

# Coins of the Mishna and Gemara

## Based on kiddushin 12a and other sources

By Yosef Sebrow  
Yosef@sebrow.com



Version 1.0 Last modified 11/4/12





**Introduction-** The Jews in Eretz Yisroel during the time of the 2<sup>nd</sup> beis Hamikdash went through 8 coin stages: 1. **Persian** 2. **Greek** 3.

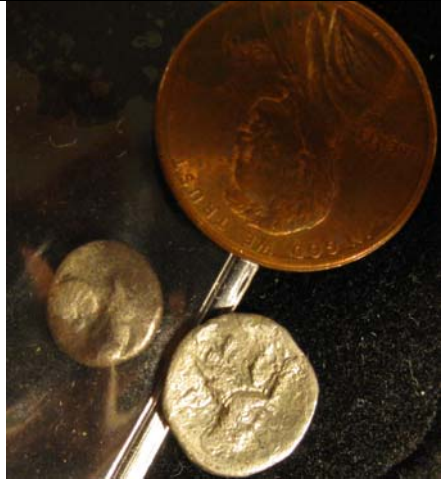



**Hasmonean/Greek/Tyrian** 4. **Greek/Roman** 5. **Jewish** (First War Against Rome which culminated in *churban bayis sheini*) 6. **Greek/Roman** 7. **Jewish** (Bar Kochba coins, stamped over Roman coins) **Greek/Roman**.

The coins mentioned in kiddushin 12a represent a snapshot of the particular time right before the war against the Romans, stage 4 . The coins in use were a mixture of Greek and Roman coins (and Tyrian coins for the Beis Hamikdash).

### Section 1-Coins from Kiddushin 12A

|   |   |                                      |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Prutah</b>= 1/8 assarius (as). Bronze</p> |  <p>Prutah of Agrippa I, c. 40 ce. It shows an umbrella</p>  | <p>פרוטה שהוא 1/8 של איסר איטלקי</p> |
| <p><b>Prutah</b> example #2. bronze</p>         |  <p>Prutah of Maatisyahu Antigonus, the last king of the Chashmonaim, who was replaced by Herod. It features the menorah, and clearly shows curved branches.</p> | <p>פרוטה זוגמא ב'</p>                |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |
| <p><b>Prutah</b> example #3.<br/>bronze</p>  |  <p><b>Prutah of Alexander Yannai.</b> Prutos from his reign are among the most common available on the market.</p>     | <p>פרוטה דוגמא ג</p>   |
| <p><b>Assarius</b> (as) = 8 prutahs and <math>\frac{1}{4}</math> maah. As per the Rosh in BM perek hazahav, it was bronze.</p> |  <p><b>Assarius of Domition (81-96 CE)</b></p>  | <p>איסר איטלקי שהוא שמונה פרוטות ורבע מעה. היה של נחושת כפי שיטת הרא"ש בב"מ פרק הזהב</p> |
| <p><b>Dupondium</b>=2 assarii. It was the same size as the assarius, which helps understand maser sheini 4:8. Also bronze.</p> |  <p><b>Pundyon of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, assumed to be the Antoninus who befriended Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi.</b></p> | <p>פונדיון שהוא 2 איסרי איטלקי</p>   |
| <p><b>Dupondium</b> example 2. Bronze</p>  |  <p><b>Dupondium of Nero (Neron Keisar).</b></p>  | <p>פונדיון דוגמא ב'</p>  |





|  |   |                                     |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Obol</b> (ma'ah)<br/>(Greek)=2 dupondia.<br/>"Maah" means<br/>"sand" and is the<br/>Hebrew name for<br/>the greek obol.<br/>Silver</p> |    | <p>מעה שהיא 2 פונדיונות</p>         |
| <p><b>Drachm</b> (zuz)<br/>(Greek)=6 obols<br/>(ma'os). Silver</p>   |   | <p>זוז (יווני) שהוא<br/>6 מעות</p>  |
| <p><b>Denarius/Dinar</b><br/>(Roman) = 6 obols<br/>(ma'os).<br/>This was the Roman<br/>answer to the<br/>drachm. Silver</p>                  |  | <p>דינר (רומאי) שהוא<br/>6 מעות</p> |
| <p><b>Zuz of bar kochba</b>=<br/>dinar= 6 ma'os.<br/>Silver</p>  |  | <p>זוז של בר כוכבא</p>              |

2 ma'os (obols) next to a penny for scale. They were very tiny. These date from the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple.

