

The Coinage of the First Year as a Point of Reference for the Jewish Revolt (66-70 CE)*

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There has been a notable absence of coinage in discussion of the 66-70 CE Jewish revolt. At best, it plays a minor role in the reconstructions. A key contention of the following discussion is the need to redress the existing imbalance. David Goodblatt made a significant step forward in this task with his recent investigation of a distinctive feature of the inscriptions on the bronze issues, the use of 'Zion'.¹ Here a more limited scope of interest is addressed, the coinage issued in the first year of the revolt.

The context for this interest in the coinage lies in previous comments made about the difficulties of using Josephus' account of the war.² In our efforts to understand the revolt we have fallen prey to Josephus' broad interpretation of how to read the situation. If our goal is to understand what happened and why then we need to gain independence from his interpretative framework. Rather than concede that such a task was impossible, it was proposed that a case study approach could be employed. However, there was no attention paid to other sources of information that could possibly provide alternative frameworks by which to understand the revolt. Here we turn to the coinage of the first year to consider what role, if any, it can play in examining the war. As such, a crucial rider to what follows is that we not confine the coinage within the framework of Josephus' reconstruction. Rather than consider how we can read the coinage within the narrative of Josephus we need to consider the possibility of reversing the process and reading Josephus in relation to the coinage.

In practical terms the investigation is guided by three related historical questions: on a broad level, what can we learn about the start of the revolt from the coinage? Of a more targeted nature: can the coinage provide any insight about the leadership of the revolt and its motivation at the outset? The third question draws us back to the issue of how we reconstruct the past: can the coinage help resolve the ongoing divide in

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¹ D. Goodblatt, 'Ancient Zionism? The Zion Coins of the First Revolt and Their Background', International Rennert Guest Lecture Series 8 (2001). See also the brief comments of J.J. Price, *Jerusalem under Siege. The Collapse of the Jewish State 66-70 CE* (Leiden, 1992) 67-8, 197-8 and M. Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea. The Origins of the Jewish Revolt Against Rome, AD 66-70* (Cambridge, 1987) 158, 178 regarding the potential importance of the coins.

² J.S. McLaren, *Turbulent Times? Josephus and Scholarship on Judaea in the First Century CE* (Sheffield, 1998).

scholarship regarding how to read Josephus' account of 66 CE? Our exploration of these questions will proceed in three parts. We commence with a brief review of the coins. In the second part we will explore four key questions about the production of the coins: where, when, why and who? The final part of the investigation will consider the possible implications of the coinage for existing scholarly reconstructions of what happened in 66 CE.

Chance has had a significant part to play in the survival of the coins and it is apparent that whatever picture we construct remains subject to the possibility that new discoveries may alter our understanding. Furthermore, we must engage in some creative reconstruction about the circumstances lying behind the production of the coins given their lack of explicit indicators. Yet the great advantage of the coins is that they do not look back on the revolt from after the event. They are not post 70 CE reflections and interpretations.³ Rather, they are part of the unfolding reality of what occurred during the revolt and, therefore, are free of the hindsight that burdens the literary accounts of Josephus.

1. The features of the first year coinage

We commence with a brief description of the coins. There are three denominations of silver: shekels, half-shekels and quarter shekels. While there are several examples of the shekel and half-shekel very few examples of the quarter shekel have survived.⁴ Those hoards of coins found *in situ* were mainly located in the environs of Jerusalem, Masada and Jericho.⁵ All the coins depict a vessel, possibly a cup or chalice, on the obverse.⁶ Above the vessel is the symbol '1', represented by the letter *aleph*. Also on the obverse around the outside of the symbol is the inscription 'shekel of Israel', which is bordered by a circle of dots.⁷ On the reverse of all coins is a plant, probably a branch with three pomegranates in transition between bud and flowering. The inscription 'holy Jerusalem' surrounds the branch of pomegranates and is bordered with a circle of dots. All the inscriptions are in a paleo-Hebrew script. The coins are thick, uniform in size, shape and

³ See the cautionary comments of W.E. Metcalf, 'Coins as Primary Evidence', in G.M. Paul and M. Ierardi (eds.), *Roman Coins and Public Life under the Empire. E. Togo Salmon Papers II* (Michigan, 1999) 1-17.

⁴ It is probable that the low number of quarter shekels found dating to the first year is because few were produced. The only other surviving examples of quarter shekels date to the fourth year of the war.

⁵ Y. Meshorer, *A Treasury of Jewish Coins* (NY/Jerusalem, 2001) 132-3 provides a list of the seven major hoard finds. See also D. Ariel, 'A Survey of Coin Finds in Jerusalem', *LA* 32 (1982) 273-326 regarding the distribution of coin finds around Jerusalem.

⁶ Meshorer, *Treasury* nos. 183-191. The following description is based on the characteristics of the shekels. Any variation between the different types of coins is noted as appropriate. Unless otherwise stated all the references to Jewish coins are based on the examples cited in Meshorer, *Treasury*.

⁷ The variants are: 'half-shekel of Israel' and 'quarter-shekel of Israel'. Meshorer, *Treasury* nos. 183-184a, 187-189, 191 (shekel), nos. 185, 188, 190 (half shekel), no. 186 (quarter shekel). This is the only significant point of variation in the inscription between the three denominations.

axis, with hammered edges and they contain a very high level of silver content.⁸ Although all the coins display the same images and inscription there are at least two types of the shekel in the first year. In one type there is an inner circle of dots that surrounds the vessel and *aleph* on the obverse and the branch of pomegranates on the reverse.⁹ In the second type the inner circle of dots is removed and the respective images are enlarged and refined.¹⁰

From this basic description there are a number of important observations to make which indicate the uniqueness of these coins. First and foremost, this is the earliest surviving example of silver coinage issued by Jews in their own right.¹¹ Not one of the Hasmonean or Herodian rulers minted silver coins. Second, this was also a first for the use of 'shekel' and the various fractional denominations. In fact, even the decision to identify any type of denomination was in itself an unusual feature. Third, these coins are the earliest extant example of the use of two names, 'Israel' and 'Jerusalem' on Jewish coinage.¹² Fourth, the use of the vessel depicted on the obverse was without precedent.¹³

Three further aspects of the coins, although not unique in themselves, help reinforce their distinctive nature. One is the high level of silver content. Not only did it outstrip the level of silver in the Roman tetradrachms from Antioch but it also matched or bettered the level found in the Tyrian 'shekels'. Second, the use of a paleo-Hebrew script was a clear break from the current practice on the Herodian and provincial coinage of the period. It did, however, resemble the practice of some earlier Hasmonean issues.¹⁴ The third aspect is the date marker. The practice of providing a date according to an era

⁸ Meshorer, *Treasury* 119 states the level of silver as being 98%. R. Deutsch is currently undertaking research on die-links and metallurgy of the 66-70 CE revolt coins that will help provide more detailed information about such issues as the silver content of the coinage. See also V. Clain-Stefanelli, 'A New Quarter Shekel of the First Year of the Jewish War', *INJ* 2.1-2 (1964) 7 and H. Kreindler, 'The Application of SEM for Authentication of an Important Find of Year Five Shekels of The Jewish War', *INJ* 9 (1986-87) 43-5. An interesting variation between the shekels and half-shekels is their relative weight. While the shekels generally weigh over 14 grams the half-shekels are either just on 7 grams or slightly lower.

