.g., *ibid.*, plate 19:29–29a). A third coin shows on its reverse a *lulav* flanked by an *etrog* on either side accompanied by the legend שנת ארבע (Year Four), and on its obverse a chalice or goblet with the caption לגאלי ציון (see, e.g., *ibid.*, plate 19:30–30d). See also Donald T. Ariel, “Identifying the Mints, Minters and Meanings of the First Jewish Revolt Coins,” in *The Jewish Revolt against Rome: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (ed. Mladen Popović; JSJSup 154; Leiden: Brill, 2011) 373–97, esp. 376. Meshorer has explained the choice of the “four species” motif on coins of the Jewish War by the fact that the Feast of Tabernacles was “a festival of national pride” and palm branches were a symbol of victory (Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, 2:118). The similarities in the depiction of the “four species” on the coins of the First and the Second Revolts makes it likely that Bar Kosiba minters were familiar with the coins of the First Jewish Revolt. However, they introduced a major innovation by systematically and exclusively associating this symbol with a representation of the temple facade, turning the “four species” into a temple inauguration motif.

³⁰ The importance of Sukkot for Bar Kosiba’s propaganda is reflected by the use of other symbols on his coins that are related to this festival (exclusively or not). Thus, for instance, a common motif is the palm branch (*lulav*) encircled by a wreath; see, e.g., Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, 2:plate 21:6–6h. While, as seen above, the palm branch is one of the four species used during the Feast of Tabernacles, references to wreaths in relation to Sukkot can be found in *Jub.* 16:39. Likewise, the single-handled jug with a palm (or a willow?) branch to its right, which appears on Bar Kosiba

shown below, the association of the festival of Sukkot with the founding of temples and altars is a recurring motif in biblical tradition and Second Temple literature.

A prime and well-known example of this is provided by the biblical accounts of King Solomon's inauguration of the First Temple of Jerusalem. First Kings (ch. 8) recounts that when Solomon had finished building the temple in Jerusalem, he assembled the priests and the leaders of Israel to bring the ark of the covenant from the City of David into the sanctuary "at the feast (בַּחֹג), in the month of Ethanim—that is, the seventh month" (1 Kgs 8:2). According to the vast majority of scholars, "the feast" in this verse is to be identified as a reference to Sukkot.³¹ After the priests had placed the ark, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels into the holy of holies, a cloud manifesting the glory of the Lord filled the temple. Then, Solomon gave a prayer of dedication while standing before the altar, and, together with the people, he offered sacrifices in the sanctuary, while observing the festival of Sukkot (1 Kgs 8:65–66).

A retelling of the dedication of Solomon's Temple is found in 2 Chr 5:2–7:10; although it adds little to the account in 1 Kgs 8, it does display an interesting difference.

When Solomon had ended his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. The priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed down on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever." (2 Chr 7:1–3 NRSV)

As Itamar Kislev has noted, the depiction of the fire that descends from heaven to consume the sacrifices displays a similarity to the account of the inauguration of the tabernacle in the Sinai wilderness, for there too the sacrifices on the altar were consumed by divine fire (Lev 9:24).³² Also noteworthy is the emphasis that Solomon and all Israel observed the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days and the *aseret* on the twenty-third of the seventh month (2 Chr 7:8–9). Jeroboam's dedication of the Bethel temple coinciding with his institution of an alternate and rival Feast of Tabernacles on the fifteenth day in the eighth month (1 Kgs 12:32–33) provides

denarii, has been identified as the golden flagon (צִלְחֵית שֶׁל זָהָב) that was used in the temple to pour out libation water during the Feast of Tabernacles (m. Sukkah 4:9–10). See, e.g., Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage* 2:plate 23:33–37a; idem, *Treasury*, 146; Yonatan Adler, "The Temple Willow-Branch Ritual Depicted on Bar Kokhba Denarii," *INJ* 16 (2007–8) 129–33.

³¹ See, e.g., Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *A History of Sukkot in the Second Temple and Rabbinic Periods* (BJS 302; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) 18–20; Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (AB 10; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) 289. For a different position, see, e.g., Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings* (WBC 12; Waco: Word Books, 1985) 113, 124.

³² Itamar Kislev, "The Role of the Altar in the Book of Chronicles," *JHS* 20 (2020) 1–16, esp. 2.

a further example of connecting the celebration of Sukkot with the inauguration of a sanctuary.³³

Likewise, the book of Ezra presents the restoration of sacrificial worship after the return from captivity in Babylon in the setting of the festival of Sukkot. According to Ezra 3:1–6, the rebuilding of the altar and the resumption of the sacrificial service by Joshua (son of Jozadak the High Priest) and Zerubbabel (son of Shealtiel) coincided with the celebration of the Festival of Booths. In all likelihood, Ezra 3:1–6 deliberately cast the restoration of worship after the exile in the same mode as the ceremony of inauguration of the Temple of Solomon. In this regard, Jeffrey Rubinstein stated: “The initiation of the festival cycle on Sukkot recalls the dedication of Solomon’s Temple, and the parallel serves to confer legitimacy on the restored cult. Just as God responded to the dedication of the First Temple by Solomon, so the efforts of Yeshua and Zerubabel should receive divine favor.”³⁴

