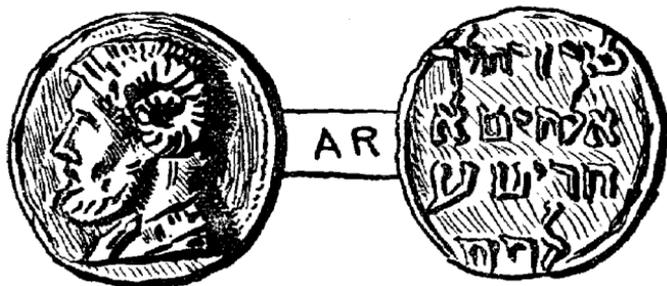


A CURIOUS COIN.

SOUTHAMPTON, 6th February, 1892.

THE coin here given full size was sent to me for inspection by V. Barton Hill, Esq., from Bath, and is stated to have been bought from a peasant of Gaza, by Benaiah Gibb in 1848, and to have been ever since in the collector's family's possession. It appears from its weight and colour to be silver. The workmanship is excellent from an artistic point of view, especially the bold relief of the head; and the appearance of age suggests that the medal is genuine. On submitting the drawing to inspection of the Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund it was found that a similar coin had for some time been in possession of Dr. T. Chaplin,



which proved, however, to be of copper covered with silver. Dr. Chaplin's coin has a better preserved inscription, and from his specimen it is clear (as he points out to me) that the Hebrew reads:—

לך	לא יהיה לך
א	אלוהים
ע	חרים
	לפני

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me." (Exod. xx, 3.) The publication of the drawing may, perhaps, lead to further information being obtained from numismatists throwing light on the subject. It appears not very probable that such a medal should be a forgery, because of its unique and extraordinary character. Forgers would be well aware that Jewish coins do not give any representation of living forms, such being contrary to the Law. The letters being square Hebrew, cannot be older than the Middle Ages at most, while the head has a somewhat Byzantine appearance. It would seem that the horn belongs to some kind of cap or head-dress, which is still clearer in Dr. Chaplin's specimen. It might

even represent the coil of a turban worn on one side, though the convolutions suggest a horn. The question is whether it represents a monarch or a deity with ram's horns. In the first case it might be suggested that the medal is one of those trade tokens used by people of different race and religion in the East for communication, the Hebrew inscription being a protest against the Christian obverse. We have instances of this in the case of the gold coins of the thirteenth century, having the cross on one side, but covered on both with Arab texts, including the legend: "Struck at Acre in the year 1251 of the era of the Messiah," and the words "God is One: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." These appear to have been imitations of Fatemite coins worth about seven shillings, which probably few could read. They would readily, therefore, have been accepted by natives.

Ram-horned figures are well known on the coins of Alexander the Great, of Lysimachus of Thrace (281 B.C.) and of the island of Tenos in the Ægean, but the Byzantine coins of kings do not present such a type. The ram-horned deity (Ammon) is also represented in the pottery statuettes of Phœnicia.

It appeared to me possible that the medal might belong to the Manichean Gnosticism, which survived in the East to so late a date. The Gnostics, as we know from Irenæus, made use of Hebrew formulæ, and King has given a drawing of a beautiful gem supposed to be Gnostic, which represents a deity with rays round the head, and ram's horns and beard, having the *modius* above and the staff of Æsculapius before the face.

The above suggestions do not, perhaps, suffice to account for this medal, but there can be no doubt that whoever the sculptor was, he possessed much greater artistic ability than the ordinary forgers of coins bearing inscriptions in square Hebrew appear usually to possess, and the question appears worthy of further consideration.

C. R. C.