⁹ Meshorer, *Treasury* no. 183.

¹⁰ Meshorer, *Treasury* nos. 184-186. Note also that the orientation of the inscription on the obverse and reverse is altered between type one and type two. Meshorer (116) also claims a third stage of improvement in the first year of production (nos. 187-188). Whether this is best labelled as a distinct type, however, is debatable. There is clearly a refinement in the year two coins (see below, n. 18).

¹¹ On earlier issues of silver coinage in the territory by foreign rulers see D. Barag, 'The Coinage of Yehud and the Ptolemies', *INJ* 13 (1994-99) 27-38 and R. Deutsch, 'Five Unrecorded "Yehud" Silver Coins', *INJ* 13 (1994-99) 25-6.

¹² This point was noted by Goodblatt, 'Ancient Zionism' 2-3.

¹³ Although the use of three pomegranates as depicted on the silver coins of the first year is without precedent a single pomegranate is used between the double cornucopias on a number of Hasmonean coins and, less frequently, on some early issues by Herod. See Y. Meshorer, *AJC* I 67-8, II 20-1, 27-8.

¹⁴ Whether the intention was that a connection be made is unclear. On a more general level there is also the question of whether many people would have been able to read the script. It is possible the paleo-Hebrew script was used in a similar manner to which Latin is employed today in the motto of some schools, namely to convey a sense of tradition and heritage.

was common. What marks these coins as distinctive is that they are labelled as the start of a new series and do so without association to a particular ruler or group. The use of '1' sets the coins apart from any previous issue.

From this list of unique and distinctive features it is apparent that the coins are not merely another issue in a long established sequence. The people who minted these coins did not simply try to mirror what had happened before. They were marking the advent of a new era and starting something quite different from what had been done before.

The special nature of these coins is further reinforced by comparison with the other Jewish coinage issued during the war. Two points stand out for comment. One relates to the type of coins issued. Large quantities of bronze coins have been found from year 2. A decreasing number of year 3 and year 4 bronze coins of various denominations have also survived.¹⁵ However, with one possible exception, there are no known bronze coins from the first year of the revolt.¹⁶ Even allowing for the possibility of a prototype from year one the available evidence points to the second year as the time of full scale production of bronze coins. This stands in sharp contrast to the situation with the silver coins. In the first year there were at least two versions produced and there were three denominations issued. Clearly effort and care went into the minting of the silver coins at the start of the war. In 66 CE it was not simply a case of deciding to produce coinage *per se*, deliberate choice was a key factor about what coins to issue and it is notable that the choice was for silver.¹⁷

The other point to note relates to the style of the silver coins. There is a significant level of consistency in the silver coinage produced during the course of the war. There is little variation in the weight and purity of the silver. Furthermore, the inscriptions and symbols placed on the first year coins are retained. The few evident changes to both are best described as being refinements made in the year two coins. They include the

¹⁵ See Meshorer, *Treasury* 120-30. Why no bronze coins from the fifth year have been found and why the fourth year issue of bronze included varying sizes lies beyond the scope of this investigation.

¹⁶ R. Deutsch, 'A Unique Prutah from the First Year of the Jewish War Against Rome', *INJ* 12 (1992-93) 72, followed by Meshorer, *Treasury* 120 no.192, has argued for an undated prutah to be identified as a year 1 coin. Note, however, the comments of D. Hendin, *Guide to Biblical Coins* (4th ed; NY, 2001) 259-61 where he argues that the coin should be dated to the fourth year. The use of the inscription 'holy Jerusalem' in the abbreviated form, the absence of a date and the reference to Israel rather than Zion all point to it being a hybrid or prototype coin. While it remains possible this is an early version of what was to become the basic design of the bronze coins from year 2 and 3 it does not point to there being a sustained production of bronze coins in the first year. The absence of a date means particular caution is required in its interpretation. It is important to note that even the prototype silver coins included a date formula.

¹⁷ Although the existing provincial coinage carried rather bland symbols, especially in comparison to the Tyrian silver, it is hard to understand why the rebels would regard the bronze coins issued by the procurators as legal tender. The coins had been produced by Roman officials, for use in an economy administered by Romans. The large-scale production of bronze coins, especially in year 2 of the revolt, indicates that an effort was made to ensure Jewish coinage was available for use at an everyday level of existence. What is significant is that this activity did not take place until well after the war began.

expanded spelling of the inscription on the reverse, a more stylised depiction of the vessel and the addition of the letter *shin* to the date inscription of each year on the obverse.¹⁸ What was commenced in the first year, therefore, was not a one-off; it was the start of an ongoing action for which the basic model was formed at the outset. These coins clearly warrant further detailed investigation regarding their origin and purpose.

2. Explaining the coins of the first year

The preceding comments about the very existence of the first year silver coinage point to it as far more than a by-product of the war. The coins proclaim the beginning of a new era. High quality and almost pure silver coins of 'Israel' inscribed in paleo-Hebrew were now a reality. As Jews went about their daily life they did so with a coinage in their hands that was entirely new. These coins, therefore, are of more than a passing interest for understanding the initial stages of the war. To establish exactly what role the coins can play we need to explore four questions that are derived from the preceding description. They are: where were the coins produced; when were the coins minted and what is meant by the time period '1'; why were the coins minted; and, who minted the coins? Although these questions are related to one another in varying degrees we will address each one in turn.¹⁹

2.1 Where were the coins minted?

We commence on the basis that there was no more than one 'mint'.²⁰ The two types of year one shekel and the various refinements are best explained as developments of the one basic style of coin.²¹ The vast majority of first year coins have been found in the environs of Jerusalem, often in hoards. The distribution, in itself, does not really provide any assistance as to determining where the coins were minted. There are, however, four points that favour identifying Jerusalem as the location of the 'mint'.

By far the most significant reason to favour Jerusalem is the source of the silver. With no natural means of supply the most obvious immediate way of acquiring silver

¹⁸ It is quite remarkable that the design remained fairly uniform over the five years of production. For the refinements see Meshorer, *Treasury* nos. 193-195, 202-203a. It is worth noting that this consistency stands in contrast to the bronze coins of years 2-4.

¹⁹ The following discussion deliberately avoids using the 132-135 CE revolt coins as the major point of reference for those of the 66-70 CE revolt. See L. Mildenberg, *The Coinage of the Bar Kokhba War* (Frankfurt, 1984) 66-8. Nor are the bronze coins issued in years 2-4 used as a point of comparison. The key reason in both instances is a concern to recognise the chronological sequencing. There is insufficient overt recognition given to the fact that the silver coinage was issued first in the existing discussion.

