

A new date on coins of Marisa in Idumaea and its historical implications

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A NEW DATE ON COINS OF MARISA IN IDUMAEA
AND ITS HISTORICAL IMPLICATIONS

PLATE 12

Although the coinage of the Greek city of Marisa in Idumaea was short-lived it has definite historical interest. Marisa was among the many urban centers of Palestine that had been conquered, and seemingly demolished, by the Hasmoneans at the end of the second and beginning of the first century BC. The majority of these cities, Marisa included, were restored as *poleis* by the Romans after Pompey's annexation of Syria in 64 BC (*Map 1*). Marisa was again destroyed, this time permanently, during the Parthian invasion c. 40 BC.

Within the short period between its restoration by the Romans and the Parthian invasion the city issued a few series of bronze coins; most of these have been identified and published by S. Qedar in 1992/3.¹ This paper will present the updated overview of the coins of Marisa that includes two newly discovered issues of the city which bear a date hitherto unknown. These new coins not only add to the overall picture of the coinage of Marisa but also throw a new light on the history of the region during the initial stage of Roman domination.

The coinage of Marisa seems to have begun with an extremely rare undated type (*Pl. 12, 1a-b*).² Its obverse shows the bust of Athena right, wearing an aegis, within a wreath. On the reverse an eagle is standing left on a thunderbolt, with palm over its right shoulder. Around, clockwise from lower left, there is a legend reading MAPICH[.]N. Only two specimens of this type have been published. The legend of the reverse has been completed as MAPICH[νω]N ('of the people of Marisa'),³ but this reading is not entirely certain.

The remaining issues consist of the following types:

1) A larger size issue which has on the obverse a bust of Tyche right wearing a turreted crown and veil; on the reverse there is an eagle standing left on a thunderbolt, with palm over its right shoulder; in the left field: ΛΓ (Year 3), below which is ΓΑ standing for ΓΑΒΙΝΙΑ. In the right field: ΜΑ (the first two letters of MAPICH) (*Pl. 12, 4*).⁴

2) A smaller size issue, which can be divided into two variants. The first has a head of Athena similar to that appearing on the undated type, but with a border of dots instead of a wreath. On the reverse there is a palm branch with a

¹ S. QEDAR, *The Coins of Marisa: A New Mint*, *Israel Num. Journal* 12, 1992-93, pp. 27-33, pls. 6-7 (henceforward QEDAR).

² QEDAR, *Type A*.

³ QEDAR, p. 28.

⁴ QEDAR, *Type B*.



serpent (?) in the foreground. In the left field of the reverse are letters ΛΓ and ΓΑ, and in the right field MA (*Pl. 12, 5*).⁵

The second variant has similar types but the serpent appears behind the palm branch and the Α of the legend in the right field is written below the Μ and not alongside it (*Pl. 12, 6*).⁶

There is yet another group with types similar to the last ones but which seems to have been produced separately. This group differs in its crude execution (letters and designs in thick lines) and the omission of the serpent on the reverse (*Pl. 12, 7*).⁷ Furthermore, all known specimens of this «imitation» issue have an irregular axis whereas the rest of the coins of Marisa have a 12 o'clock axis. On none of the published specimens can the date be clearly seen. However, the Israel Museum has recently acquired an unrecorded variant belonging to this crude style group, which shows in the right field two letters Π; this could mean the date ΛΓ in retrograde (*Pl. 12, 8 and 8A*);⁸ however, the possibility that this group was produced some time later than the «Year 3» coins cannot be excluded.

The date «Year 3» on the published coins of Marisa must have normally been counted from the city's era, which would in turn imply that, similar to the majority of local cities restored by the Romans, Marisa had inaugurated its own system of time-reckoning based on the date of its refounding as a *polis*.

The Israel Museum collection has yet another unpublished coin-type of Marisa belonging to the same period.⁹ It shows on the obverse the helmeted bust of Athena right, wearing an aegis, within a wreath. The aegis, placed at the bottom of the neck, is represented as a strip covered by two rows of large dots. Athena's locks falling down below the helmet are also represented by large dots arranged in straight lines. On the reverse an eagle is standing left on a thunderbolt, with palm over its right shoulder; in the left field appear the letters ΛΒ, ΓΑ and ΒΙ (Year 2, Gabinia), in three lines. In the right field are letters ΜΑ and ΠΙ (Marisa), in two lines (*Pl. 12, 2 and 2A*).

The obverse and reverse designs of this coin are the same as those on the undated issues. Besides, the obverse of the «Year 2» coin was struck with the same die as the one used for the minting of the two known specimens of the undated series. This, and the fact that a date appears also in the next year, «Year 3», seems to indicate that the undated issue was the earliest, namely it preceded the «Year 2» coins. The legends on the coins of «Year 2» are arranged in a manner similar to those of «Year 3»; however, the legends on the former are less abbreviated than those of previously known issues and confirm both the attribution to Marisa and the reconstruction of the surname as *Gabinia*.¹⁰

⁵ QEDAR, Type C (2, 4, 5).

⁶ QEDAR, Type C (1, 3).

⁷ QEDAR, Type D.

⁸ Israel Museum inv. no. 16197.

⁹ Israel Museum inv. no. 15639.

¹⁰ The arrangement of the legends on the coins of Marisa has its closest parallels in the early

The types appearing on the new coin are well known from other coins of the region. The helmeted head of Athena originates in the gold staters of Alexander the Great, imitated later by Seleucid kings. The eagle was a common Ptolemaic motif reproduced on many local coins in the second and first centuries BC. The eagle on the coins of Marisa closely resembles that found on the Ascalonian tetradrachms of the same period, as well as on this city's bronze coins dated to the 40s and 30s BC.¹¹

The central types of the issues of Marisa were thus copied from earlier coins circulating in the region. However, there is one, apparently unique, element, namely the aegis below Athena's neck. The aegis, a loose sleeveless outer garment made of goatskin and fastened at the neck, was an attribute of Zeus and his daughter Athena.¹² On the Marisa coins it is shown as a strip with two rows of dots on the larger coins and with one row on the smaller issues. In both cases it covers the entire length of the lower neck. In numismatics the aegis is best known from the royal Ptolemaic portraits where it is shown in a somewhat similar fashion.¹³

It is possible that Marisa issued yet another coin dated «Year 2». A specimen in a private collection in the USA has a head of Tyche on the obverse and an eagle on the reverse – similar to the known coins of Year 3, with the same arrangement of the legend (*Plate 12, 3 and 3A*).¹⁴

However, the digit representing the date on this specimen may not be a *gamma*. The surviving parts of this digit consist of a long vertical line broken in the middle, with a semicircle joining the upper end of its lower part from the right. The digit that can best suit these surviving lines is *beta* (B), which would mean that this coin too is a «Year 2» issue of Marisa (The updated sequence of all the issues of Marisa is given in Table 1).

Roman coins of Nysa-Scythopolis dated to the 50s and 40s BC, where on some coins the legend runs along the borders, while on the others it is placed horizontally across the field. See R. BARKAY, *The Coinage of Nysa-Scythopolis (Beth-Shean)*, (Jerusalem 2003), pp. 197-198, nos. 1-6.1, pl. 1.


¹¹ BMC Palestine, pls. 11:18, 12:1, 41:2; M. ROSENBERGER, *The Rosenberger Israel Collection*, vol. I (Jerusalem 1972), p. 35, no. 8.

¹² A. VILLING, ΚΕΣΤΟΣ, ΖΩΣΤΗΡ and Athena's Crossband Aegis. Anatomy of a Classical Attribute, in: G.R. TSETSKHLADZE, A.J.N.W. PRAG, and A.M. SNODGRASS (eds.), *Periplous*, Papers on Classical Art and Archaeology presented to Sir John Boardman (London 2000), pp. 361-370.

¹³ J.N. SVORONOS, *Ta Nomismata tou Kratous ton Ptolemaion*, vol. II (Athens 1904-1908, in modern Greek), e.g. nos. 181, 357, 1001a, 1208, 1327.

¹⁴ We are grateful to Richard B. Witschonke, USA, for enabling us to examine and publish this unique coin.

Table 1. Coins of Marisa – Synoptic Table

Date	Coin-Type	Qedar 1992-93	Coin-type here	Number of known specimens	Legends		Axis	Remarks	Plate 12
					Obv.	Rev.			
Undated	Athena/Eagle	A1 – A2	1	2		MAPICH ...N	12	Obv. die link with the unique specimen of Type 2	1
Year 2	Athena/Eagle	–	2	1	LB ΓA BI	MA P I	12	Obv. die link with Type 1 (both coins)	2
Year 2 (?)	Tyche/Eagle	–	3	1	LB (?) ΓA	M[A]	12	The date looks like B but this is not entirely certain	3
Year 3	Tyche/Eagle	B1 – B8	4	14	LΓ ΓA	MA	12	Various obv. and rev. die links	4
Year 3	Athena/Palm branch with a serpent in the foreground	C2; C4; C5	5a	3	LΓ ΓA	MA	12	Obv. die link with 5b (all known specimens) Same rev. die for all three specimens	5
Year 3	Athena/Palm branch with serpent behind the branch	C1; C3	5b	6	LΓ ΓA	M A	12	Obv. die link with 5a (all known specimens) Same rev. die for all six specimens	6
Undated imitation of «Year 3 »	Athena/Palm branch	D1–D5	6a	5	Γ A	M A	2. 3 and 6	Obv. die links between Qedar's D-1 and D-5 and between D-3 and D-4. Same rev. die for all five specimens	7
Dated (?) imitation of « Year 3 »	Athena/Palm branch	–	6b	1		In right field  (LΓ retrograde?)	2		8

