

Star of Bethlehem Coins – A Set of Serial Commemoratives

By: T. B. Cartwright

Date: October 1, 2014

Abstract

In 1999, Dr. Michael Molnar, a Christian astronomer, published “The Star of Bethlehem - The Legacy of the Magi.” His findings included the meaning behind the “Ram and Star” coins from Antioch along with the most likely “heavenly alignment” constituting the “Star of Bethlehem.” He concluded that the design was meant to recognize the birth of the Messiah in Judaea and that His birth occurred on April 17, 6 BC. Since his book was published, I have continuously accumulated these coins by date and conducted research into the purpose of their minting. My conclusions not only confirm Dr. Molnar’s findings but also show that this “Star of Bethlehem” motif was used frequently between 6 AD and 253 AD. Ultimately, there are over 20 different dates for these commemorative coins and the dates cluster around major anniversary dates of Yeshua’s (Jesus’) “birth” and/or “death and resurrection.”

Table of Contents	Page
Introduction.....	2
Why the Magi.....	5
Why Antioch.....	6
Why Aries.....	6
Commemorative Categories:	
The Birthdays dated AT, BM, ΓM, ΔM.....	7
Imitations dated EM, ΓIA, ΓΔ, ΓN, ΛΛ, and ΛM	9
25th & 60th dated ETΔP, ΔP, ZOTΔP and ETEP.....	12
75th (since death) dated L QP (reign of Legatus Quintus Pompeneus).....	15
100th (since death) dated ETZOP and no-date Leaping Ram.....	16
150th (since birth) dated ETOC qP, ETOYΔqP, ETΔqP, ETEqP, ETZqP	18
125th (since death) dated ETOC EC and ETOC ZC.....	21
200th (since birth) Coins of Geta, Caracalla, Septimius.....	22
200th (since death) Coins of Elagabalus and Severus Alexander.....	24
250th (since birth) Coins of Gordian III, Philip I and Philip II.....	27
Conclusions	31
References.....	31
Appendix	32

Introduction

Dr. Molnar revealed convincing evidence on the source of the Star of Bethlehem along with the purpose of the star and ram design. He based his conclusions on the interpretation of scripture along with ancient writings of the Romans, Jews and Greeks regarding astrology. His research was sparked by the scene on the reverse of the coin shown in Figure 1. This coin was minted in 6 AD in Antioch which was one of the centers of early Christianity. Ancient writings show that Judea was represented by the Ram Aries in the zodiac and particular positions of the other heavenly bodies represented regal divinity.



Figure 1. Bronze Trichalkon from Antioch depicting Aries looking back at a heavenly star.
(From the T. Cartwright collection)

Molnar found that an unusual array of the planets occurred in Aries during 6 BC – which the Magi recognized as a divine birth in Judea. This unique alignment is represented by the star next to the Ram's head. An important fact from Dr. Molnar's work was that the Magi meticulously tracked the position of all the bodies and didn't necessarily have to view the special alignment.

The following diagrams are borrowed from Dr. Molnar's book and graphically show the position of the 7 heavenly bodies at sunrise and at the mid-heaven. At sunrise, Venus rises first while in Pisces. Venus is then followed by Saturn, Moon, Jupiter and the sun which were located in Aries. Finally, Mars and Mercury appeared above the horizon while in Taurus.