²⁰ The use of the term mint should not be seen to imply a major industrial complex that was of a fixed location. The actual production could have easily taken place in a small workshop. I am grateful for the information on production methods provided by Y. Dray (personal correspondence).

²¹ Goodman, *Ruling Class* 178 flags the possibility of various factions being responsible for minting different versions of coins in 66 CE; cf. L. Kadman, *The Coins of the Jewish War of 66-73 CE* (Jerusalem, 1960) 100 n. 95.

was from the treasury in the Temple.²² Housed in the Temple were two ready made sources of silver, the so-called Tyrian 'shekels' which had been used for the payment of the annual Temple tax, and gifts of precious metal offered to the Temple (*War* 5.205).²³ It would be practical to set up the mint nearby and to avoid transporting quantities of the precious metal far away from the environs of Jerusalem, especially in the context of a war.²⁴

The second reason requires us to look beyond 66 CE at the situation in the remaining years of the revolt. The general level of consistency in the quality, level of silver and style of the coins and the number of years of production suggest a degree of continuity. Although the 'mint' could have been moved around during the war, from late 67 CE there were a limited number of locations still in Jewish hands that would also allow distribution of the coins. Clearly by 68 CE Jerusalem was the obvious location of the mint. There is no reason to suggest an earlier, alternative location. It was where the revolt began and one of the few places continuously under the control of the rebels.

The two other reasons for favouring Jerusalem are indirect at best. One is the nature of the images and inscriptions on the coins. The vessel appears to have been associated with the Temple cult, while the inscription on the reverse explicitly names Jerusalem.²⁵ As such, the coins display a declared allegiance to the city and the Temple. There was no attempt to distance the coins from Jerusalem or to identify an alternative place of origin. The other reason is that Jerusalem had long been a location for minting coins. Certainly as recently as Agrippa I Jewish coins were minted in the city.²⁶ It is also likely that the Roman governors who minted coins in the province used Jerusalem, in which

²² Importing silver would have been possible in 66 CE but extremely difficult from mid 67 CE onwards. Josephus mentions a public archive in Jerusalem (*War* 2.427) that housed debit records and Antipas as the public treasurer (*War* 4.140). Whether these could be the source of silver is unclear. He also mentions Eleazar b. Simon (*War* 2.564) as acquiring large amounts of money, including funds from the public treasury. On the Temple as a store of treasures see *War* 6.390 and E. Gabba, 'The Finances of King Herod', in A. Kasher, U. Rappaport, G. Fuks (eds.), *Greece and Rome in Eretz Israel* (Jerusalem, 1990) 167-8.

²³ For the Temple tax see *War* 7.218; *Ant* 13.312 and Philo *Spec. Leg.* 1.77. That the Temple acted as a storage place for the tax is evident from the various efforts by several people to acquire its funds (*War* 2.50, 175, 293). It is unclear as to whether the Tyrian money collected remained as coinage or was melted down into ingots. The question of where the raw material was acquired for the bronze coins produced lies outside the scope of this investigation.

²⁴ Meshorer, *Treasury* 240 asserts Jerusalem is the location of production, with the exception of the coins found at Gamala (no. 217).

²⁵ It is possible the naming of Jerusalem was intended, in part, to replicate the previous Tyrian silver coins, which named Tyre. Caution is warranted about the significance of Jerusalem being named as evidence of the location because the coins also use the label 'Israel'. They could be part of claims and aspirations of the rebels rather than expressions of the actual situation. Here insight can be derived from the so-called Gamala coins. These coins were produced locally at Gamala yet make no reference to the town; instead they name Jerusalem. See D. Syon, 'The Coins from Gamala — Interim Report', *INJ* 12 (1992-93) 42-3.

²⁶ See Ariel, 'Survey' 288-90 on the large number of bronze coins issued by Agrippa I from Jerusalem.

case there had been an active mint in the city as recently as 58 CE, when Felix was in office.²⁷

There is one final observation about Jerusalem as the likely location of the mint. If Jerusalem was not the place of production then where else were the coins made? There is no obvious alternative candidate. Although our answer cannot be definitive, Jerusalem is the most likely home of the mint from the outset in 66 CE.

2.2 When were the coins minted and what is meant by the use of the symbol '1'?

The question of timing has attracted attention.²⁸ Much of this discussion has been dominated by an acceptance of Josephus' description of the way the war unfolded. It has also been constructed in the context of ongoing uncertainty about the type of calendar(s) used in Judea at the time, especially in terms of whether the new year began in autumn or spring.²⁹

The inclusion of the letter *aleph* on the obverse indicates that identifying the date was important. The subsequent markings 'y[ear] 2', 'y[ear] 3', 'y[ear] 4' and 'y[ear] 5' further affirm that the reference is to a calendar year.³⁰ What is not evident from the coins is when the year began. It is either a case of creating a new calendar that marks the new year as the time the war began or a case of the rebels adopting an existing type of calendar so that it became 'the' official one to be used. The existence of 'y[ear] 5' coins provides some general assistance.³¹ This appears to be the final year in which coins were produced. Given that the capture of Jerusalem was completed in Elul 70 CE the calendar year must have commenced before that month.³² Whether the limited number

²⁷ See A. Kushnir-Stein, 'Some Observations on Palestinian coins with a bevelled edge', *INJ* 14 (2000-2002) 80-1. Meshorer, *AJC* II 8-9 and 'One Hundred Ninety Years of Tyrian Shekels', in *Studies in Honor of Leo Mildenburg. Numismatics, Art History, Archaeology* (Wetteren, 1984) 171-80 argues that Jerusalem became the location of the minting of Tyrian silver coinage from 18/17 BCE. For a thorough and effective rejection of this theory see B. Levy, 'Tyrian Shekels and the First Jewish War', in *Proceedings of the XIth International Numismatic Congress* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1993) 267-74. Note also *RPC* I 655-6.

²⁸ For example, see C. Roth 'The Historical Implications of the Jewish Coinage of the First Revolt', *IEJ* 12 (1962) 37, 'The Year-Reckoning of the Coins of the First Revolt', *NC* 2 (1962) 95 and Price, *Jerusalem under Siege* 68 n. 17; cf. Meshorer, *AJC*, II 99-100.

²⁹ As evident in the assumption by Kadman, *Coins* 54 and Meshorer, *AJC* II 99 that Nisan already marked the official start of the new year.

³⁰ On the y[ear] 5 coins see Y. Meshorer, *Masada I* (Jerusalem, 1989) 73-5 nos. 3595-3597.

