

Ya'akov Meshorer (14.08.1935 - 23.06.2004)

Ya'akov Meshorer, one of the foremost specialists of ancient Jewish coinages, passed away on June 23, 2004. He is survived by a brother Asher, his wife Adaya, three children and three grandchildren.

Ya'akov Meshorer's love of coins and history was deeply embedded in him from the start. It is well known that as boys, Ya'akov and his twin brother Asher used to find ancient coins as they wandered around the city of Jerusalem, which was then growing rapidly. As Ya'akov would say, "the most exciting part was realizing that our forefathers



had used the same language and lived in the very same place where we spent our free time." The twins donated their first coin finds to the Israel Department of Antiquities at the age of 14 (1949). Among the many coins he found, was an archaic Athenian tetradrachm – one of the earliest coins ever recorded as a surface find in Israel. This coin was published as his first article.

Meshorer was born in Jerusalem in 1935. He joined the Israel Defense Forces in 1954. After completing his military service in 1956, he became a member of Kibbutz Hazerim. There he married Adaya Weiss in 1956. During the five years they lived there, he devoted his spare time to his "hobby" – archaeology – and established a museum on the kibbutz. Meshorer left Hazerim in 1960 and moved to Jerusalem, where he enrolled as a student at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, studying there from 1960 to 1966. He received his Bachelor's Degree in Archaeology and Jewish History, his Master's Degree in Classical Archaeology and his Ph.D. in Numismatics in 1971 from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. As a reservist he served in the Jerusalem Reconnaissance Company and was lightly wounded in the Six Days War; he later served as an officer in the UN liaison unit.

Meshorer established the Department of Numismatics at The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, in 1969 and stood at its helm until 1993. The department, built up from individual coins, collections, and funds donated to the Museum through Meshorer's tireless efforts, now holds one of the most important collections of ancient Jewish coins in the world, as well as an impressive collection of Islamic gold coins and a

significant group of Roman city coins of Palestine. Meshorer was particularly dedicated to the task of locating important Jewish coins and acquiring them for the collection, and he successfully assembled the best specimens of this group. Over the years, he also mounted numerous numismatic exhibitions, providing the general public and visitors to Israel the opportunity to view important coins and to learn about their rich past. In addition to his role as Curator of Numismatics, Meshorer was Chief Curator of the Archaeology Wing of the Israel Museum from 1975 to 1982, and from 1990 to 1996. He retired from the Israel Museum in 2000.

Ya'akov Meshorer contributed greatly to the development of numismatics as an important archaeological discipline, and he helped promote the study of ancient coins as an academic field in Israel. He was a lecturer at the Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and was appointed Professor of Numismatics in 1983. Meshorer had the foresight to delegate responsibilities to students in a manner that enabled them to develop professionally, thus ensuring the next generation of numismatists. He was an enthusiastic and popular lecturer, who knew how to get everyone – colleagues, scholars, and laymen – as enthusiastic about numismatics as he was.

Meshorer's passion for coins and boundless intellectual curiosity are notable in his many publications (19 books and more than 100 articles).

His publications on Jewish coins struck in ancient Palestine, and his interpretation of the subjects have become fundamental in the field. His work *Ancient Jewish Coinage* (1982) and the updated edition *A Treasury of Jewish Coins* (2001) include the entire group of coins struck by Jewish leaders over a period of five hundred years. The books contain a detailed discussion of the motifs appearing on the coins, some of which had never been published before. His research opened up new areas for scholars in the field of Jewish studies and has contributed significantly to the field of Jewish art. Regarded as basic textbooks, his publications are not only used to date archaeological finds but also to understand the historical, economic, and political circumstances, which lead to the minting of Jewish coins.

Meshorer's work on the Nabatean coins and his pioneering study of Samaritan coinage earned him international acclaim. His doctoral thesis on the Nabatean coins was published as a book in 1975 and it is still considered the fundamental treatment of the subject. In 1982 he dared to propose (in the addendum of *Ancient Jewish Coinage I*) the existence of Samaritan coinage based on four coins he published. Scholars were skeptical about this proposition. Nine years later, however, in *The Coinage of Samaria in the Fourth Century BCE* (written in collaboration with Shraga Qedar), 106 Samaritan types were included, and since then, this coinage has become an extremely popular topic of study. In 1999 they published *Samaritan Coinage*, which includes a total of 224 different coin-types. These two publications are among the most important breakthroughs in numismatic research of the last few decades.

Meshorer's interests were not confined to the distant past. His catalogue *Sixty Economic Documents of Eretz Israel, 1870–1944* describes banknotes, payment orders, and other elaborately decorated financial papers – highlights of the Sidney Olson Collection, which was donated to the Department of Numismatics at the Israel Museum in 1992. The book addresses historical, economic, and artistic aspects of Jewish life in Palestine from the late nineteenth century until the founding of the State of Israel.

Meshorer was a member of the Archaeological Council of the Israel Antiquities Authority and was invited to supervise the establishment of two museums devoted to Biblical Archaeology: the museum of the Cleveland Jewish Community Center in 1976; and The Hecht Museum, University of Haifa, in 1984. He was also a member of the directorate of the Israel Society for Medals and Coins, serving on the committees that determined the design of the modern Israeli coins. In this capacity, he was instrumental in the decision to base many of the modern coins on ancient Jewish coinage, thus strengthening the affinity between past and present in the State of Israel.

Meshorer was invited to lecture and research at several major institutions, including The American Numismatic Society, New York; Duke University, North Carolina; the British Museum, London; the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York; and the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. Among the many honors he received, Meshorer was granted the Huntington Medal of The American Numismatic Society in 2001, and he was elected an honorary member of the International Numismatic Commission at the opening of the XIIIth International Numismatic Congress of Madrid in 2003.

In 2002 a prize was established in Meshorer's name at the Israel Museum; its first recipient was Dr. Andrew Burnett.

The American Numismatic Society, as part of the Ancient Coins in North American Collections series, will publish Meshorer's *opus ultimum*, a three-volume catalogue of the *Abraham Sofaer Collection of Coins from the Holy Land*. In addition, the Israel Numismatic Society plans to dedicate its forthcoming volume of the *Israel Numismatic Journal* (vol. 15) to his memory.

Yankele, as he was affectionately called, died at his home in Jerusalem on the morning of Wednesday, June 23 after courageously battling a debilitating illness for six long years. A dear friend and colleague, the entire numismatic community in Israel and abroad will miss him, as well as the many others who cherished him greatly.

Haim GITLER
Curator of Numismatics
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem