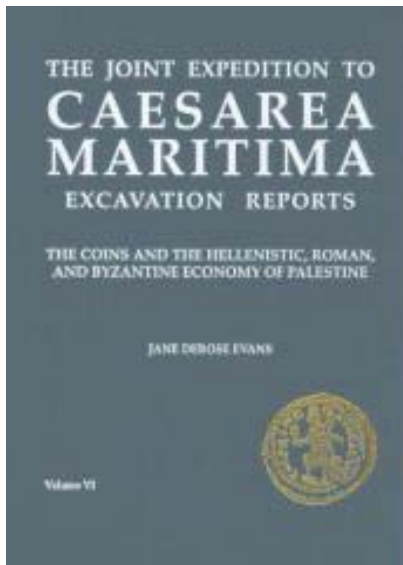


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Evans, Jane DeRose

The Coins and the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine Economy of Palestine

The Joint Expedition to Caesarea Maritima Excavation Reports 6

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From 1971 through 1995 the Joint Expedition to Caesarea Maritima conducted archaeological excavations at the important Palestinian port city of Caesarea. Caesarea functioned as the Roman administrative center for the region, and at the time of Vespasian the city was raised to the status of a Roman colony. Over 8,000 coins were found in these excavations, about 2,700 of which were dated to the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods. The date of most of the remaining coins could not be determined. Although she was not a part of the JECM excavation, Jane DeRose Evans was asked to author the current volume, presenting the final report of the coins along with an explanation of the economic context of Palestine during these periods.

The volume is wonderfully supplied with maps, charts, and tables illustrating the site and the distribution of the coins. At the end of the volume, there are eight photographic plates with twelve to twenty-five selected coins on each page. The first four of these plates show coins photographed in black and white, but the last four are color shots of the ninety-nine pieces of the gold hoard discovered in 1993.

Following a short preface by JECM director Robert Bull, Evans offers a brief introduction wherein she describes the history of Caesarea from its foundation up to the Muslim

conquests. This section also includes an overview of the excavations. This piece is probably too brief (only five pages) but is nonetheless well written.

Chapter 1 presents a chronological description of the coins found at Caesarea and describes what appear to be economic fluctuations based upon the finds from the ancient city. Coins from the Hellenistic period (third and second centuries B.C.E.) represent only a small portion of the finds, and the Maccabean revolt seems to have had a predictably detrimental effect upon the economy. The Hasmonean mint was established in Jerusalem at the beginning of the first century B.C.E., but up through its closure in 37 B.C.E. relatively few of those coins made their way to Caesarea. Herodian coins, on the other hand, are well represented among the finds at Caesarea. There were several prutot found from Herod the Great, Archelaus, and the procurators who followed. Respecting Jewish sensibilities, these coins were of the aniconic style, lacking human and animal images. None of these prutot were minted at Caesarea, as they were produced in Jerusalem. Not surprisingly, coins of the first or second revolts were not found at Caesarea, with the exception of two strays. A mint opened at some time in the first century C.E. at Caesarea; however, there is some dispute as to when the mint began operations. Evans, following the majority opinion, believes the mint started limited production during the time of Nero, although full operation began after the first revolt.

A large number of countermarked coins have been discovered at Caesarea. Countermarks expanded the usable time and domain of provincial coins. The countermarking was probably done at Caesarea. The mint at Caesarea began to taper off in 253 C.E.; however, the number of coins found at Caesarea from the late Roman and Byzantine periods constitutes the bulk of the finds. The coins found at the site during this time came from a wide variety of mints and include several countermarked pieces.

In the second chapter Evans compares the numismatic data from Caesarea with similar data from excavations at other cities in the eastern empire. The percent of coins from various periods extending from the Hellenistic period through the Roman period to the Byzantine period are compared to the percent of coins in other cities of Samaria, Jerusalem, Galilee, Syria, Anatolia, and Macedonia. Evans, however, argues that these raw numbers and percentages are of limited value in determining the economic vitality of a community. Thus, she is careful to evaluate the numismatic data in consort with the additional economic data supplied by literary sources, inscriptions, and the material remains of the culture. The result is a convincing description of the economic fluctuations of Palestine from the Hellenistic period through the Byzantine period.

Two appendices are added. The first describes the discovery and significance of the Byzantine gold hoard at Caesarea, and the second describes the Chi-Square Test that

Evans believes is more helpful in determining the numismatic profile of eastern empire cities and Caesarea in particular. Evans concludes that Caesarea fits into the profile of a normal eastern empire city but is not comparable to Jerusalem. In fact, Evans believes it is not possible to develop a profile for a normal Palestinian city. The report is enhanced by an excellent bibliography, a complete catalog of all coins found in the JECM excavations, an index of the loci of the coins at the site, and a general index.

The volume is somewhat flawed by a number of typographical errors and some serious gaffes where the numbers cited in the text vary with the numbers listed in the tables, a confusion of Herod Agrippa I with Herod Agrippa II (13–14), and a puzzling dislocation of Beersheba (perhaps Bethsaida is intended [34]). Nevertheless, the volume is a valuable contribution not only for our understanding of Caesarea but also for framing the various economic conditions of Palestine.