³¹ For what follows the issue of where the coins were minted is important. If there were several locations or it was outside of Jerusalem we must be less confident about the line of argument advocated. Note the ongoing debate regarding the dating of some of the Judaean desert documents. See H. Eshel, M. Broshi and T.A.J. Jull, 'Documents from Wadi Murabba'at and the Status of Jerusalem During the War', in H. Eshel and D. Amit, *Refuge Caves of the Bar Kokhba Revolt* (Jerusalem, 1998) 233-9 and D. Goodblatt, 'Dating Documents in *Provincia Iudaea*: A Note on *Papyri Murabba'at* 19 and 20', *IEJ* 49:3-4 (1999) 249-59.

³² This is based on the dates provided by Josephus (*War* 6.435). Slightly earlier alternatives could be Ab, the month the Temple was captured (*War* 6.250), or Iyyar, when the first and then the second wall were captured (*War* 6.299-302, 331-47).

of 'y[ear] 5' coins should be viewed as evidence that the new year had only recently commenced is unclear. It is equally possible that the scarcity of extant 'y[ear] 5' coins is connected with the fact that Jerusalem had been under siege since Nisan 70 CE.

In terms of the coins of the first year it means the year must have begun before one known option for the start of the year, Tishri. If a new calendar was created to coincide with the founding of the new state then the decision to stop offering sacrifices on behalf of the emperor is a plausible choice (*War* 2.409). It would mean that years 1-4 ran their full course and that the fifth year was very short.³³ Although such a rendering of the calendar asserts independence it has two major drawbacks. One is the complete absence of any attempt to commemorate *the* specific event on the coins. Neither the images nor the inscriptions provide a clear link to the action of Eleazar and his associates. The other problem relates to the type of coinage produced. No effort was made to issue bronze coins in any number during the first year of the war. If this remained the case for a full calendar year it means the new administration was content initially to use existing Herodian and Roman bronze coinage. Given the large quantities of bronze coins surviving from the second year it means there must have been a sudden, dramatic change of policy.

The more plausible explanation is that the calendar year as marked on the coinage commenced in Nisan.³⁴ In practical terms this means the coins of the first year were produced in a shortened year that lasted no more than eight months. Such a rendering extends the length of the fifth year by a few months. The extension, however, is not to the point of making the scarcity of coins from that year difficult to reconcile in terms of the complications associated with the siege. In favour of placing Nisan as the beginning of the year as marked on the coins is that it was already a known option within Jewish thinking. It also is a date for which a connection with the symbols and inscriptions on the coins can be readily made.

There are two significant observations that flow from the view the calendar year began in Nisan and that the first year ran for no more than eight months. One is that it indicates priority was given to producing and refining the silver coinage. Rather than delay until the first full calendar year, as with the bronze coins, it was decided to start minting silver in the short year. There is, therefore, a sense of urgency in the action that heightens the importance of explaining the motivation behind the decision.

The second observation relates to the choice of Nisan-Adar as the calendar year. There is a substantial amount of evidence that different systems of determining when the

³³ The annual commemoration of the recapture of the Temple by Judas Maccabee could be seen as a precedent for making such a choice to commemorate a more recent event in connection with the Temple. The defeat of Cestius was too late in 66 CE to allow for the commencement of a fifth year in 70 CE.

³⁴ This is the line of argument forwarded by Meshorer, *AJC* II 99. However, what Meshorer does not consider is that such a rendering of the calendar could have been part of an overall assertion of a new uniform Jewish system of dating. In other words, as well as starting to date from this year, a decision was made also to declare when the year would commence for the new state.

year began were current among Jews in the late second temple period.³⁵ The events of 66 CE provided an opportunity for the Jews to opt for a calendar of choice: they were free of foreign control and any constraints it may have placed on them. The choice of Nisan was important as the declared option of the rebels for the newly established state. It was associated with the Temple cult, the pilgrim festival of Passover and the payment of the annual Temple tax.³⁶

The use of *aleph* referred to the first year of a new era that ended in Adar, 67 CE. What remains unclear is exactly when during the first year production actually began. Time was required to decide the type, design and denomination of the coins to be issued and then for the production of at least two versions of the first year shekel. Beyond these limited time constraints determining when production commenced is largely dependent on how we interpret Josephus' account of events in Jerusalem during the later part of 66 CE. The earliest such a decision could have been made was in connection with the cessation of offering sacrifices on behalf of the emperor and Rome in the summer.³⁷ Any further suggestion regarding the timing moves into the realm of speculation. If the decision to stop offering the sacrifices was part of a planned program then it becomes more plausible to view the minting as commencing almost immediately. Alternatively, the more spontaneous the action was the greater the time delay in the decision to commence producing coins.³⁸

2.3 Why were the coins minted?

This issue has attracted more attention than any other aspect of the coinage but not in relation to the focus of this investigation, namely, the very existence of the silver coins from the first year. Instead, most of the discussion has centred on the various inscriptions and symbols of the bronze issues.³⁹ The silver coinage has been left on the outer.

³⁵ For the divergent views expressed in antiquity by Jews about the calendar in terms of when the year began see *Ant* 1.80-81; 3.239, 248 cf. 11.109; Philo, *Spec. Laws* 2.151; m.Rosh 1.1; Esth. 3.7 and 1 Esd. 5.6. The key biblical passages, which further complicate the question, are Ex. 23.16; 34.22 and Lev. 23.5, 23. The recent study of S. Stern, *Calendar and Community: A History of the Jewish Calendar: Second Century BCE-Tenth Century CE* (Oxford, 2001) does not address the question of when the year commenced in first century Judaea. H.M. Cotton and Y. Yardeni, *DJD XXVII* (Oxford, 1997) 10-11 list Nisan and Tishri as possible months for the commencement of the year in relation to the 132-135 CE revolt documents.

³⁶ A further possible dimension to this choice was the underlying story of Exodus and notions of liberation from servitude under foreign control.

³⁷ Josephus offers no date for this action. From the subsequent narrative it is apparent the action is to be dated before the festival of wood carrying in Ab (*War* 2.425).

³⁸ Further clarification regarding the commencement date is dependent on resolving the fourth and final question in this section, the identity of those who produced the coins.

³⁹ See in particular, M. Hengel, *The Zealots. Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 A.D.* (trans. D. Smith; Edinburgh, 1989) 116-18, B. Kanael, 'The Historical Background of the Coins "Year Four Of the Redemption of Zion"', *BASOR* 129 (1953) 18-20, Goodblatt 'Ancient Zionism?', and Meshorer, *Treasury* 125-8. The one aspect of the symbols on the silver coinage to attract a similar level of interest is the explanation of the vessel.

Caution in relation to this question is of paramount importance.⁴⁰ We commence from the basis that the decision to strike silver coins and the design used were the result of deliberate choices not the result of chance.

There were two related practical concerns that would have influenced the decision-making process about what type of coinage to produce in 66 CE. One was the economic cost of war. Payment of troops, provision of supplies and equipment and funding of building activity were consequences of going to war. Silver currency would be a practical means of paying any large-scale financial costs. In turn, this need highlighted the second concern, accessing a supply of silver coinage. Before the war the vast bulk of existing silver coinage in Judea was derived from Tyre.⁴¹ Such dependence on Tyre would be a cause for concern. With the outbreak of the war it was no longer clear such access could be maintained. Furthermore, since the recent reorganisation of the Antioch mint under Nero, the Tyrian mint had either stopped production, or at least was no longer producing large quantities of coinage.⁴² Therefore, even if Tyre remained accessible, there was a question over the level of production.

It would be inappropriate to place undue emphasis on practical concerns as an explanation of why the coins of the first year were produced. There was an immediate need for coinage and the rebels could no longer presume that they could rely on previous sources once hostilities commenced. Yet, even in the solution to these practical concerns it is evident that the issue of supplying sufficient currency was not, in itself, the key issue. Any immediate concerns for payment of expenses could have been addressed by using existing coinage stored in the Temple. Opting for the production of an entirely new series of coins indicates interests above and beyond practical, economic needs. It is also apparent that the decision to produce only silver coins in the first year was deliberate. If the concern were to provide a new currency for the functioning of the entire economy, then bronze coins would have been an obvious choice. The focus on silver coins indicates interests beyond the realm of economic management.

The explanation for the decision to produce silver coinage in the first year is primarily associated with asserting independence. On a general level, the intention was to make a statement about political status. The coinage helped assert the freedom and independence of the Jews.⁴³ By their very existence the silver coins defied Roman authority. Such features as the means of dating, the use of a paleo-Hebrew script and the label 'shekel of Israel' stress the independent nature of the coins. This was not simply

⁴⁰ See C.J. Howgego, 'Why did Ancient States Strike Coins?', *NC* 150 (1990) 1-25.

⁴¹ There is some debate as to what, if any, silver coinage constituted the marketplace currency in Jerusalem. See Ariel, 'Survey', 283-5 and D. Barag, 'Tyrian Currency in Galilee', *INJ* 6-7 (1982-83) 7-13; cf. L. Kadman, 'Temple-Dues and Currency in Ancient Palestine in the light of Recently Discovered Coin Hoards', *INB* 1 (1962) 9-11.

⁴² Production of Tyrian silver coinage appears to have declined in the late 50's CE, probably as a result of the refining of silver coinage from Antioch, but it clearly did not cease in 58/59 as had previously been thought to be the case. See *RPC* I Supplement 45-6. For the situation in Antioch see *RPC* I 13, 586.

⁴³ On Josephus' possible attitude toward political freedom see D.R. Schwartz, 'Rome and the Jews: Josephus on "Freedom" and "Autonomy"', in A.K. Bowman, H.M. Cotton, M. Goodman, S. Price (eds.), *Representations of Empire. Rome and the Mediterranean World* (Oxford, 2002) 65-81.

another example of an autonomous city mint granted permission to strike coins in the functioning of the Roman imperial economy. These coins were a bold and deliberate expression of independence from all the existing political and economic structures functioning in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

While a desire to express independence explains the production of this new type of coinage in general, there is a specific reason for the decision to commence with the issuing of silver coins. It was to provide Jews with appropriate coinage to pay the upcoming annual Temple tax. This provided a tangible practical expression of the claim that breaking from Rome gave the Jews their independence. At the same time it was highly symbolic in that a prominent element of the way an ordinary Jew associated with the Temple could now be undertaken using coins ready made for the purpose. Prior to the war the Tyrian 'shekel' was the approved method of paying the annual levy. It was a choice made out of necessity. The coin directly violated the commandment about iconic images. On the obverse was depicted the image of the Tyrian deity Melqart and on the reverse was an eagle, surrounded by the inscription 'Tyre the holy and inviolable'.⁴⁴ There were, however, two points in its favour. First, it was of the highest quality available, especially in terms of the level of silver and its consistency in weight.⁴⁵ Second, it was readily accessible in the Eastern Mediterranean area and had few plausible rivals.⁴⁶ Whatever the drawbacks associated with the Tyrian silver coinage, it was the best option available at the time.⁴⁷ It was, however, apparently not the preferred option when free of any constraints. Hence, the new 'shekel of Israel' replaced the Tyrian 'shekel' at the earliest possible moment in the war. Adult male Jews could now pay the tax for the Temple of their God using their own coinage. Free to act, the rebels decided to claim full control

⁴⁴ See *RPC I* 655-57 nos.4619-4706 and M. & K. Preur, *A Type Corpus of The Syro-Phoenician Tetradrachms and Their Fractions from 57 BC to AD 253* (London, 2000) 160-3 nos. 1365-1476.

⁴⁵ D. Walker, *The Metrology of the Roman Silver Coinage* (Oxford, 1974) I 58, 66. Another possible advantage may have been the lack of overt signs of Roman hegemony on the coins.

⁴⁶ The Isfiya hoard from near Mt. Carmel may indicate the continued preference for Tyrian silver above any contemporary Roman options. See the reconstruction proposed by Kadman, 'Temple Dues'.

⁴⁷ For the preference of Tyrian silver for the Temple tax see Meshorer, 'One Hundred', 177-8 and *AJC* II 6, 8, 98; cf. W. Weiser, H.M. Cotton, 'Neues Zum "Tyrischen Silbergeld" Herodianischer und Römischer Zeit', *ZPE* 139 (2002) 236-42. The use of Tyrian coinage for the Temple tax was not necessarily supported by all Jews. It is also likely that some Jews questioned the appropriateness of the tax being levied on an annual basis. See J. Liver, 'The Half-Shekel Offering in Biblical and Post-Biblical Literature', *HTR* 56 (1963) 173-98, P. Richardson, 'Why Turn the Tables? Jesus' Protest in the Temple Precincts', in *SBL Seminar Papers 1992* (Atlanta, 1992) 507-23 and more recently, J. Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, 2002) 188-93. It is important that the use of Tyrian coinage not be viewed as a sign of the priestly authorities willingly compromising their religious heritage. If the tax was to be paid in silver, before the revolt the choice was between using Roman coinage, depicting the emperor and made with an inferior level of silver, or Tyrian silver depicting Melqart but with a consistently high level of the precious metal. Some groups or individuals may have held out for an idealist line, arguing that neither of these types should be used. Such an approach, however, would not help answer the question of how you pay the levy.

of the activities in relation to the Temple.⁴⁸ They decided to break any sense of dependence on foreign material for the functioning of the Temple cult. Although the first year was a short one on the newly declared calendar, the rebels decided to ensure there was appropriate coinage that could be used to pay the upcoming annual levy rather than wait for a complete calendar year in order to undertake the task.⁴⁹

