The Pillars of Hercules as Metaphors for Fertility and Health among Bedouin and Fellahin in the Southern Levant

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Introduction

It is universally accepted in archaeological and ethnographic research that mobile pastoralists are integrated into and dependent upon symbiotic relations with the "Outside World."[1] In the 19th century, the Bedouin in Arabia, the Levant, and Sinai acquired milled Spanish silver coins through their economic activities. These coins served as more than a simple medium of exchange, however, and the symbols on the reverse side were reinterpreted and contextualized within the culture of Bedouin and Fellahin societies. As a result, they came to be used as medicinal talisman by these populations during the Ottoman and British Mandate periods.

The use of milled colonial Spanish coins in the folk traditions of Bedouin and Fellahin societies was discovered by Barakat in the course of his long-term commercial interactions with these communities.[2] This article describes how the Bedouin acquired these coins, and how the symbols on the reverse of these coins were integrated into the folk culture of the Bedouin and Fellahin in southern Palestine during the 19th and early 20th centuries C. E.

Milled Colonial Spanish Silver Coins

Milled Spanish silver coins were struck by the Spanish Empire at several mints in Spain and Central and South America between 1732 and 1821 (Jordan 1997). Prior to 1772, the obverse of these silver coins depicted the crowned arms of Castile and Leon, and the reverse side contained two orbs flanked to the left and right by the Pillars of Hercules. After 1772, the busts of consecutive Spanish kings replaced the crowned arms of Castile and Leon on the obverse, and on the reverse, the pillars now flanked the crowned shield of Castile and Leon which replaced the orbs (Fig. 1). The design was changed in order to distinguish the earlier from later silver issues as the latter coins contained less silver than the former (Jordan 1997).

For the Kingdom of Spain, milled Spanish colonial coins were both a currency and a propaganda tool for displaying the wealth and power of the Empire and its colonies.[3] The two pillars represented the Pillars of Hercules, which flanked the straights of Gibraltar and symbolized the end of the known world according to classical authors (Jordan 1997). In addition, a banner wound around the two pillars on the reverse of the coin was stamped with the Latin phrase "*PLUS ULTRA*," translated as "more beyond," referring to the Spanish colonial conquests and newly acquired wealth in the Americas (Jordan 1997).

Spanish Pillar coins entered the Levant by means of the export of cotton from Acre to Europe during the 18th century (Kool 2005). These and later the Austrian Maria Theresa thalers supplanted the silver grush and/or piaster issued by the Ottoman Empire (Kool 2005). Massive quantities of milled colonial Spanish silver coins entered the Middle East via trade between Europe/Spain and Egypt from 1690 to 1720. During this period, between 300,000 and 1 million Spanish dollars were sent from the port of Marseille to Egypt as payment for coffee and textiles (Walz 1983: 307). By 1730, however, although Spanish dollars continued to be imported into Egypt, the quantities were smaller (Walz 1983: 307). Nevertheless, by the beginning of the 19th century, this type of coin was the preferred silver currency among the Bedouin in Arabia, and when Mohammed Ali Pasha attempted to remove it from circulation and supplant it with the Egyptian *piastres,* the Bedouin baulked (Burckhardt 1829: 43):

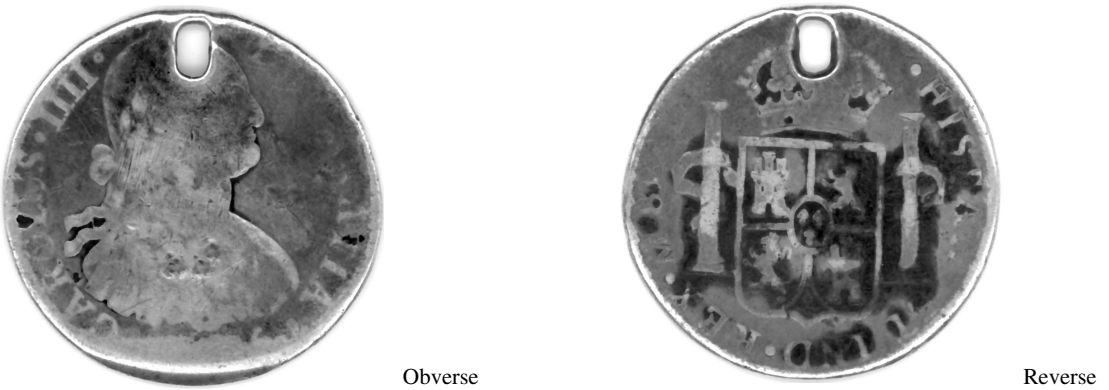
> In the Hedjaz [Mohammed Ali Pasha] has not the same means of enforcing his despotic measures to their full extent; and thus it happens that in the interior of the country, where the Turkish troops are placed, the value of the dollar is eighteen or nineteen piastres. The Bedouins, however, refuse to take the Egyptian piastres, even at a depreciation, and will receive nothing but dollars; a determination to which the Pasha himself has been frequently obliged to yield.

By the time of Burton's travels in Arabia (1853–1854), milled colonial coins were no longer being minted by Spain and as a result, were increasingly replaced by issues of Austrian Maria Theresa

1 E.g., Musil 1928: 278 f.; Barfield 1993: 16, 68 f.; Khazanov 1994; Rosen 2000, 2002: 35 f.

2 Abed Barakat is a collector of Bedouin and Fellahin ethnographic material.

3 On the use of coinage for propaganda purposes see Grierson (1975: 76).



Obverse Reverse

Fig. 1: A 8 Real-Pillar coin, formerly from the ethnographic collection of Yacub Harub (Jerusalem), used by Bedouin and/or Fellahin as a talisman. This coin was minted in Mexico City either in 1790 or 1803.
Obverse: Bust of Charles IV of Spain with inscription: Carolus IIII . . . Gratia . . . .
Reverse: Crowned shield of Castile and Leon flanked by Pillars of Hercules with inscription: Hispan et Ind Rex Mo R.

thalers. Nevertheless, Spanish dollars were among the many coins in circulation in Arabia when Burton visited this area (1893/II: 111, fn. 1):

> The Spanish dollar is most prized in Al-Hijaz; in Al-Yaman the Maria Theresa. The Spanish Government has refused to perpetuate its Pillar-dollar, which at one time was so great a favourite in the East. The traveller wonders how "Maria Theresas" still supply both shores of the Red Sea. The marvel is easily explained: the Austrians receive silver at Milan, and stamp it for a certain percentage. This coin was doubtless preferred by the Badawin for its superiority to the currency of the day: they make from it ornaments for their women and decorations for their weapons. The generic term for dollars is "Riyal Fransah."

When Doughty traveled to Arabia (1876–1877) milled colonial Spanish coins were still in circulation among merchants (Doughty 1936/II: 23):

> All their dealings are in foreign money; reals of Spain, Maria Theresa dollars, and Turkish mejîdy crowns; gold money is known more than seen among them. They call *doubloon* the piece of 5 Turkish pounds, English sovereigns *ginniyát* or *bintu*, and the 20 fr. piece *lira fransâwy*.

Both Burton and Doughty noted that the trade coins circulating in Arabia were generically referred to as "riyals" or "reals," terms originally used solely for the Spanish dollar (Burton 1893/II: 111, fn. 1; Doughty 1936/II: 664).[4]

Milled colonial Spanish coins were acquired by the Bedouin through a range of commercial activities. Doughty observed that Spanish dollars functioned as the basic medium of exchange for the Bedouin in Arabia, as they "reckoned only by reals" (Doughty 1936/I: 430). He attributed the presence of these coins to commerce carried out in ports located on the Persian Gulf (Doughty 1936/II: 664). The Bedouin also acquired a range of silver coinage through "the sale of some of their camels to the brokers" (Doughty 1936/I: 338). Doughty noted that one source of silver currency, Turkish mejîdies, was paid to Bedouin sheikhs who lived on or adjacent to the Haj road (Doughty 1936/I: 338). In addition, some travelers such as Doughty used Spanish dollars in their commercial transactions with the Bedouin (e.g., Doughty 1936/II: 63).