A further important example of associating Sukkot with the inauguration of the temple is found in the book of Zechariah. In chapter 14, the prophet predicts the coming day of the Lord after the destruction of Jerusalem by the nations: God will come forth and rebuild his city, causing the nations to convert to worship of him. Then, Zechariah envisions the celebration of Sukkot in the restored temple. Although this vision does not portray any dedication ceremony, it does depict a new sanctuary and the advent of a new era.³⁵

The motif of the coinciding of the dedication of the temple with the celebration of Sukkot is also found in later Second Temple literature. In this respect, certain passages of 2 Maccabees are of direct interest to our discussion. Second Maccabees claims to be an epitome of Jason of Cyrene’s lost work that comprised five volumes. While Jason’s work is usually ascribed to the first Hasmonaean generation, the date of its abridgement is still disputed; it has been variously dated between the reign of John Hyrcanus (134–104 BCE) and Pompey’s conquest of Judea (63 BCE).³⁶ Second Maccabees deals with the Jews’ revolt against Antiochus IV Epiphanes until the defeat of the Seleucid general Nicanor (161 BCE). Of special interest is the second of the two letters that are appended to the abridgment of Jason’s history (2 Macc 1:10–2:18), both of which instruct the Jews of Egypt to join the Jews in Judea in commemorating the purification of the Jerusalem temple by observing the newly instituted “feast of Tabernacles in the month of Kislev” (1:9).³⁷ The second

³³ See, e.g., Jules F. Gomes, *The Sanctuary of Bethel and the Configuration of Israelite Identity* (BZAW 368; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006) 147–48.

³⁴ See, e.g., Rubenstein, *Sukkot*, 33.

³⁵ On this, see, e.g., Konrad R. Schaefer, “The Ending of the Book of Zechariah: A Commentary,” *RB* 100 (1993) 165–238, esp. 228–29; Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, “Sukkot, Eschatology and Zechariah 14,” *RB* 103 (1996) 161–95, esp. 186.

³⁶ On 2 Maccabees, see Jonathan A. Goldstein, *II Maccabees* (AB 41A; Garden City, NY; 1983) 3–188; Daniel R. Schwartz, *2 Maccabees* (CEJL; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008) 3–126.

³⁷ For discussions on the dates and authenticity of the letters, see, for instance Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 138–39, 157–67; Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, 519–29; Robert Doran, *2 Maccabees: A Critical Commentary* (ed. Harold W. Attridge; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012) 62–63.

letter says: “Inasmuch as we are about to celebrate, on the twenty-fifth of Kislev, the Purification of the temple, we thought we ought to let you know, so that you, too, might celebrate it as Days of Tabernacles and Days of the Fire, as when Nehemiah, the builder of the temple and the altar, brought sacrifices” (1:18).³⁸

The letter contains a story about Nehemiah dedicating the newly rebuilt altar with the remains of the sacred fire, which the priests of the First Temple had hidden away before they were taken into exile.³⁹ This fire was preserved underground in a thick liquid form and miraculously went up in flames when poured upon the altar and exposed to the sun.⁴⁰ As seen above, that dedication occurred at the time of the festival of Sukkot. The first eight verses of the next chapter go on to say that it was the prophet Jeremiah who had instructed the captives to take sacred fire from the altar. Jeremiah himself took the holy tent, the ark, and the altar of incense and sealed them in a cave on Mount Nebo, where they would remain undiscovered until God again gathers his people.

“At that time the Lord will bring these things to light again and the Glory of the Lord and the cloud will be seen, as they were over Moses and as Solomon, too, requested, in order that the Place should be greatly sanctified.” We are also told that Solomon in his wisdom offered a sacrifice in honor of the dedication and completion of the temple. Just as Moses prayed to the Lord and fire came down from heaven and devoured the sacrifices, so Solomon prayed, and fire came down and consumed the burnt offerings. (2 Macc 2:8–10)⁴¹

Most noteworthy is the recurrent motif of the sacred fire descending from heaven at the dedications of Moses, Solomon, and Nehemiah. It appears thus that the epistle in 2 Macc 1:9–2:18 had two goals. The first goal was to legitimize the altar of the Second Temple by using the theme of sacred fire as a symbol of God’s presence and of his approval.⁴² The second goal was to connect the rededication of the temple by Judah Maccabeus (celebrated “as Days of Tabernacles and Days of the Fire”) to the dedications by Solomon and Nehemiah who inaugurated the temple and altar on Sukkot.⁴³ Moreover, Daniel Schwartz has proposed that the account of Judas Maccabeus rededicating the altar by igniting rocks and extracting

³⁸ Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 154.

