



A Hoard of Golden Coins from the Givati Parking Lot

**and its Importance to the Study of the History
of Jerusalem in the Late Byzantine Period**

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The second season of excavations in the Givati Parking Lot began in February 2008. The excavated area was expanded northwards and it is bordered now by the edge of the previous area (M1) to the south, and the road along the wall of the old city, to the north. The excavation, was initiated by the Elad Foundation on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, and directed by the authors (Ben-Ami and Tcheganovetz 2008).

So far, remains of the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods have been discovered throughout the expanded area (M2). Apart from the opportunity to examine previous conclusions, the new data along with the data from the southern section, has enabled us to illustrate a wider scheme of settlement in this part of the city during the fourth through tenth centuries CE. The following description is focused on the history of the settlement in the late Byzantine period. The recent discoveries have contributed to our understanding of the changes that occurred in the city in this period.

Our starting point is the end of the earliest phase of the Byzantine period. The fourth century CE settlement came to its end as the result of a destruction that left its clues all over the area. This major event is well reflected in the peristyle building which extended over most of the excavated area (Ben-Ami and Tcheganovetz 2008:66). Architectural elements such as columns and capitals, as well as fragments of mosaic floors that were found in the accumulated debris, point to the existence of a second floor. The surviving walls of the first floor were found to be slanted westwards, and similarly was the collapse of the second floor. The ceramic and numismatic finds dated the end of the building to the second half of the fourth century CE. It seems that this is important archaeological evidence that reflects the results of the earthquake that occurred on Monday, May 19th 363 CE. This earthquake is well documented in various historical sources which describe the sites that were damaged, including Jerusalem (Russel 1995:42; Amiran, ArieH and Turcotte 1994:265).

Following this destruction, the designation of the area was significantly changed. The peristyle building was abandoned and its plot was converted into an agricultural zone. A 25 m long north-south terrace wall was erected on top of the deserted remains of the building, and loose, stone-cleaned soil accumulated on both sides.

To date, the excavation of this phase is still being continued. However, it seems that this soil partially rested against a large structure that was uncovered near the northern edge of the excavating area. The properties of this high quality structure attest to the fact that it was not a standard domestic building. So far, a row of rooms on its southern wing has been completely revealed, but it is apparent that the structure extended beyond the northern limits of the excavated area, leaving its top plan unknown. The southern wing of the building consists of

two wide parallel walls that stretch over 10 m, and perpendicular walls divided the space into several rooms. A barrel vault was incorporated into the northern wall, bearing a sloping stone surface that apparently served as a ramp to the building's second floor.

Various events that disturbed the building are evident on its walls. The earliest one caused the collapse of sections of the walls, while others were twisted. We have to wait for the completion of the excavation and until more data associated with the original phase of the building is revealed, before we can date this event and possibly define its purpose.

This destruction did not bring the building to its end. The newly built walls attest to its quick renovation. These added walls are noticeable and easily recognized by the "seams" visible on them. The later additions are also characterized by rectangular dressed stones and dark colored mortar.

While renovating the building, the function of several of its original spaces was changed. This is noticeable on the southeastern corner, where the new walls reduced the area of the original space. It was converted into a water reservoir that was used during the early Islamic period.

A street made of flat and large paving stones was discovered west of the building and adjacent to it. The paving stones were 0.8 X 1.0 m on the average and they were smooth, as a result of continuous use. The street was limited by curbstones along the eastern side of the building. Most of the western side of the street remained beyond the excavated area excluding one section where it was fully uncovered with its western curbstones. It became clear that the 30 m long section of the street was c. 6m wide and slightly sloping southwards, in accordance to the natural topography of the range of the City of David. Crowfoot and Fitzgerald (Crowfoot 1928:20–22; Crowfoot and Fitzgerald 1929:41–43) previously excavated a section of this street some ten meters to the south. The two sections represent one of the main streets of Byzantine Jerusalem (Tsafrir 1999:295–300; Gutfeld 2007:66–78). Although at this phase of the excavation we do not have any evidence for the date of its construction, the final phase of the street is clearer. The large building uncovered adjacent to the street existed during the later phases of the Byzantine period (fifth–sixth centuries CE) and was in use simultaneously. This was evident from the drainage channel that collected water from the roof of the building and diverted it westwards to the central drain under the street. The later Byzantine phase in Crowfoot and Fitzgerald's excavations was characterized by similar drainage channels that originated in buildings on both sides of the street and connected to the central drain (Crowfoot 1928:21–22; Crowfoot and Fitzgerald 1929:41–43). Yet, the demolished parts of the street and the erection of poor walls above it during the early Islamic period attest to the fact that the street went out of use in this period (Tsafrir 1999:298). Heavy destruction brought