Abu ʿAmud

The Bedouin and Fellahin referred to milled Spanish silver coins as "Abu ʿAmud," literally translated as "Father of the Pillar" (Weir 1989: 176, fn. 16; Meir 2002: 14*), a name derived from the dual pillar symbol on the reverse side of the coin. The name "Abu ʿAmud" suggests that for Bedouin and Fellahin, the significance of the coin and its symbols lay on the reverse and not on the obverse.[5] On Western coinage, it is typical for the obverse to

4 The currency in the modern country of Saudi Arabia is called the *riyal* (Ross 1994: 41).

5 Milled Spanish silver coins were not the only coins identified on the basis of the designs on their reverse. Thalers, for example, including the Maria Theresa thaler, were usually identified by the eagle on the reverse, and this coin was generally referred to as Abu Risheh, "father of feathers" (Weir 1989: 176, fn. 16; Meir 2002: 14).

Fig. 2: Two girls from the Ta'amreh tribe photographed in the early 20th century, when the tribe lived to the east of the village of Artas. The older girl (left) has a silver trade coin (similar to a Maria Theresa thaler and a Spanish Pillar coin) attached to her dowry hat. Her dowry hat with the attached row of silver coins indicates that she is already spoken for in marriage. Her clothing is made from pieces of old dresses with good-luck charms. The talismen and the fragments of dresses originate in the areas of Hebron and Yatta (Reproduced by Studio Varouj).

carry "the more important device or inscription," denoting "the authority by which the coin is issued" (Grierson 1975: 86, 195). For the Bedouin and Fellahin in Arabia and the southern Levant, the symbols of the Spanish monarchy found on Pillar coins had little relevance as references. They either did not recognize the images as referring to the "Pillars of Hercules" and the inherent authority vested in this symbol, or chose to promote a local referent, one that more clearly resonated within their local culture.

The two Pillars of Hercules were images that were easily incorporated as meaningful symbols into traditional Bedouin and Fellahin folk culture. There seem to be two possible explanations, which are not mutually exclusive, for the reinterpretation of the pillars within these societies. The more popular account is that they were viewed as phallic symbols, and this influenced the role that this coin played in folk medicine. A more speculative suggestion is that the pillar image resembled a type of ancient monument found in the arid zones of the southern Levant and Arabia. According to Burton (1893/I: 370, fn. 2), "the Badawi calls a sound dollar 'Kirsh Hajar,' or 'Riyal Hajar,' a 'stone dollar.'" It is conceivable that the Bedouin drew analogies between the Pillars of Hercules and the standing stone monuments found in Arabia, the Negev, and Sinai (e.g., Avner 1984: 115–119; Zarins 1992: 51). These stone constructions are referred to as *massebot* in Hebrew and *menhir* in Arabic.[6]

Medicinal Talismen

The Abu ʿAmud coin was used not only as currency, but as a medical talisman by both males and females (Fig. 2). As a talisman in folk medicine, milled Spanish coins could be used either alone or attached to a string of beads.[7] As a prophylaxis from illness, young boys would hold the coin on their head and a family member would pour water over the coin in order to ward off the evil eye. Among women, the Abu ʿAmud coin was used in a variety of rituals associated with fertility and cleansing. For example, when a woman visits another woman who has recently given birth, both have to wash underneath the coin. The reason stated is that a new mother is considered "polluted" and, therefore, the visitor needs to be cleansed and protected so that her own fertility will not be jeopardized. In another context, a woman might wash underneath this type of coin after menstruation as a method for increasing her fertility. We discovered at least two other variations of this ritual cleansing practice: a woman might stand on the coin while she bathes, or the coin might be placed underneath her pillow while she sleeps.

The Bedouin's use of the Abu ʿAmud coin as a medical amulet in the Ottoman and British Mandate periods was most likely based on practical considerations. Archaeological excavations of the Bedouin cemetery at Tell el-Hesi dated to the 15th–19th centuries A. D. demonstrate a high rate of both infant mortality and death of young adult women, most likely associated with the dangers of childbirth among the Bedouin (Eakins

6 For standing stones/*massebot* depicted on the reverse side of a Hellenistic coin, see the example from Phoenicia documented in Avner (1993: 172, Fig. 22; 174 f.).

7 For examples of other types of coins used as medicinal amulets see Meir (2002: 11*, 19, Fig. 15, 20, Fig. 16) and Helmecke (1998: 47, Nos. 133 f., 48, No. 143).

1993: 79). At the beginning of the 20th century, Jennings-Bramley observed that the Bedouin in the Sinai did not have access to "doctors of any kind or nationality" (1905: 132). He further noted that if a doctor was available, he would most likely be stationed only in the town of El Arish in Sinai, and he believed that the Bedouin were often reluctant to pay for medical services (Jennings-Bramley 1905: 133).[8] During the British Mandate, the Bedouin of the Negev had access to limited medical facilities in Beersheba. According to Aref al-Aref, governor of the southern district of Palestine from 1929–1939, who was based in Beersheba, there was "only one Government doctor and only one licensed practitioner" in the entire subdistrict of Beersheba (1944: 69; Abu-Rabi'a 2001: 34). Moreover, the Bedouin who lived to the east and south of the town of Beersheba tended to be distrustful of modern medicine (Abu-Rabi'a 2001: 52).

Tawfik Canaan (1927), a physican and ethnographer, recorded high infant mortality rates among both "peasants" and "poor city dwellers" in Palestine. Of the 2,185 medical cases he documented 20% of the infants died at birth and another 36% died following birth (1927). In the course of his medical practice, Canaan observed that gold coins circulating in Ottoman Palestine were used as talisman and medical amulets to treat a range of maladies (1914: 114). Canaan collected a number of coins that functioned as amulets. His personal collection included three Byzantine and Ottoman coins used to promote "healing from diseases" (Helmecke 1998: 47, 133, 134).[9]

The appeal of milled colonial Spanish coins as amulets in traditional folk medicine grew with the increasing scarcity of this coin in the early part of the 20th century. It was estimated that the ratio of milled Spanish coins to Maria Theresa thalers was approximately 1 to 100 at the time. As a result of the rarity of Abu ʿAmud coins, only a few families, for example, the village *mukhtar* or similar figure, actually owned one. The coin was then leased to those who needed it. Therefore, it was not uncommon for an Abu ʿAmud coin to move from one family to another.[10]

Summary

Archaeological and ethnographic research are often cited as evidence that mobile pastoralists are economically integrated into the "Outside World."[11] Milled Spanish coins are an example of an aspect of Western material culture that was integrated into the folk medicine of the Bedouin and Fellahin in southern Palestine during the Ottoman and British Mandate periods. These populations, however, did not interpret the Pillars of Hercules as symbols of Spanish conquest, but rather as symbolizing strength and virility that could be transferred from the coin to the person by means of proper ritual. The presence of these coins in Bedouin communities corresponds with a growing corpus of evidence, including the use of coffee, firearms, and tobacco, that demonstrates that the Bedouin in the Ottoman and British Mandate periods were integrated into a global economy (e.g., Baram 1996; Saidel 2000).

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8 In the Kerak area in Transjordan, the Bedouin sought medical services from Forder, who was both a doctor and missionary; most of the cases he mentions were injuries sustained during fighting (e.g., Forder 1909: 36, 48 f.).

9 Canaan acquired these three amulets at different times. The amulet comprising a Byzantine coin was acquired in Jerusalem in 1929 and the talisman with a gold Byzantine coin in 1942 (Helmecke 1998: 47, 133 f.). The third amulet, which contained an Ottoman coin among other items, was purchased in Lifta in 1913 (Helmecke 1998: 48, 143).

10 Maria Theresa thalers continued to be minted well into the 19th century for export to the Near East, even after they went out of circulation in Austria. These coins functioned as currency in western Arabia and Yemen until the 1930s (*Great Britain* 1946: 537).

11 E.g., Musil 1928: 278 f.; Barfield 1993: 16, 68 f.; Khazanov 1994; Rosen 2000, 2002: 35 f.

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Rätisch und Etruskisch

Zu einer Neubestimmung ihres Verhältnisses

Alfréd Tóth

§ 1

Das Buch "Die rätische Sprache – enträtselt" (Brunner und Tóth 1987) hatte über viele Jahre hinweg wie selten ein sprachwissenschaftliches Buch höchstes Lob auf der einen und tiefste Ablehnung auf der anderen Seite provoziert. Wie ich im Einleitungskapitel unseres Buches (13–48)