³⁹ The fact that, according to 2 Maccabees, it was Nehemiah who was involved in the rededication of the temple, while in the books of Zechariah (4:9–10), Ezra (3:2–3; 5:2), and Ben Sira (49:11–12), Zerubbabel and Joshua son of Jozadak are referred to as the builders of the temple and altar, has been widely discussed. However, this question goes beyond the scope of the present research; for discussions on that, see Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 174–76; Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, 151; Doran, *2 Maccabees*, 63.

⁴⁰ According to Doran, the actual meaning of this account is that God himself, by means of the sun, reignited the sacred fire from Solomon’s Temple (Doran, *2 Maccabees*, 53).

⁴¹ Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 156.

⁴² Eyal Regev, “2 Maccabees,” in *Jewish Annotated Apocrypha* (ed. Jonathan Klawans and Lawrence M. Wills; New York: Oxford University Press, 2020) 251–88, esp. 259.

⁴³ See, e.g., Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 176; Rubenstein, *Sukkot*, 60; Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, 134.

fire from them (2 Macc 10:3) was an implicit reference to the rocks on which the viscous liquid was poured at the time of Nehemiah.⁴⁴ Also noteworthy is the fact that 2 Macc 10:7 says that during the festival of purification of the temple, the Jews carried “wreathed wands, and branches bearing ripe fruit, and palm fronds,” which is most likely a reference to the four species used during the Feast of Tabernacles.⁴⁵ Another reference to a connection between Sukkot and the inauguration of an altar can be found in the book of Jubilees (16:20–31), which records that it was Abraham who introduced the Feast of Tabernacles, when after the birth of the promised child Isaac, he built an altar beside the Well of the Oath.

In light of the above, I propose that the iconography on Bar Kosiba’s tetradrachm is probably referring to this ancient tradition setting the dedication of the temple (or of altars) in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles. In other words, combining a depiction of the temple facade with symbols related to the festival of Sukkot on Bar Kosiba’s tetradrachms was intended to represent and announce the coming inauguration of the new sanctuary.⁴⁶

■ A Representation of the Descent of Heavenly Fire or of the Glory of God

Furthermore, such a proposition opens new perspectives on the study of other symbols on Bar Kosiba’s coinage, among which is the star-like item depicted above the temple on the tetradrachms from the second year of the revolt onward. Interpreting this design has been an object of intense discussion. A popular understanding has been to view it as a stellar design alluding to the Aramaic nickname Bar Kokhba (Son of the Star), which was given to the leader of the Jewish revolt, with a probable messianic reference to Num 24:17.⁴⁷ The sobriquet is found

⁴⁴ Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, 134.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 380–81; Hayim Lapin, “Palm Fronds and Citrons: Notes on Two Letters from Bar Kosiba’s Administration,” *HUCA* 64 (1993) 111–35, esp. 117–18; Eyal Regev, *The Hasmoneans: Ideology, Archaeology, Identity* (Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013) 40–41.

⁴⁶ It may be useful to mention here Meshorer’s suggestion that the inscription ירושלם (Jerusalem) on Bar Kosiba tetradrachms was perhaps used as a symbol for the rebuilding of the temple (*Ancient Jewish Coinage*, 2:153). In support of this proposal is the strong relationship in prophetic literature between the restoration of Jerusalem and temple restoration; see, e.g., Isa 60–62; Ezek 40–48; Zech 14.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., Kanael, “Notes,” 42 n. 21; Mary E. Smallwood, *The Jews under the Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian* (Studies in Late Antiquity 20; Leiden: Brill, 1976) 444–45; and, more recently, Hillel I. Newman, “Stars of the Messiah,” in *Tradition, Transmission, and Transformation from Second Temple Literature through Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity* (ed. Menahem Kister et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2015) 272–303, esp. 286–92. Likewise, William Horbury seems to endorse, cautiously, this proposition (William Horbury, *Jewish War under Trajan and Hadrian* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014] 384).

transliterated in patristic literature, where he is named Βαρχωχεβας,⁴⁸ Χοχεβᾶς⁴⁹ or Cochebas.⁵⁰ Eusebius, in an account probably derived from Aristo of Pella's lost *Disputatio Iasonis et Papisci*, explicitly links this name to the Jewish leader's Messianic self-understanding:

At that time the one who led the Jews was a man by the name of Barchochebas, which in fact means "star" (ἀστέρᾱ). He was a man in all respects murderous and criminal, yet, based on his name, he tricked them like slaves into thinking that he was a star come down to them from heaven, to illuminate those suffering evil.⁵¹

In this regard, we should also mention the famous rabbinic tradition, according to which Rabbi Akiba saw in Bar Kosiba the fulfillment of Balaam's oracle of the star rising out of Jacob (Num 24:17) and identified him as the king messiah:

R. Shimon b. Yohai taught, My teacher Akiba used to expound: A star (כוכב) shall step forth from Jacob (Num. 24:17): Koziba steps forth from Jacob. When R. Akiba saw Bar Koziba, he exclaimed: This one is the king messiah. R. Yohanan b. Torta said to him, Akiba, grass will grow between your jaws and still the son of David will not have come.⁵²

Identifying the star-like item as a messianic star has been seriously questioned by scholars such as Gedalyahu Alon and Leo Miltenberg, according to whom neither Bar Kosiba's coinage nor the documents and letters found in the Judean desert hint at any messianic self-awareness on the part of the rebel chief. In their opinion, this design is a common rosette devoid of symbolic value.⁵³ Without entering into the debate on Bar Kosiba's messianic status,⁵⁴ the main difficulty with the identification of the star-like design as a messianic stellar symbol alluding to Bar Kosiba is that the nickname Bar Kokhba does not appear on the coins and weights⁵⁵ from the

⁴⁸ Justin, *I Apol.* 31.6 [ed. Jacques-Paul Migne; PG 6; Paris: Petit-Montrouge, 1857] col. 375–78; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.6.2 [ed. Eduard Schwartz et al.; GCS 2.1; Berlin: Akademie, 1999] 306; 4.8.4 (GCS 2.1, 316); Jerome, *Ruf.* 3.31 [ed. Pierre Lardet, CCL 79; Turnhout: Brepols, 1982] 102.

⁴⁹ Eusebius, *Chron.*, Hadrian xvii (ed. Alfred Schoene, *Eusebius, Chronicorum Libri Duo* [Berlin: Weidmann, 1875] 2:168).

⁵⁰ Jerome, *Chron.* Olymp 228 [ed. Rudolf Helm; GCS 47; Berlin: Akademie, 1956] 201).

⁵¹ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.6.2 (Eusebius of Caesarea, *The History of the Church: A New Translation* [trans. Jeremy M. Schott; California: University of California Press, 2019] 180).

⁵² Y. Ta'an. 4.8.68d (Jerusalem: Academy of the Hebrew Language, 2001, col. 733); Lam. Rab. 2:4 (*Lam. Rab.* [ed. Salomon Buber; Vilna: Romm, 1899] 101).

⁵³ On this, see, e.g., Craig A. Evans, "Messianic Hopes and Messianic Figures in Late Antiquity," *JGRChJ* 3 (2006) 9–40, esp. 32; Aharon Oppenheimer, "Leadership and Messianism in the Time of the Mishnah," in *Eschatology in the Bible and in Jewish and Christian tradition* (ed. Henning Graf Reventlow et al.; JSOTSup 243; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997) 152–68; Dan Jaffé, "La figure messianique de Bar-Kokhba. Nouvelles perspectives," *Henoah* 28 (2006) 103–23.

⁵⁴ Gedaliah Alon, *The Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic Age, 70–640 CE* (trans. and ed. Gershon Levi; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 622; Leo Miltenberg, "Bar Kokhva Coins and Documents," *HSCP* 84 (1980) 311–35, esp. 315; idem, *Coinage of the Bar Kokhba War*, 44–45.

⁵⁵ For the Bar Kosiba weights, see: Baruch Lifshitz, "Bleigewichte aus Palästina und Syrien," *EL ZDPV* 92 (1976) 168–87 n. 41; Amos Kloner, "Load Weight, Ben Kosba's Administration," *EL*

Second Revolt or in the documents from the Judean desert.⁵⁶ It seems to have been neither a self-designation of Bar Kosiba himself nor a key element in his official propaganda.⁵⁷ This being said, it seems very unlikely that the design above the temple is merely a decorative device and has no symbolic signification. Mildenberg himself emphasized the great care with which the rebel administration chose the legends and symbols on Bar Kosiba's coinage for propaganda purposes.⁵⁸

Another interpretation has been suggested according to which the star-like item represents the golden chandelier bestowed by Queen Helena of Adiabene.⁵⁹ According to the Mishnah (Yoma 3:10), it was placed "over the opening of the temple" (על פתחו של היכל). The Babylonian Talmud (Yoma 37b) says that when the sun rose, sparkling rays of light would emanate from the candelabra because it was polished. The difficulty with this proposition is that the item depicted on Bar Kosiba's tetradrachm is above the sanctuary and not part of it. It is therefore unlikely that it was a temple accessory. Furthermore, we note with Michael Avi-Yonah that according to the Mishnah, Queen Helena's lamp "was not placed above the outer door of the temple, the door of the *ullam* (porch), but over the inner door to the sanctuary (*hekhal*)."⁶⁰

In my opinion, the star-like design should be understood within the context of the iconic depiction of the inauguration of the temple. This leads me to propose two alternative but related interpretations of this item. First, it may be a representation of the holy fire descending from heaven to consume the sacrifices on the altar of burnt offerings. As seen above, this motif, which is found in several biblical accounts that describe the inauguration of the temple (or of an altar),⁶¹ was taken as a confirmation that God had accepted the dedication. There is another possible interpretation. In a study from 1942, Paul Romanoff proposed: "The star (sc. on Bar Kosiba tetradrachm), suggesting a pedimental star, may have represented celestial abode, as the temple actually symbolized the world and the Holy of Holies,

20 (1989) 345–51 (in Hebrew), also published in *IEJ* 40 (1990) 58–67; Robert Deutsch, "A Lead Weight of Shimon bar Kokhba," *IEJ* 51 (2001) 96–98; idem, "A Further Lead Weight of Shimon Bar Kokhba," *INJ* 15 (2003–2006) 77–78; Boaz Zissu and Amir Ganor, "A Lead Weight of Bar Kokhba's Administration," *IEJ* 56 (2006) 178–82.

⁵⁶ For the Bar Kosiba letters found in the Judean Desert, see Yardeni, *Textbook*, 155–84.

⁵⁷ Furthermore, it is noteworthy that in his official propaganda, Bar Kosiba did not put a special emphasis on his own patronymic name upon which the nickname Bar Kokhba is based. To the best of my knowledge, in the coins, letters, and official documents from the Second Revolt, the rebel leader is never referred to by only his patronymic; his first name, Shimon, always appears (sometimes with, sometimes without the patronymic Bar Kosiba).

⁵⁸ Mildenberg, *Coinage of the Bar Kokhba War*, 69–72.

⁵⁹ See, e.g., Israel Renov, "A View of Herod's Temple from Nicanor's Gate in a Mural Panel of the Dura Europos Synagogue," *IEJ* 20 (1970) 67–74, esp. 71–72; David Hendin, "On the Identity of Eleazar the Priest," *INJ* 18 (2014) 155–67, esp. 165.

⁶⁰ See Avi-Yonah's critique of Renov in his editor's note published at the end of Renov, "A View of Herod's Temple," 73–74.

⁶¹ See, e.g., Lev 9:23; 1 Kgs 8:10–11; 2 Chr 7:1–2.

the Seat of Divine Glory.”⁶² If I am correct in understanding the imagery on Bar Kosiba’s tetradrachms as a representation of the inauguration of the temple, then the star may more accurately represent the return of the glory of God (כבוד יהוה). In the biblical narrative, the glory of God symbolizes the divine presence of God.⁶³ The glory filling the newly built tabernacle of Moses (Exod 40:34; Num 9:15–23) and the Temple of Solomon after the ark of the covenant was placed in it (1 Kgs 8:11; 2 Chr 5:13b–14; see also 2 Chr 7) indicates the entrance of God into his divine dwelling place. In the book of Ezekiel, the glory of God leaves the temple because of the sins of the Israelites (11:23), but in the eschatological age, it will once again take up permanent residence in the rebuilt temple (43:2).⁶⁴ After 70 CE, the tradition about God’s presence departing from the temple is echoed in various writings responding to the destruction the Second Temple;⁶⁵ likewise, the hope was expressed that the sanctuary would be restored and God would situate his presence in it.⁶⁶ In the Priestly source, Yahweh’s glory is depicted as a blazing fire surrounded by a cloud;⁶⁷ elsewhere in biblical literature, it is pictured as having a physical appearance of radiant light. A famous example is found in Isa 60:1–3, which emphasizes the restoration of Jerusalem and the shining brilliance of the glory resting over the city.⁶⁸ Also noteworthy is the connection of the glory of God to the fire coming down from heaven to consume the sacrifices on the altar, as is found in several biblical texts including the account of the dedication of the temple in 2 Chr 7:1.⁶⁹

⁶² Paul Romanoff, “Jewish Symbols on Ancient Jewish Coins,” *JQR* 33.1 (1942) 1–15, esp. 2; idem, *Symbols*, 40.

⁶³ For research about the glory of God, see, e.g., Leopold Sabourin, “Glory of God,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 254–55; Jarl E. Fossum, “Glory,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Karel van der Torn et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 348–52; Darrell D. Gwaltney Jr. and Ralph W. Vunderink, “Glory,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. David N. Freedman et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 507–8; Carey Newman, “Glory, Glorify,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible II* (ed. Katharine D. Sakenfeld; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007) 576–80.

⁶⁴ The future restoration of God’s presence in Jerusalem is also announced in Zech 8:3.

⁶⁵ See, e.g., Josephus, *J.W.* 2.539 (LCL 203:530); 5.412 (LCL 210:266); 6.299 (LCL 203:462); *Ant.* 20.166 (LCL 456:90); 2 Bar. (8.2; 64.6). The belief that the God of Israel had abandoned his temple before it was destroyed by the Romans is also echoed in Tacitus’s writings (*Hist.* 5:13 [LCL 249:196]).