Fig. 1:
The north-south street discovered on the western side of the excavations.

the Byzantine period to an end and left its clues throughout the building. Debris of walls was frequently accumulated to a considerable height and the dark layer of ash that covered the floors reflects the deliberate destruction that was accompanied by heavy conflagration.

The surprise discovery found on the floor of the western room suggested the destruction date of the building, as well as the identity of those who carried it out (see below). This was a hoard of golden coins uncovered near the northern wall, a few centimeters above the floor. The hoard contained 264 golden coins arranged in groups, overlapping one another. This arrangement, and the fact that the coins were not deposited in a ceramic vessel (no sherds were found near the hoard), support the assumption that it was wrapped with a textile or other organic material that did not survive. It seems that the hoard was placed on a small shelf attached to the wall. This assumption is further supported by the existence of three rounded sockets found on one of the stones of the wall, directly above the location of the hoard. Thus, when the building collapsed, including the walls of the room where the coins were hidden, the hoard dropped and was covered by the accumulated debris.

The hoard is of great importance, beyond its direct contribution to numismatic study. First, the vast number of the coins attest its value. It is worth noticing that the only hoard of golden coins (Amiran and Eitan 1970:15) found hitherto in Jerusalem, contained only five coins. Secondly, the hoard consisted exclusively of golden coins. It also became evident that all the 264 coins were identical, thus minted in a single mint. According to the name of Constantinople depicted on the coins, it appears they were delivered to Jerusalem from the Byzantine capital (this assumption awaits further analysis). Hence, this is a one-period hoard and not a collection that was saved during a long period of time, like other hoards (Bijovsky 2002:161–228)*. The portrait of Emperor Heraclius (610–641 CE) was depicted on all of the coins. On one side, the Emperor is dressed in a military suit and holding a cross, and the other side bears the Golgotha Hill. These coins were minted in the beginning of Heraclius' reign, between 610–613 CE, and his figure seems to be younger than on later coins. Careful examination of the coins showed that they were not worn and actually were never used in monetary circulation. The coins were minted for a particular purpose. Gold is now, and was then, of great value and the fact that golden coins in general and golden hoards in particular are rare in archaeological findings, emphasizes this fact. Since the coins arrived in the building they must have been hidden in the wall where they were found, with the intention of being used shortly afterwards – a purpose that never materialized.

* We would like to express our gratitude to Gabi Bijovsky for her guidance.



Fig. 2.: The Byzantine hoard discovered at the Givati Parking Lot.

The hoard's short-term and absolute dating has important chronological implications, as they represent the date of its minting. Examining the characteristics of the building where the hoard was found, the following scheme emerges: the extent of the 'Hoard Building', the measurements of its walls and their building quality, as well as other architectural elements found there, point to the fact that it was not a domestic building. Presumably, it served as a residence of one of the Byzantine governmental or church officers in Jerusalem. The fact that the coins were never used and no later coin was added to the hoard to change the coins' uniformity, emphasizes the fact that only a short period of time passed between the minting of the coins and their final deposit in the building.

Dating the hoard to 613 CE and the fact that it was never used, points to the fact that the destruction of the building should be associated with Sasanian invasion of Jerusalem in 614 CE, when the Persians destroyed various buildings in the city (Courlet 1897:143–164; Garitte 1973; Baras 1982:300–310). Several scholars suggest identifying the devastation caused by the Persian army with the destruction layers found in their excavations in Jerusalem (Reich 1994:111–118; 1996:26–33; Schick 1995:332–334, 340–354; Mazar 2003:65). However, it should be emphasized that so far these excavations have not yielded clear and independent

chronological evidence that would support this interpretation (Magness 1992:71–72). It appears that the discovery of the seventh century CE architectural complex in the City of David, including the unique hoard of the golden coins, and the fact that the owner never came back to collect his treasure, is tangible evidence of this dramatic event that occurred in Jerusalem in the beginning of the seventh century CE.

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