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Timothy Schaefer and Christopher Huang



Religious

On the obverse side of this coin, there is a figure that appears to be a star. This symbol is actually a religious allegory of Jannaeus himself. Since his people are strictly Jewish he cannot depict himself as God (like many other ancient rulers) so instead he says he is chosen by God, a messianic figure.



Cultural

Like other late Hasmonean rulers, Alexander walked the line between outright Hellenization and traditional Judaism. He did this to please other powerful rulers while keeping his power over his domestic people. We can see this clash of Hebrew and Greek influences on his coinage. The obverse side is distinctly Jewish while the reverse side is clearly Greek. Notice the languages in the coin.



A star surrounded by a royal diadem



Biography

Alexander Janneus (126 BC-76 BC) inherited the throne of Judea from 103 BC to 76 BC and adopted the name "King Yannai." During his reign, Alexander was primarily known for his territorial expansion. His conquests of parts of the Seleucid Empire came with the aid of Cleopatra the third, ruler of Ptolemaic Egypt, especially during the siege of Gaza, which brought more than a year of bloodshed. Ptolemy Lathyrus, the king of Gaza, burned down and slaughtered women and children in a nearby village in Judea but was halted from progressing even further when Cleopatra intervened. Janneus was able to control the ports of Dor and Caesarea and establish a dominant control over the trading routes of the Mediterranean Ocean.

It is evident that Janneus wanted to establish himself through conquests rather than through a religious statement. Known as the Hasmonean King, Alexander quickly drew conflict with the Pharisees and civil war eventually broke out. After Janneus regained his power, he executed 800 of his enemies including their family.

Economical

On the reverse side of the coin, there is a Seleucid anchor. During the rule of Alexander Jannaeus, like may other Maccabean rulers, his Kingdom was bent on expansion. The areas that Alexander conquered were coastal parts of Phoenicia. Since the Bronze Age, control of the coastline was a highly sought after asset, because it tended to be more reliable than the interior of the Mediterranean, where storms would quickly develop. Jannaeus put the maritime symbol of an anchor on his coin to boast about his newfound economical prosperity.



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