⁶⁶ See, e.g., Sib. Or. 5.414–33; Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ishmael, Massekhta de-Pisha, 14; Tg. Isa. 52:8. In rabbinic sources, the glory of God is equated with the *Shekhina* (שכינה), the invisible divine presence.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Exod 24:15–18; 40:34–38. In this respect, notice Romanoff’s proposition that the wavy lines appearing over the temple roof on some of the third year dies “suggest clouds representing divine presence” (*Symbols*, 40 n. 170). If correct, this proposal may explain the relation and coherence between both symbols placed above the temple (i.e., the star-like design and the wavy line), since it would mean that they have a roughly similar meaning. We should be careful, however, not to fall into a circular argument.

⁶⁸ See, e.g., Ezek 10:4; 43:2.

⁶⁹ See also Lev 9:23–24.

■ A Representation of the Placing of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies

If my proposition that the imagery on Bar Kosiba's tetradrachms is to be understood as a representation of the dedication of the temple is indeed correct, then this may also shed new light on the controversial identification of the square structure with a semicircle top that is inserted inside the facade of the building. Among the above-mentioned proposals that have been advanced,⁷⁰ the one that would best fit the context of the inauguration of the temple is to identify this object as the ark of the covenant. As seen above, the accounts of the ceremonial inauguration of Solomon's Temple in 1 Kgs 8 and 2 Chr 5 report that the main ritual act of the dedication (which was held around the time of Sukkot) was the placing of the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies. It was only then that the glory of God filled the sanctuary (1 Kgs 8:6–11). Against this proposal, it has been argued that the ark had disappeared following the Babylonian sack of Jerusalem in the sixth century BCE, and that both Josephus (*J.W.* 5.219)⁷¹ and the Mishnah (*Šeqal.* 1–2) clearly say that the ark was not in the Second Temple. For this reason, Dan Barag has seriously questioned the likelihood that Bar Kosiba made the claim of restoring the ark.⁷² However, this argument is not compelling, because traditions about the concealment of the ark of the covenant prior to the Babylonian conquest are not rare in late Second Temple and post-destruction writings. As already mentioned, according to 2 Macc 2:1–8, just before the Israelites were exiled to Babylon, Jeremiah hid the ark on Mount Nebo and then professed:⁷³

The place will remain unknown until God gathers His people together in the Age of Mercy. At that time the Lord will bring these things to light again, and the Glory of the Lord and the cloud will be seen, as they were over Moses and as Solomon, too, requested, in order that the Place should be greatly sanctified. (2 Macc 2:7–8)⁷⁴

Likewise, the Temple Scroll confirms a frequent hope that there would be an ark in the restored temple.⁷⁵ Here it should be emphasized that according to the *opinio communis*, Bar Kosiba neither conquered nor held Jerusalem;⁷⁶ it is therefore

⁷⁰ See the discussion above, under "Description of the Tetradrachms."

⁷¹ Josephus, *J.W.* 5.219 (LCL 210:266).

⁷² See Barag, "Shewbread," 22.

⁷³ For other accounts relating the concealment of the ark, see, e.g., Eupolemus, in his work *On the Kings of Judea* (*apud* Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 9.39:5 [ed. Karl Mras; GCS 43.1; Berlin: Akademie, 1954] 548); 2 Bar. 6:7; 4 Bar. 3:7–19; Liv. Pro. 2:11–19; m. *Šeqal.* 6:1–2. For further references, see, e.g., Chaim Milikowsky, "Where Is the Lost Ark of the Covenant? The True History (of the Ancient Traditions)," in *Tradition, Transmission, and Transformation from Second Temple Literature through Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity* (ed. Menahem Kister et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2015) 208–29.

⁷⁴ Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 156.

⁷⁵ 11Q19 VII:10–12 (*The Dead Sea Scrolls: Study Edition* [ed. Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar; 2nd ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1999] 1232).

⁷⁶ See, e.g., Mildenberg, "Bar Kokhva Coins and Documents," 320–24; Meshorer, *Treasury*, 152;

more than likely that the imagery on the tetradrachms is an idealized representation of the expected inauguration of the temple.⁷⁷ It seems safe to assume that Bar Kosiba's propaganda campaign sought to promote the idea that the restoration of the temple would be a full restoration that would include the placing of the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies, symbolizing God's presence in the temple (unlike the restoration following the return from Babylon).⁷⁸

■ Bar Kosiba Tetradrachms as a Response to the Foundation Coin of Aelia Capitolina

Considered in a larger context, Bar Kosiba tetradrachms may also be interpreted as a response to Hadrian coinage, and more specifically to the coin type struck in celebration of the inauguration of Aelia Capitolina. The date of the founding of Aelia Capitolina on the ruins of Jerusalem has long been a focal point of scholarly debate: while many consider that the colony was established before the Second Jewish Revolt broke out, as reported by Cassius Dio,⁷⁹ others have dated it after the suppression of the uprising as stated in Eusebius's writings.⁸⁰ However, recent archaeological finds seem to confirm Cassius Dio's statement. Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah has demonstrated, on the basis of numismatic and epigraphic evidence and archaeological remains from the Eastern Cardo (the Western Wall Plaza), that the inauguration of Aelia Capitolina should be linked to Hadrian's visit to the city in 129/130 CE. Indeed, by that time, the city already had main streets, plazas, and public and private buildings, and it is likely that Hadrian himself came to officially proclaim the founding of the colony.⁸¹

Horbury, *War*, 347. For a different opinion, see Yehoshua Zlotnik, "Coin Finds and the Question of the Conquest of Jerusalem by Bar Kokhba," *Israel Numismatic Research* 3 (2008) 137–46.

