

**MATERIAL CULTURE AND
CULTURAL IDENTITY:
A STUDY OF GREEK AND
ROMAN COINS FROM
DORA**

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Preface

The ancient harbor town of Dor/Dora in modern Israel has a history that spanned from the Bronze Age until the Late Roman Era. The story of its peoples can be assembled from a variety of historical and archaeological sources derived from the nearly thirty years of research at Tel Dor — the archaeological site of the ancient city. Each primary source offers a certain kind of information with its own perspective. In the attempt to understand the city during its Graeco-Roman years — a time when Dora reached its largest physical extent and gained enough importance to mint its own coins, numismatic sources provide key information. With their politically, socio-culturally and territorially specific iconography, Dora's coins indeed reveal that the city was self-aware of itself as a continuous culture, beginning with its Phoenician origins and continuing into its Roman present.

Focusing primarily on the iconography and epigraphy of Dora's Greek and Roman coins, this study examines the evolution and outlook of the city and its society in these contexts:

- a. The geographical and historical contexts of Dor and its physical transformations as reconstructed by archaeological evidence from Tel Dor and by literary sources.
- b. Ethnicity, cultural identities, and cultural boundaries as starting points for the study of the changes that transformed the Phoenician city of Dor into the Hellenistic and Graeco-Roman Dora. The Hellenization and Romanization processes of the city will be examined within the larger frame of border studies. Dora's coin iconography will be used to determine that the city's milieu was not a product of Greek and Roman acculturation or assimilation, but a complex aggregation of three diverse systems that came into contact with each other. Since most samples are Roman imperial coins, the study will demonstrate the mechanisms by which Rome's imperial aspirations were articulated in the Middle East.
- c. The value of mints as extensions of the governmental apparatus and the issuance of coins as an indication of the authority in charge. Dora's first year minting of quasi-autonomous Roman coinage in 65 BCE was done under the auspices of Pompey, who must have provided the impetus to initiate a new civic era. Minting continued, with several periods of inactivity, until the reign of Caracalla. Samples of each issuance will be analyzed within the larger context of the political and military developments in the eastern empire, especially under Trajan, when Dora's mint issued its largest output.
- d. The relevance of material culture studies and semiotics to the study of coin iconography. Each of Dora's coin types will be examined as a *semeion*, i.e., a sign of the cultural self-understanding of the city and a primary vehicle through which the city constructed its ideology. Dora's coins will be viewed as records of the trends that contributed to the city's self-authoring narrative.
- e. The relevance of Dora imperial images to the understanding of the role of visual media in the Graeco-Roman world. While the quasi-autonomous coins drew their iconography from local features, e.g., religious, economic, etc., all imperial coins have royal portraits — Augustus, Vespasian, Titus, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Septimius Severus, Caracalla, Geta, Julia Domna and Plautilla. These imperial effigies will be analyzed and placed within the context of Roman imperial portraiture, since Roman imperial coinage reflects ideological claims within each reign.
- f. Dora's exclusive use of the Greek language on its coins as a sign of identity construction. Dora's coin legends will be assessed according to linguistic and onomastic principles.

The study is obviously bounded within the timeframe of the material examined (205 BCE-210 CE). But if Dora's Graeco-Roman coins can be considered within the context of material culture and semiotic studies, the opportunity has been created of extending the same approach to bordering cities. With this in mind, I include a brief chapter comparing the numismatic issuance of Caesarea Maritima during the Flavian reign with coins issued in Dora during the same period, using the same approach.

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