The concern to provide appropriate coinage for the payment of the Temple tax as the key motive to mint silver is supported by two aspects of the actual coinage. One is the purity of the coins. As noted above, the consistently high level of silver in the Tyrian 'shekel' was a key reason for its use in relation to the Temple tax. It is significant that the new coinage comprises an equivalent, or in many cases an even higher, level of silver. There was no immediate economic benefit to producing such pure coinage. Rather, this concern to provide a series of near pure silver coins indicates that, when free to choose, the rebels were rigorous in seeking to provide the appropriate means for paying the Temple tax.⁵⁰

The other aspect of the coins that helps indicate their function in relation to the Temple is the images. To the modern eye the specific meaning of the vessel and branch is not immediately obvious, nor are they necessarily as evocative as some other known images made popular in later periods, such as the menorah. However, it is important that we not allow post-70 CE images, constructed in the absence of the Temple, to dominate expectations of what would be used to encourage Jews to think of the Temple while it still stood. It is reasonable to assume that the symbols used were recognizable to the contemporary Jewish audience. In such circumstances, it is appropriate to affirm that the images display a clear focus on the Temple.⁵¹ The image on the obverse, the vessel,

⁴⁸ The two defaced Tyrian coins at Masada are interesting. Whether this is the work of the same people responsible for minting the first year shekels is debatable. See Meshorer, *Masada* 74, nos. 3668, 3670. What is most striking about the Masada hoards is that there are no Tyrian coins mixed with the rebel coinage. This stands in stark contrast to the other recorded hoards, which include a mixture of Tyrian and Jewish silver coins. See Meshorer, *Treasury* 133.

⁴⁹ Of course, this solution was only really viable for those Jews residing within the territory controlled by the rebels. If Kadman's reconstruction is valid, it would appear that Tyrian coinage was still being sent from Jews outside the newly established independent state ('Temple Dues' 10).

⁵⁰ It is important to note that the high level of silver was maintained throughout the war. The use of shekels in relation to the Temple tax, rather than exclusively half-shekels, is probably best explained by a surcharge levied on payments of the tax. See Magness, *Archaeology* 192 cf. D. Sperber, 'Numismatics and Halacha', *INJ* 2 (1964). It also mirrors the situation when the tax was paid using Tyrian coinage. What is curious is the decision to produce quarter shekels in the first and fourth year of the revolt.

⁵¹ The obvious point of comparison would appear to be the coins of the 132-135 CE revolt, where there are very clear images of the Temple façade. However, there are crucial differences between these coins and the ones of the first revolt which counter this choice. The latter were produced when there was no Temple standing and Jerusalem was most likely not under the control of the people responsible for minting the coins. Instead, the points of comparison should be drawn from pre-70 art work and, possibly, imagery on other pre-70 coinage. It is notable that the former provides very few potential precedents for depicting the Temple. Although the menorah was to become a key symbol in later Jewish artwork there

probably represents the vessel in which the *omer* offering was placed. If correct, this reinforces the association of the coins with the Temple cult, and the festival of Passover.⁵² The function of the three-pronged branch of pomegranates on the reverse is less clear. Although there is no doubt that it can be connected with the Temple it could also have a more general connotation, evoking images of the land being given to the people by God.⁵³

Money was obviously needed for the war effort and the everyday economy. Yet it was decided to commence only with silver and not to draw on existing supplies. New Jewish coins were produced to affirm independence from Rome. This claim was given practical expression first by producing coins that could be used to pay the Temple tax due in Nisan of 67 CE.

2.4 Who was responsible for producing the coins?

There is no obvious answer to the question of identity on the actual coins. The only definitive point is that the people who minted the coins were linked with the revolt against the Romans. To go further in the quest for identity is the point at which we strike problems because we must turn to Josephus' account. While the following reconstruction draws upon Josephus' narrative it does not employ his interpretation of what happened as the framework for explaining the coinage.

Rather, it is a case of trying to find likely candidates to mint the coins who match the following broad description, based on what we have established from the three previous questions. They needed the following characteristics: to have ongoing access to the Temple; to be eager to assert publicly the freedom of the Jews from foreign dominance; to view the Temple and Jerusalem as rallying points for other Jews; to regard themselves as part of a new period of freedom for the Jewish people; to see the provision of Jewish money for the payment of the Temple tax as a high priority in that process; and, to regard Nisan as the appropriate date to mark the new year. Of these characteristics, the key one is the ability to have ongoing access to the Temple in order to obtain the raw material from which the coins could be minted.

are only a few examples from the pre-70 period. On the art work see D. Barag, 'The Temple Cult Objects Graffito from the Jewish Quarter Excavations at Jerusalem', in H. Geva (ed.), *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed* (Jerusalem, 1994) 277-8 and L.Y. Rahmani, 'Representations of the Menorah on Ossuaries', in Geva, *Ancient Jerusalem* 239-43. For the Temple orientated imagery on one type of Antigonus' coinage see Meshorer, *AJC* I 92-7, plate 55 nos. Z1-Z3.

⁵² See Lev 23.11-16 and m.Menah. 10.3-9. There has been a shift in thinking regarding this image. See Meshorer, *Treasury* 117 and P. Romanoff, *Jewish Symbols on Ancient Jewish Coins* (Philadelphia, 1944). The utensil depicted on the Arch of Titus is intriguing. Whether the level of association suggested by Meshorer, *Treasury* 117, is valid is questionable. On the panel depicting the various items being carried away from Jerusalem is a menorah and the shrewbread table with a small vessel placed on top of the table. While it is appealing to consider this as a Roman joke — what had been a central image on the 'rebel' coinage was now nothing more than one of several items that made up the spoils of victory — it is difficult to establish how many people would have understood the connection.

⁵³ Meshorer, *Treasury* 118-19.

The situation prior to the revolt is straightforward. Although Agrippa II was in charge in name, it was elements of the priesthood, centred round the high priest, who effectively controlled the Temple and its treasury. On several occasions different people tried to assert authority over the priesthood in relation to the Temple but without success.⁵⁴ If the coins had been minted prior to 66 CE it is the priesthood who would have matched the key characteristic, ongoing access to the Temple.

Turning to the outbreak of the war in 66 CE, rather than become entangled in interpreting Josephus' commentary in his reconstructed narrative, it is important to keep the focus on the broad nature of the events he mentions. There are three key events in direct connection with Jerusalem and the start of the war: Florus' attempt to access the Temple treasury; the decision to stop sacrifices being offered on behalf of the emperor and Rome; and the fighting in Jerusalem among Jews and between Jews and Roman troops.⁵⁵ The first two incidents provide a context for the rationale to produce the coinage and, combined with the third, indicate that elements of the priesthood remained in control of the Temple and its treasury as the events of 66 CE unfolded. Together, they help provide an immediate historical context in which there is continuity, in terms of the people involved and the crucial issues and associated motivation behind what happens.