⁷⁷ Such a situation is not unprecedented and has been found, for instance, in coins depicting the various Jupiter Capitolinus temples while the temples were either planned or under construction; see the discussion in Ritter, "Buildings," 102–10.

⁷⁸ In this regard, see the depiction of weeping by returnees to Zion who had seen both the First and the Second Temples in Ezra 3:13. The Talmud's listing of the things in which Solomon's Temple differed from the Second Temple is also noteworthy, namely, the ark, the ark-cover, the cherubim, the fire, the divine presence, the Holy Spirit, and the *Urim-we-Thummim* (b. Yoma 21b).

⁷⁹ Cassius Dio, *RH* 69:12:1–2 (Cassius Dio, *Roman History: Books 61–70* [trans. Earnest Cary; LCL 176; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925] 46). See, e.g., Aharon Oppenheimer, "The Ban on Circumcision as a Cause of the Revolt: A Reconsideration," in *Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Second Jewish Revolt* (ed. Peter Schäfer; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2003) 55–69; Hanan Eshel, "'Bethar Was Captured and the City Was Plowed': Jerusalem, Aelia Capitolina, and the Bar Kokhba Revolt," *EJ* 28 (2007) 21–28, esp. 28 (in Hebrew).

⁸⁰ *Hist. eccl.* 4:6.4 (GCS 2.1, 308). Mary Smallwood has stated in this respect that "Dio records the inception of the plan and Eusebius its fulfilment" (*Jews under the Roman Rule*, 433).

⁸¹ See, e.g., Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah, "The Foundation of Aelia Capitolina in Light of New Excavations Along the Eastern Cardo," *IEJ* 64 (2014) 3–62; eadem, *Jerusalem in the Roman Period: In Light of Archaeological Research* (Mnemosyne Supplements 432; Leiden: Brill, 2019) 51–60; Hannah M. Cotton Paltiel and Avner Ecker, "Reflections on the Foundation of Aelia Capitolina," in *The Past as Present: Essays on Roman History in Honour of Guido Clemente* (ed. Giovanni Alberto

Most interesting are the bronze coins struck to commemorate the founding of Aelia Capitolina (fig. 2). On the obverse of the coins is a portrait of Hadrian with a laurel wreath on his head and the inscription IMP[ERATORI] CAES[ARI] TRAI[ANO] HADRIANO AVG[USTO] P[ATRI] P[ATRIAE] (To Emperor Caesar Trajan Hadrian Augustus, Father of the Fatherland). On the reverse is a depiction of the ceremonial founding of the colony with the inscription: COL[ONIA] AEL[IA] CAPIT[OLINA] and in exergue COND[ITA] (The Founding of the Colony of Aelia Capitolina).⁸² Hadrian (?) is represented wearing a toga and plowing the *sulcus primigenius*, the “first furrow,” with a plow attached to an ox and a cow to establish the sacred limits (*pomerium*) of the new colony. The coin bears no date, but based on the legend on its obverse, Hannah Cotton and Avner Ecker have placed it between 128 CE—the year when Hadrian received the title of *Pater Patriae*—and 138 CE.⁸³ Rachel Bar Nathan and Gabriela Bijovsky have recently narrowed this dating to 128–130 CE on the basis of the discovery of a foundation coin of Aelia Capitolina at the site of Shua‘fat, an urban Jewish settlement about three miles north of Jerusalem that was built circa 70 CE and abandoned circa 130 CE.⁸⁴ It is thus obvious that the minting of this coin antedated the outbreak of the Second Jewish Revolt. Accordingly, it is not unlikely that the imagery of Bar Kosiba’s tetradrachm that represents the ritual inauguration of the temple of Jerusalem was a response to the imagery of Hadrian’s coin representing the ritual foundation of Aelia Capitolina on the ruins of Jerusalem.⁸⁵ This would be a further illustration

Cecconi et al.; Turnhout: Brepols, 2019) 681–95.

⁸² See, e.g., Leo Kadman, *The Coins of Aelia Capitolina* (Corpus Nummorum Palaestinensium 1; Jerusalem: Israel Numismatic Society, 1956) 53–54. Alternatively: COL(onia) AEL(ia) KAPIT(olina) COND(itor) (“the colonia Aelia Capitolina to its founder”); see Hannah M. Cotton and Avner Ecker, “The Date of the Founding of Aelia Capitolina,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Numismatics* (ed. William E. Metcalf; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 492–98, esp. 492.