The date «Year 2» on the new coins has an interesting historical consequence. As mentioned earlier, Marisa was destroyed by the Hasmonean ruler Hyrcanus I and later restored as a *polis* by the Romans. The new era, by which the coins of the city were dated, must have referred to the time of this restoration. The date «Year 2» as well as the surname *Gabinia* can help in establishing the chronology of this event.¹⁵

Aulus Gabinus was governor of Syria between 57 and 54 BC. He served as a consul in 58 BC, and seems to have left Rome for the province towards the end of this year.¹⁶ Gabinus must thus have arrived in Syria in the first months of 57, which falls within the year 58/7, counted from autumn to autumn in terms of the local calendars. He was replaced at his post by Crassus, one of the consuls of 55 BC, who arrived in Syria at the beginning of 54.¹⁷ Gabinus' last year in the province in terms of the local calendars would thus have been 55/4 BC.

¹⁵ The era of 60 BC, suggested by QEDAR, pp. 30-31, seems now untenable.

¹⁶ E. SCHÜRER, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, revised and edited by G. VERMES, F. MILLAR and M. BLACK, vol. I (Edinburgh 1973), pp. 245-246.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 246.

Marisa was not the only city with a surname derived from the name of a Roman personality of the Late Republic: Gadara used the title *Pompeia*; Gaba, as well as Pella, was called *Philippeia*, Nysa-Scythopolis and Canatha also bore the name *Gabinia* (Table 2). Gadara and Gaba named themselves after the Romans who restored them as *poleis*. For Gadara we have an explicit account by Josephus¹⁸ who says that Pompey rebuilt Gadara as a favour to his freedman Demetrius. Furthermore, the era of Gadara (64 BC) implies a refounding in 64/3 BC, the year in which Pompey was in Palestine. For Gaba we have only the era (60 BC), which coincides with the years of tenure by Lucius Marcius Philippus (61–59 BC, calendar years 62/1–60/59).¹⁹

However, three other cities – Nysa-Scythopolis, Pella and Canatha – took the names of governors who served several years after their refounding (Tables 3 and 4 show the eras of this period pertaining to the region of the Decapolis and to the coastal area). These later governors must have bestowed on each of these cities a favour (or favours) great enough to deserve this kind of commemoration. There exists no detailed literary account on the tenure of Philippus in Syria, but Gabinius is indeed described by Josephus as helping many Palestinian cities to get back on their feet.²⁰

The case of Marisa can thus conform to either of two possible scenarios. Marisa is mentioned among the cities helped by Gabinius and, therefore, the bestowal of a favour on the already existing city cannot be entirely excluded. As has been shown, the earliest year in which the surname *Gabinia* could have been acquired is 58/7 BC, which means that coins of «Year 2» could have been minted in 58/7 at the earliest. If this was the case, then the earliest date for the refounding of Marisa is 59/8 BC, during the tenure of Cornelius Lentulus Marcellinus, the governor who preceded Gabinius in Syria (59–57 BC, calendar years 61/59–58/7).²¹ The earliest date for the era of Marisa is then the autumn of 59. If this was indeed the case, then it is possible that the first issues of Marisa, namely the undated type without the surname *Gabinia*, could have been minted already in 59/8 BC.

Alternatively, if Marisa was refounded by Gabinius himself, the city would have an era coinciding with the period of his governorship. The first and the last years of Gabinius being 58/7 and 55/4 BC, the possible range for the era would be 58–55. However, given the evidence in Josephus as regards Gabinius' help to local cities in 57 BC, the earliest date, in autumn of 58 BC, would seem the most probable. In this case the coins of «Year 2» would have been issued in 57/6 and of «Year 3» in 56/5 BC.

¹⁸ *AJ* XIV 75, *Bj* I 155.

¹⁹ SCHÜRER (above, n. 16), p. 245; A. STEIN, *Studies in Greek and Latin Inscriptions on the Palestinian Coinage under the Principate*, Ph.D. thesis (Tel-Aviv University 1990), pp. 26-28, 53-56, 295-296.

²⁰ *AJ* XIV 87-88, *Bj* I 165-166.

²¹ SCHÜRER (above, n. 16), p. 245.