Drachm of Alexander III, aka Alexander the Great, 336 bce-323 bce. This followed the Athens (Greek) sela weight of 17 grams, and weighed 4.25 grams. Later coins in Eretz Yisroel followed the Tyrian weight of 14 grams per sela.

"Ivdea Capta" denarius of Vespasian, showing the weeping widow, representing a defeated Judea, sitting below a victory trophy.c. 71 CE

Zuz of bar kochbar, stamped imperfectly over a Roman denarius. The image on the above left shows Latin above Ksav Ivri.

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
|   |   |  |
| <p><b>Didrachm</b> (half-sela) "shekel" used for Temple Tax. They usually used coins of Tyre, except during the revolt against Rome. = 2 dinarim/ ½ sela. silver</p>                |  <p>"Freedom of Jerusalem" half-shekel coin used during the revolt against Rome (66-70 CE).</p>  | <p>חצי סלע (2 זוזים/דינרים)<br/>שהיה החצי שקל<br/>היו נותנים בשביל הבית המקדש.<br/>ברם היו קוראין אותו "שקל"</p> |
| <p><b>Didrachm half-sela</b><br/>example 2. Silver</p>  |  <p>Half-shekel of Tyre, c. 7 grams. The later shekels of Tyre have Greek writing on them instead of Phoenician script .</p>   | <p>חצי שקל דוגמא ב'<br/>חצי שקל צורי</p>   |
| <p><b>Tetradrachm,</b><br/>"sela". = 4 dinarim<br/>This is a genuine Shekel of Tyre. The Jews used Tyrian money for the Temple Tax as the silver was very pure (93-95%). Silver</p> |  <p>Shekel of Tyre, weighing about 14 grams.</p>   | <p>סלע=4 זוזים<br/>24= מעות<br/>סלע זה הוא מצור, והשתמשו היהודים בו מפני שהכסף היה צרוף מאוד.</p>                |
| <p><b>Tetradrachm</b> (sela)<br/>example 2. This was the famous "shekel hakodesh coin described by the Ramban in his <i>hosafah</i> to <i>chumash</i>.</p>                          |  <p>Shekel of Israel (c. 67 ce) saying "Shekel of Yisroel, Year 2" on one side and "Yerushalayim the Holy" on the other. It is written is ksav ivri instead of ksav ashuris.</p> | <p>סלע דוגמא ג'<br/>"שב (שנה ב')"<br/>"שקל ישראל"<br/>"ירושלים הקדושה"</p>                                       |


|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
|   |  |  |
| <p><b>Tetradrachm</b><br/> example #3<br/> Sela of Bar kochba .<br/> It was made by<br/> stamping over<br/> Roman<br/> tetradrachms. Silver</p>   |  <p>Bar kochba sela (modern replica) showing a<br/> lulav and esrog. (original c. 132 ce)</p> | <p>סלע של בר כוכבא<br/> "לחירות ירושלם,<br/> לולב ואסרוג</p> |
| <p><b>Aureus / Golden<br/> dinar (25 denarii).</b> It<br/> was from the same<br/> mold as the silver<br/> denarius, and was<br/> known as the<br/> Golden dinar to non-<br/> Romans. gold</p> |  <p>Aureus (replica) of Vespasian (original c. 71<br/> ce)</p>                               | <p>דינר זהב(25 דינרים)</p>                                   |






## Section 2: Lesser-used coins:




|   |  |                                 |
|---|--|---------------------------------|
| <p><b>Quadrans</b>= 1/4 Assarius, 2 prutahs. These coins were infrequently minted. Bronze</p> |  <p>Courtesy: Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.<br/><b>Quadrans of Augustus.</b></p>                                       | <p>קונטריק</p>                  |
| <p><b>Semis</b>= 1/2 assarius, 4 prutahs. Bronze</p>  |   | <p>מוסמיס</p>                   |
| <p><b>Victoriatus, Trapaikon, quinarius</b>= 1/2 denarius, 3 obols. Silver</p>                |  <p><b>Quinarius, known in Greek as a Trapaikon</b> because the reverse showed an ovoidah zarah decorating a trophy.</p> | <p>טראפיק<br/>שהוא חצי דינר</p> |

## Section 3: earlier coins:



|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <p><b>Quarter-maah</b> of Early Persian period, made of silver (like Rashi's view of the issar italki)</p> |  <p><b>Figure 1- quarter-maah of Early Persian period.</b> It says "yahad" (Judea) in ksav ivri (paelo-Hebrew). It was incredibly tiny.</p> | <p>מעה או רבע גרה בזמן שיבת ציון רבע , תחילת בית שני. היה לו השויות של האיסר איטלקי בזמן הרומאים. כתוב בו "יהד" בכתב עברי.</p> |
|--|--|--|

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Persian<br/><b>Daric</b> or darchemon. gold</p>                       |  <p><b>Daric showing the Persian king and a punch mark on the reverse.</b></p>   | <p>דרכמון של הפרסיים<br/>תחילת זמן בית שני</p>  |
| <p>Persian<br/><b>Siglos</b><br/>(Babylonian shekel weight). silver</p>  |  <p><b>Siglos of Artaxerxes I (Artachashasta, Achashveirosh?). The siglos was named after the Babylonian shekel, which weighed 8 grams. The Babylonian shekel and this coin may be why the half-shekel coin was called a "shekel".</b></p> | <p>"סיגלוס"<br/>(שקל של הפרסיים,<br/>שהיה המשקל של השקל הבבליים)<br/>סיגלוס של ארתחשסתא</p> |
| <p>Tyrian<br/><b>double-shekel</b>,<br/>early Persian period. Silver</p> |  <p><b>This Tyrian double-shekel weighed 28 grams. It has Phoenician script (ksav livonah) on it, and is designed to reflect the Phoenicians' seafaring prowess. Later coins from Tyre would use Greek lettering.</b></p>                | <p>שקל כפול של הצורים<br/>, תחילת בית שני</p>   |



## Coins of the Amoraim (Sassanian Babylonia)

|  |   |                           |
|--|---|---------------------------|
| <p><b>Pashiz</b> example<br/>1. Bronze.<br/>Unknown value.</p>         |    | <p>פשיטא</p>              |
| <p><b>Pashiz</b> example<br/>2. unknown value. Bronze</p>              |  <p>Pashiz of Shapur II</p>                                   | <p>פשיטא<br/>דוגמא ב'</p> |
| <p><b>Dang</b>=1/6<br/>drahm. Silver</p>                               |  <p>Sassanid dang. Like the ma'ah, it was very tiny.</p>     | <p>דנקא שהוא 1/6 זוז</p>  |
| <p><b>Drahm</b>,<br/>dirham,<br/>drachm, zuz =<br/>6 dangs. Silver</p> |  <p>Drahm of Shapur I (Shavur Malka), the friend of Rava</p> | <p>זוז, דרהם</p>          |



|   |   |                    |
|---|---|--------------------|
| <p><b>Ster</b><br/>(tetradrachm, istera, sela) = 4 drahm (silver) or ½ zuz (bronze). Usually bronze with a bit of silver.</p>                               |  <p><b>Ster of Ardeshir I (225 CE, beginning of amoraim). It was made of bronze and was known as an istera medina or sela medina as opposed to a pure Tyrian Sela, which was made of silver.</b></p> | <p>איסתרא, סלע</p> |
| <p><b>Dinar</b><br/>(unknown value to other coins). Name came from the Roman golden dinar (the regular Roman dinar was known to them as a Roman drachm)</p> |  <p><b>Golden dinar from the time of Rava</b></p>  | <p>דינר (זהב)</p>  |

## Early Islamic coins (mentioned in the rishonim)

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <p><b>Dirham</b><br/>(copied off Sassanian Drahm or zuz). Silver</p>                         |  <p><b>Islamic dirham. It weighed 2.9 grams.</b></p>   | <p>דירהם</p>                                  |
| <p><b>Dinar, bezant</b><br/>Designed to weigh as much as the original Greek drachm. gold</p> |  <p><b>Islamic dinar, weighing a "mithkal" (the official weight of the old Athens-weight drachm, 4.25 grams)</b></p> | <p>דינר, בזנט<br/>יש לו משקל של זוז יווני</p> |