⁸³ See Cotton and Ecker, “Date,” 492–93.

⁸⁴ Rachel Bar-Nathan and Gabriela Bijovsky, “The Emperor Plowing: Cause or Effect? A Hadrianic Coin from Excavations at Shu‘afat and the Foundation of Aelia Capitolina,” *Israel Numismatic Research* 13 (2018) 139–50. In earlier studies, Meshorer, followed by Hanan Eshel and Boaz Zissu, had already sustained that the coins of Aelia’s founding type were struck before the end of the Second Revolt, basing their claim on the fact that coins of this type were discovered in some of the hoards of Bar Kosiba coins. See, e.g., Ya‘akov Meshorer, “A Hoard of Coins from Hebron Hill Area,” in *Bar Kokhba Revolt* (ed. Oppenheimer) 69–70 (in Hebrew); Hanan Eshel and Boaz Zissu, “Coins from the el-Jai Cave in Nahal Mikhmarsh (Wadi Suweinit),” *INJ* 14 (2002) 168–75. However, the validity of the evidence put forward by Meshorer has been questioned, since it was not discovered in controlled excavations. Likewise, some doubts have been expressed about whether the coins of Bar Kosiba and of Aelia Capitolina found by Eshel and Zissu in El-Jai cave did actually constitute a hoard. On this, see the discussion in Benjamin Isaac, “Jerusalem—an Introduction,” in *Jerusalem, 1–704* (vol. 1/1 of *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae*; ed. Hannah M. Cotton et al.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010) 1–37, esp. 19.

⁸⁵ In this context, it could be proposed that the legend ירושלם (Jerusalem) on the tetradrachms, which, as seen above (n. 46), was probably understood as a symbol for the rebuilding of the temple, was also intended to function as a strong refutation of the name Aelia Capitolina struck on Hadrian’s coins.

of what Mildenberg called “the political astuteness” with which Bar Kosiba and his men chose coins “to match Hadrian’s” coinage.⁸⁶

■ Conclusion

This article has proposed that the facade of the temple on the obverse of Bar Kosiba’s tetradrachm and the four species on its reverse side are complementary symbols, for they work together in a relationship that expounds on the theme of the (planned) inauguration of the restored temple.⁸⁷ This interpretation also offers a coherent explanation for the star-like symbol above the temple and the square item in its center, which are likely to represent the holy fire or the glory of God descending from heaven after the placing of the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies.

If my interpretation of the Bar Kosiba tetradrachms is correct, then it confirms the fact that he made shrewd use of coins for propaganda and that he chose the symbols and legends on his coinage with considerable care. More significantly, it might also shed additional light on the ideology of his regime. The imagery on the tetradrachms was not only intended to proclaim the planned reconstruction of the temple, it was also meant to connect Bar Kosiba’s action with the biblical precedents of Solomon, Zerubbabel, Nehemiah, and Judah Maccabeus, as well as to present it as the realization of biblical prophecies about the future restoration and the return of the glory of God. In addition to these considerations, it is not unlikely that the symbolic representation of the expected inauguration of the restored temple was also chosen with the intent to respond to the coins Hadrian issued to commemorate the founding of Aelia Capitolina.

⁸⁶ Mildenberg, *Coinage of the Bar Kokhba War*, 72.

⁸⁷ This conclusion is also valid for the rare silver didrachm (*shekel*) of Bar Kosiba, which depicts types almost similar to those of the tetradrachms. The obverse of the didrachm depicts a distyle facade with a flat roof that stands on a three-stepped podium and with an inner item between the columns; the reverse shows three of the four species (the *etrog* is lacking). It bears Paleo-Hebrew inscriptions: שמעון (Shimon) on the obverse and לחרות ירושלים (To the Freedom of Jerusalem) on the reverse. See Leo Mildenberg, “A Bar Kokhba Didrachm,” *INJ* 8 (1984–1985) 33–36. The item between the pillars has a chest form and stands on two feet, but it differs from the one on the tetradrachms in that it has no semicircular top. While, according to Mildenberg, it is a representation of the ark of the covenant (Mildenberg, “Didrachm”), Dan Barag has proposed that it is a representation of the shewbread table (Barag, “Shewbread”).

Figures



Fig. 1: A tetradrachm found in Sabar cave near Ein Gedi, from the third year of the Second Revolt, with the inscriptions “Shimon” on the obverse and “To the Freedom of Jerusalem” on the reverse. Reproduced with permission of Roi Porat. Photograph by Zeev Radovan.



Fig. 2: A coin from Colonia Aelia Capitolina depicting Hadrian as the founder of the colony. Reproduced with permission of the British Museum Images. Image © The Trustees of the British Museum.