Whatever the exact date, the date of 59 BC or somewhat later will be the latest known Palestinian city era belonging to the initial stage of Roman domination. The eras of 64 were due to Pompey's actions taken in the summer of 63 BC, while he was present in the region. The eras of 63 must have resulted from the activity of Aemilius Scaurus, a quaestor of Pompey, whom the latter left as the first governor (63–61 BC) of the newly created province of Syria. Most of the eras in the coastal region and the adjoining areas seem to have been due to the measures taken by Philippus, the governor of Syria in 61–59 BC.²²

Since the latest eras known up to now involved Philippus' tenure, it looked as if the process of the restoration of the Greek cities in Palestine ended in his time.²³ However, the coins of Marisa discussed above change this picture. It now appears that the earliest possible era of Marisa is 59 BC, which would mean a restoration in the calendar year 59/8, under Lentulus Marcellinus, the governor who replaced Philippus. There is also a possibility that the era of Marisa falls even later, under the governorship of Aulus Gabinius. Although many eras of the Palestinian cities have been ascribed to Gabinius in modern literature, there has so far not been convincing evidence of this.²⁴ With Marisa, Gabinius' involvement as refounder seems to be more plausible.

Table 2. Surnames of Cities Derived from the Name of a Roman Personality

City	Era	Title	Evidence
Gadara	64 BC	Pompeia	Coins of 2nd-3rd centuries AD
Gaba	60 BC	Philippeia	Coins of 1st-2nd centuries AD

Nysa-Scythopolis	64 BC	Gabinia	Coins of 1st century BC
Pella	64 BC	Philippeia	Coins of 2nd-3rd centuries AD
Canatha	63 BC	Gabinia	Coins of 2nd-3rd centuries AD

Table 3. Eras, Decapolis

Gadara	64
Hippos	64
Nysa-Scythopolis	64
Abila	64*
Dium	64*
Pella	64*
Gerasa	63
Philadelphia	63
Canatha	63*

* The most likely date. The existing evidence allows for a broader range.

Table 4. Eras, Coastal Region and Adjoining Areas

Dora	63-61
Demetrias	63*-61*
Joppe	63*-61
Gaza	61
Raphia	60
Gaba	60*
Marisa	59 or 58*

* The most likely time-limit. The existing evidence allows for a broader range.

²² STEIN (above, n. 19), p. 107.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

Whatever the case, the general conclusion would be that the process of the restoration of the Palestinian cities took longer than has been hitherto known. It started with Pompey in 63 BC and was continued by subsequent governors of Syria until either Lentulus Marcellinus (59–57 BC) or his successor, Aulus Gabinius (57–54 BC).

Zusammenfassung

Die griechische Stadt Marisa in Idumäa (östlich von Askalon gelegen) war um das Jahr 107 v.Chr. von den Hasmonäern erobert und wohl auch zerstört worden. Sie wurde als *polis* neu aufgebaut, nachdem Pompeius im Jahr 64 v.Chr. Syrien für Rom annektiert hatte. Bei der parthischen Invasion von 40 v.Chr. wurde sie dann endgültig zerstört. In der kurzen Zeit zwischen dem Wiederaufbau durch die Römer und der Zerstörung durch die Parther prägte Marisa einige wenige Serien von Bronzemünzen, die einzige Prägung der Stadt überhaupt. Neben einer Erstpublikation von zwei neuen, kürzlich ans Licht gekommenen Emissionen mit einem bisher unbekanntem Datum, auf deren historische Bedeutung im Detail eingegangen wird, sind hier auch die bereits bekannten Prägungen von Marisa neu bearbeitet. Das neu entdeckte Datum zeigt, dass offenbar die Restauration der Städte Palästinas bei Beginn der römischen Herrschaft längere Zeit in Anspruch nahm als bisher angenommen wurde.

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Key to Plate 12

- 1a Undated, 14.95 g, 26 mm, 12.00. Private collection
- 1b Undated, 16.98 g, 26 mm, 12.00 Yoav Sasson collection, Jerusalem
- 2 Year 2, 15.49 g, 26 mm, 12.00. Israel Museum, Jerusalem, inv. 15639
- 3 Year 2 (?), 7.42 g, 23 mm, 12.00. Richard B. Witschonke collection, USA
- 4 Year 3, 11.56 g, 24 mm, 12.00. Yoav Sasson collection, Jerusalem
- 5 Year 3, 4.70 g, 18 mm, 12.00. Private collection, USA
- 6 Year 3, 5.10 g, 20 mm, 12.00. Private collection, USA
- 7 Undated imitation of «Year 3», 3.84 g, 15 mm, 6.00. Israel Museum, Jerusalem, inv. 3648
- 8 Dated (?) imitation of «Year 3», 3.08 g, 16 mm, 2.00. Israel Museum, Jerusalem, inv. 16509



1a



1b



2



2A



3



3A



4



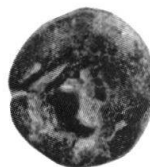
5



6



7



8



8A