| Coin Name                               | Relation to other coin | equiv. grams | equiv. in silver( Troy OZ) | Worth then   | Worth today |
|---|------------------------|--------------|----------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Prutah [ae]                             | 1/8 issur              | 0.01844      | 0.00059                    | \$0.20       | \$0.018     |
| Issur (assarius) [ae]                   | 8 prutahs              | 0.1475       | 0.0047                     | \$1.60       | \$0.142     |
| pundyon (dupondium) [ae]                | 2 issurs               | 0.2950       | 0.0095                     | \$3.20       | \$0.28      |
| ma'ah (obol) [ar]                       | 2 pundyons             | 0.59         | 0.0190                     | \$6.40       | \$0.57      |
| dinar, zuz (denarius, drachm) [ar]      | 6 ma'ahs               | 3.54         | 0.114                      | \$38.40      | \$3.41      |
| "shekel" (didrachm, Stater) [ar]        | 2 drachms, denarii     | 7.08         | 0.228                      | \$76.80      | \$6.82      |
| sela, istira (tetradrachm) [ar]         | 2 didrachms, 4 drachms | 14.16        | 0.455                      | \$153.60     | \$13.63     |
| dinar zahav, <i>dinar</i> (aureus) [au] | 25 denarii             | 88.50        | 2.845                      | \$960.00     | \$85.22     |
| Maneh (minah)                           | 100 drachms, denarii   | 354.00       | 11.381                     | \$3,840.00   | \$340.87    |
| Kikar (talent)                          | 60 Maneh               |              | 682.8819                   | \$230,400.00 | \$20,452.31 |

[ae] = Bronze, [ar] = Silver, [au] = Gold

**1 Troy Ounce = 31.1 grams. 1 regular ounce =28.3 grams.**

The "worth then" column is based on the fact that the dinar was the daily wage, a loaf of bread cost a pundyon in the cities while costing only an issur italki in the country, and a cheap fruit costed a prutah.

We can therefore guesstimate that silver is worth about \$330/oz back then. Today silver is

\$29.95 per ounce

These coins and prices are accurate for the time period right before the Destruction of the Second Temple (66 CE).

The names in parentheses are the secular names for the coins.

#### Notes:

1. The prutah, issur, and pundyon were bronze or copper [ae], and were Roman. The ma'ah was silver [ar], and was a Greek coin.
2. While the official issur and pundyon were bronze, there were fractions of silver ma'os in circulation earlier that were the equivalents. The Rosh and Rashi argue if the issur and pundyon were bronze or silver. We see they're both right.
3. The Roman dinar and Greek drachm were originally equivalent. Later the Roman Empire started shrinking its denarii. They compounded this by mixing in base metals with its silver, ruining its purity and causing runaway inflation.
4. The "shekel" is a colloquial term for the didrachm used to pay the half-shekel Temple tax. Its value is only a half-shekel. The sela is, in fact, the actual shekel. The Aramaic-speaking Jews of the era called it a sela.
5. The dinar zahav was a gold coin [au]. At this point in time, the silver:gold ratio was 13:1. Gold is much denser than silver, thus the 25:1 price ratio, even though both the dinar and the dinar zahav were the same physical size.
6. The dinar was called a "zuz" in Aramaic. The dinar zahav was called a "dinar" in Aramaic.
7. The maneh and kikar were the equivalent of a "grand" in American idiom- they represented a number but were not real currency.
8. One must keep in mind that ancient societies were subsistence living, with meat being a rare luxury. Furthermore, all clothing items were hand-tailored and very expensive. Therefore, direct comparisons of prices and income are impossible.
9. The Shulchan Aruch rules that one should go by the slightly larger "mithqal" standard (17.2 gm/tetradrachm instead of the Tyrian 14.16) for all money halachos. To enlarge these weights into halachic size, multiply each equivalent by 1.2006. The Chazon Ish rules that a shekel tzuri is 19.2 grams. This works out to .617 Troy Oz per Sela.
10. Babylonian amoraim used the Sassanian coinage, a modified Greek system. There were no issur italkis or pundyons. bronze coins were peshittim ("pashiz"). The zuz was also called the "drahm". The golden dinar did exist, but was not Roman. This coin is referred to as the dinar (the zuz being the drachm). 4 zuzim = 1 istira ("ster").
11. This chart is for information purposes only and is not to be relied upon for halacha.

Chart by Yosef Sebrov yosef@sebrov.com