The first incident is Florus' attempt to gain access to the Temple (*War* 2.293-332). It appears there was a dispute regarding the level of tax due from the province, possibly dating back to the recent census undertaken in Judea (*War* 6.422-23).⁵⁶ Florus decided to resolve the dispute by claiming the arrears be paid out of funds from the Temple treasury. This supposedly simple solution sparked a major protest in Jerusalem, which included a mock collection. In turn, Florus responded by sending in his troops. Many Jews of Jerusalem resisted. The ensuing street fighting resulted in loss of life and property but Florus was prevented from gaining immediate access to the Temple. The issue of the arrears was at a standstill. As Florus headed back to Caesarea the Jews debated what to do next and were left to ponder what Florus' next move would be in the situation. What the incident brought to everyone's attention was the issue of who had control of the Temple and its treasury. What degree of autonomy, if any, did those who oversaw the Temple have in practice? Was the action of Florus a one-off or was it part of a broader Roman attitude?⁵⁷

⁵⁴ The exact level of control exerted by Agrippa II is unclear from Josephus' account. He is presented as being responsible for appointing the high-priest (*Ant.* 20.203, 213, 223), granting the Levites the right to wear linen robes (*Ant.* 20.217) and oversight of requests about construction work (*Ant.* 20.220-23). However, in the dispute about the height of the Temple wall he was unsuccessful in the appeal to Nero (*Ant.* 20.189-98). Note also the decision of Claudius to allow the robes of the high-priest to remain under the control of the Jews (*Ant.* 20.6-14).

⁵⁵ The incident in Caesarea (*War* 2.284-92) can also be indirectly connected with this context. Florus' dealing with the dispute would have brought home to the aristocratic priests that their way of life was directly dependent on the attitude of the foreign overlord.

⁵⁶ It is unclear when this census was undertaken. The earliest date is 63 CE, depending on when Cestius arrived, and it could be as late as 66 CE, when Cestius visited Jerusalem for Passover (*War* 2.280).

⁵⁷ These questions were faced by the previous generation of Jews when Gaius issued the order for his statue to be erected in Jerusalem (*War* 2.185-203; *Ant.* 18.261-308; Philo, *Embassy*

In the ensuing discussions about how the Jews should deal with the issue of the disputed tax arrears the second incident takes place. Taking the initiative, certain Jews directly connected with the oversight of the Temple decided to stop sacrifices offered on behalf of the emperor and Rome (*War* 2.409-417). The action is largely symbolic in nature and probably one of principle. Exactly what the action entailed is unclear. We do not know whether the sacrifices were offered regularly or only on special occasions or whether the Romans or the Jews paid for the sacrifices. Irrespective of these issues the action was a clear statement about who controlled the Temple and its activities and for what purpose the Temple could be used. The key figures in the incident, Eleazar and other priests, were asserting that the Temple was under the control of Jews and that Rome and its emperor had no special place in its functioning. This action proclaimed the liberation of the Temple from foreign control.

Josephus presents the third incident, the fighting among the Jews, as immediately following the action of Eleazar and his associates. Their action triggered a civil war among the Jews and, on the Roman front, the legate apparently interpreted what had happened as warranting his military intervention to reassert control (*War* 2.418-56, 499-568). Exactly how much intra-Jewish fighting took place is difficult to establish. Josephus' effort to reconstruct a particular interpretation of the events is clearly evident here. There are a few named radicals, both individuals and groups, who seek to gain control but without success (*War* 2.425, 433, 564). There are some priests and aristocrats who are named as actively opposing the move to war (*War* 2.418, 429, 556). What is most interesting about his narrative, however, is that it is Eleazar and other priests at the outset of the machinations, and that it is then priests at the resolution of the infighting, who take many of the named formal leadership roles in the guise of being generals (*War* 2.562-68). Irrespective of the many comments about non-representative extremists leading the Jews to war and the details regarding conflict in Jerusalem, priests are involved in what happens as leaders of the war effort at its key moments. Furthermore, at no stage is there any indication that the Temple was wrested from the control of priests.⁵⁸ When it came to making the decision about minting coins we have no reason to look any further than to elements of the priesthood that were actively involved in the war.⁵⁹

The discussion of the four questions about the production of the silver coinage in 66 CE indicates we are looking at material that was deliberately formed as an expression of independence. Equally important, it is evident that Jerusalem and more specifically the Temple act as focal points, offering the only viable source of silver and likely place of minting, providing the key motive for their immediate production and probable

207-333). See J.S. McLaren, *Power and Politics in Palestine. The Jews and the Governing of Their Land 100 BC — AD 70* (Sheffield, 1991) 114-26.

⁵⁸ In *War* 2.422 it is made clear that the Temple remained in the hands of those favouring war. The incursion of the sicarii (*War* 2.425) and the brief appearance of Menahem (*War* 2.433-48) do not support the idea that the Temple was ever removed from the control of the 'rebel' priests that initiated the war.

⁵⁹ For the possible association between those who captured Masada and the action regarding the sacrifices see McLaren, *Turbulent Times* 265-8, 279-88.

inspiration for the symbols and inscriptions. Furthermore, it is elements of the priesthood connected with the running of the Temple who were responsible for minting the coins.

3. The coinage and scholarship on the beginning of the revolt.

In this final part of the investigation we turn our attention to the relevance of the initial issue of silver coinage for our understanding of the war and, in turn, how we should read Josephus' account of what happened. There are two basic views as to how we should approach Josephus' account of the outbreak of the war and the role assigned to the various groups of people. The more dominant line of thought is that Josephus' presentation of the priestly aristocracy is an accurate one. They were almost all opposed to war with Rome and actively tried to prevent open conflict. When it became clear there was no way to stop the war because of the intentions of radical rebels a number of these aristocrats decided to join in, asserting control over what happened in the hope of containing the revolt until it became possible to sue for peace. With a few slight modifications to the existing narrative and its associated commentary we should regard Josephus' account as reliable.⁶⁰

The other approach regards Josephus' account as a deliberate distortion of what happened. In particular, what Josephus seeks to cover up is that at least some of the aristocratic priests took an active part in bringing about the war against Rome. While some priests opposed the war others, including Josephus, decided to reject Roman domination.⁶¹

The silver coins of the first year are most instructive for how we should proceed in the interpretation of Josephus. In both approaches to the reading of Josephus it would appear the involvement of the priests in the minting of the coins is plausible. At face value, Josephus presents elements of the priesthood as playing a key role once the war had begun. In the wake of the defeat of Cestius, Josephus speaks of generals being appointed, with Ananus being responsible for overseeing the war effort in Jerusalem (*War* 2.563). These events take place in Marheshvan (*War* 2.555). Although leaving it extremely tight, it is possible to claim that the coins of the first year were minted between this time and Nisan 67. In this reading of Josephus, the radical dimension of the revolt, the sicarii and the various revolutionaries, was no longer prominent, nor was it to reassert itself until late 67/early 68 CE. It would mean the so-called moderate aristocratic priests issued the coinage.

There is, however, a fundamental problem with adhering to Josephus' account in this manner. According to Josephus, the motive of the aristocratic priests was to prevent the war from getting too far out of hand (*War* 2.649-51, 4.320-22; *Life* 22-23). Here the

⁶⁰ Key examples of this approach are T. Rajak, *Josephus. The Historian and His Society* (2nd ed; London, 2002) 104-43, esp. 128-34, R.A. Horsley, 'Power Vacuum and power struggle in 66-7 C.E.', in A. Berlin and A. Overman, *The First Jewish Revolt. Archaeology, history, and ideology* (London/NY, 2002) 87-109 and S. Mason, 'Humor and Irony in Josephus' *Vita*', paper delivered at SBL conference in Denver, 2001 and *Life of Josephus* (Brill, 2001) xlili-xlvi.

⁶¹ For recent expressions of this approach see Price, *Jerusalem under Siege* 1-59, Goodman, *Ruling Class* 152-75, and McLaren, *Power* 172-84.

coinage undercuts this reconstruction. The broad profile outlined above is of people wanting to proclaim independence, asserting freedom from foreign domination. The coinage cannot be made to equate with what Josephus tries to claim as the motivation of the aristocrats. Whoever minted the coins did so, at least in part, as an act of defiance against Rome. Although it has been claimed that the aristocracy were engaged in a 'double game', the minting of coins makes this implausible.⁶² To produce silver coinage does not match a concern to act in a measured, damage control mode. At the very least, Josephus' presentation of the motivation of the aristocracy should be rejected.⁶³

Instead, the silver coinage of the first year indicates the validity of the school of thought that regards Josephus' account as a substantial distortion of what happened, trying to cover up the active involvement of at least some of the aristocratic priests. In fact, we can refine the situation even further. It was not just a case of some aristocratic priests being involved as part of a loose coalition or as an attempt to retain support from the majority of Jews.⁶⁴ Rather, we should see the coinage as evidence of a more co-ordinated, intentional participation in the start of the war, one that points to some of the aristocratic priests as prime movers in the events that led up to the outbreak of the war and the initial direction it took. Florus' efforts to acquire funds from the Temple confronted the priests with the issue of who controlled the sanctuary. After having to react against the attempted incursion a number of the priests decided to take the initiative. They tackled the issue of the purpose of the Temple, who could access its activity and, by implication, who controlled its activity. This was achieved through the stopping of sacrifices on behalf of the emperor and Rome. No longer was homage paid to Rome. A natural extension was to declare a new era and to display this freedom in a practical manner. The production of new, near pure silver coins explicitly affirmed the claim that the Temple was now liberated and helped show other Jews that they were now to see themselves as an independent people. In a very practical but highly symbolic way, when it would be time to pay the next annual levy the Jews would have their own coinage to offer. All three events were directly related to the Temple, they all involved some of the priests and they were crucial in the outbreak of the revolt. Priests who had decided that the only way to protect the Temple and all it stood for was to reject Roman rule, therefore, produced the coins.

⁶² For the notion of the 'double game' in which Josephus and other aristocrats were engaged, that is, appearing to go along with the cause of war in an effort to gain control and guide 'the rebels to a safer course' — eventual submission to Rome, see Mason, *Life* xliv-xlvi, 29-33.

⁶³ What ideological framework underpinned the course of action adopted by the aristocratic priests and why they chose to act in such a forthright manner in 66 CE lies beyond the scope of this paper. It is sufficient to say that any investigation of these issues should be firmly embedded in the events of the 60s before it tries to search for long term causes. It may pay also to consider the revolt in terms similar to the profile of native revolts proposed by S.L. Dyson, 'Native Revolt Patterns in the Roman Empire', *ANRW* 2 (1975) 3.138-75.

⁶⁴ See Price, *Jerusalem* 40-59, for the former view and Goodman, *Ruling Class* 153-4, for the latter. See also M. Goodman, 'Current Scholarship on the First Revolt', in Berlin and Overman, *First Revolt* 15-24.

Conclusion

David Hendin recently remarked that the question of who minted the coins remains a mystery. A key aspect of this claim is that we are limited by the lack of clarity about the situation in Jerusalem as presented by Josephus.⁶⁵ Such an approach reflects the existing direction of the role given to the coinage in relation to the revolt: explaining the coins in terms of how Josephus describes what happened. The preceding discussion has been undertaken from a different approach, seeking to allow the coinage to stand as an alternative perspective on the outbreak of the war.

Josephus' narrative has embedded in our thinking the idea that the revolt of 66-70 CE is the work of radical non-representative Jews, fighting against Rome and against their own aristocracy. As such, it has encouraged us to leave the coins on the periphery.⁶⁶ Yet the silver coins of the first year are a crucial source for understanding the start of the revolt. They lay to rest Josephus' explanation of why he has some aristocrats take a leading role in the revolt. His desire to propose the involvement of fellow priests as a belated one derived out of a supposed sense of duty and desire to engage in damage control is implausible. Given the jealous nature with which Rome sought to control the privilege of minting silver coinage it would be intriguing to know how a captured Jewish aristocrat would have justified the 'shekel of Israel' before a Roman commander. There is no way of explaining the silver issues of the first year as anything but a rebellious action by aristocratic Jews who controlled Jerusalem and the Temple.⁶⁷

On their own, these silver coins point to a focus on the Temple and to people who were deliberately asserting independence. The natural candidates for having responsibility for the minting are priests. Although it does not concur with the picture Josephus desires his readers to follow, it does resonate with the key events of 66 CE he narrates: Florus' attempt to claim tax arrears and the ban on sacrifices in relation to Rome. In a very short space of time a number of priests and their supporters decided to act in a manner that had a remarkable similarity with an ideology explicitly linked with a much earlier time, place and person, the 'no lord but God' of Judas.⁶⁸ It is time we stopped talking of nameless revolutionaries as instigators of the revolt and of Eleazar, and the priests who supported him, as the exception that proves the rule.⁶⁹ Instead, we need to begin explaining why this native revolt was instigated and led by elements of the local elite, the Judean priesthood.

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⁶⁵ D. Hendin, *Guide* 249.

⁶⁶ The other option has been the appropriation of the inscriptions on the coins by the adherents and critics of the zealot theory.

⁶⁷ For further discussion see L. Mildenberg, 'Rebel Coinage in the Roman Empire', in Kasher, Rappaport, Fuks (eds.), *Greece* 70, 74.

⁶⁸ See D. Goodblatt, 'Priestly Ideologies of the Judean Resistance', *JSQ* 3 (1996) 225-49 and J.S. McLaren, 'Constructing Judean History in the Diaspora: Josephus's Accounts of Judas', in J.M.G. Barclay (ed.), *Negotiating Diaspora: Jewish Strategies in the Roman Empire* (Sheffield, forthcoming)

⁶⁹ As claimed recently by Horsley, 'Power Vacuum' 107 n. 5.