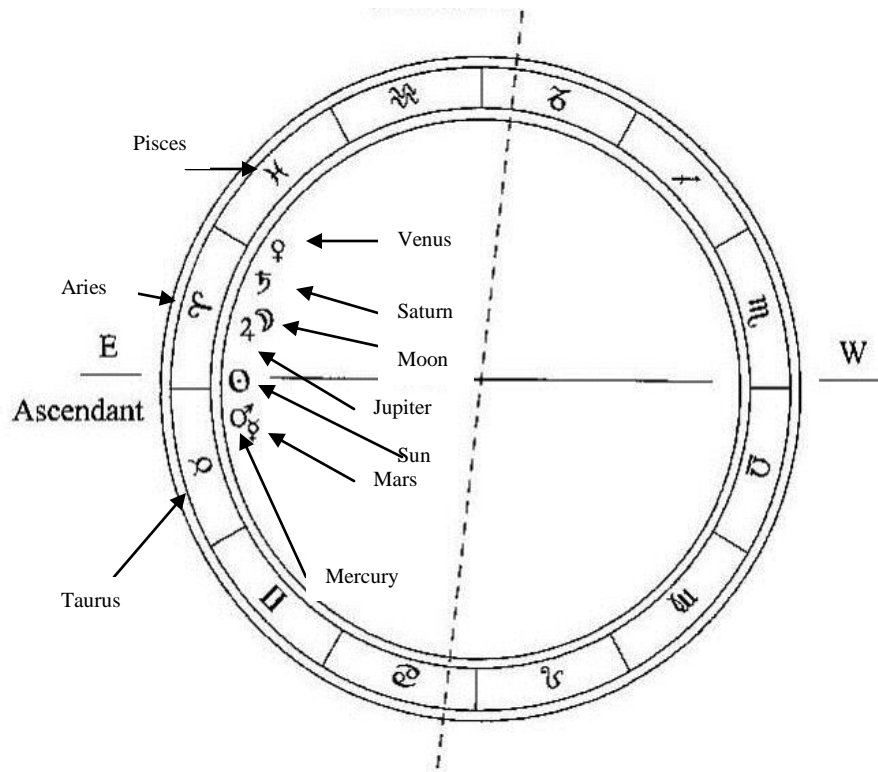


Figure 2. Position of the planets at sunrise on April 17, 6 BC (from Molnar)

Figure 3 shows the alignment at mid-heaven or the highest point in the daytime sky. All the planets kept their alignment, except Jupiter which passed behind the moon just after sunrise. This special alignment is called the “Star of Bethlehem” and was meant for the Magi and not any other priest or politician. This is why Herod and the temple officials were taken by surprise – they had not seen any spectacular heavenly displays. Matthew 2: 1-7 says *“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: ‘AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.’” Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared”*

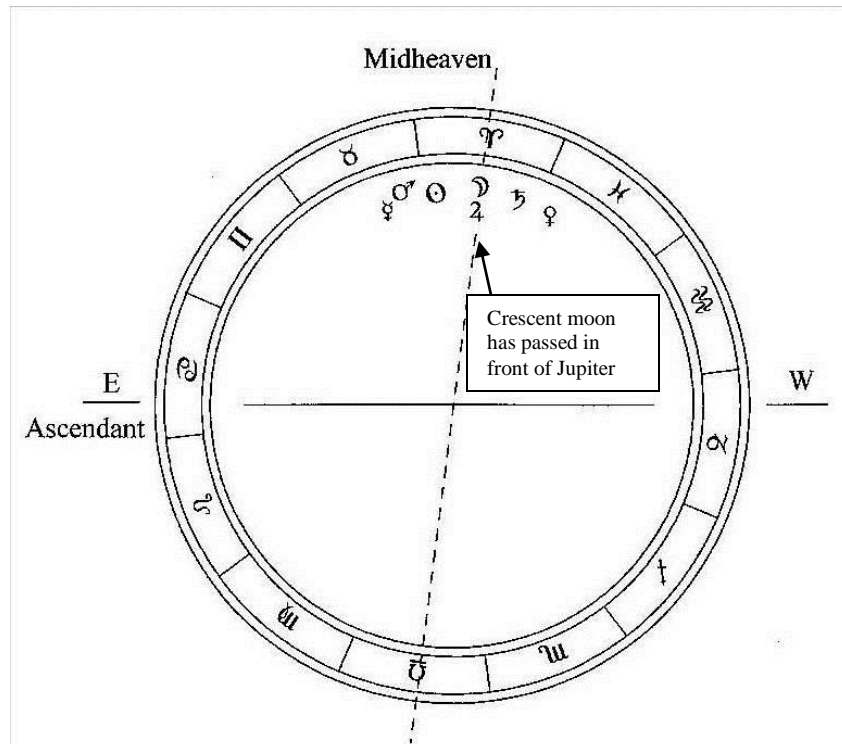


Figure 3. Position of the planets at mid-heaven on April 17, 6 BC (from Molnar)

According to the astrology of the Persians, what occurred on April 17, 6 BC was the most “Regal” or “Divine” set of signs possible. Only the Magi would have recognized this unique arrangement.

1. Saturn, Jupiter and the Sun are all in Aries
2. Moon begins its pass in front of Jupiter and completes the pass by the mid-heaven.
3. Saturn and Jupiter are “spear-bearers” (rise before) for the Sun.
4. Mars and Mercury are “attendants” (rise behind) for the Moon
5. Venus is in Pisces

I confirmed Dr. Molnar’s findings by utilizing a new astronomy program called Stellarium. By adjusting the program to the correct date, direction, and location, the alignment and movement of all these heavenly bodies can be viewed and studied. Figure 4 is a still image of that sunrise on April 17, 6 BC. The animation of the entire time from sunrise to mid-heaven is very impressive and shows the occultation of Jupiter by the crescent moon (which is only 2% visible). The most obvious concern about this alignment is that most of it couldn’t be seen during the brightness of the day. However, Dr. Molnar went to great lengths to show that the Magi tracked the planets mathematically and were not dependent on visual verification. This is the reason that no one in Judaea was aware that the “*star out of Jacob*” (Num 24:17) had occurred.

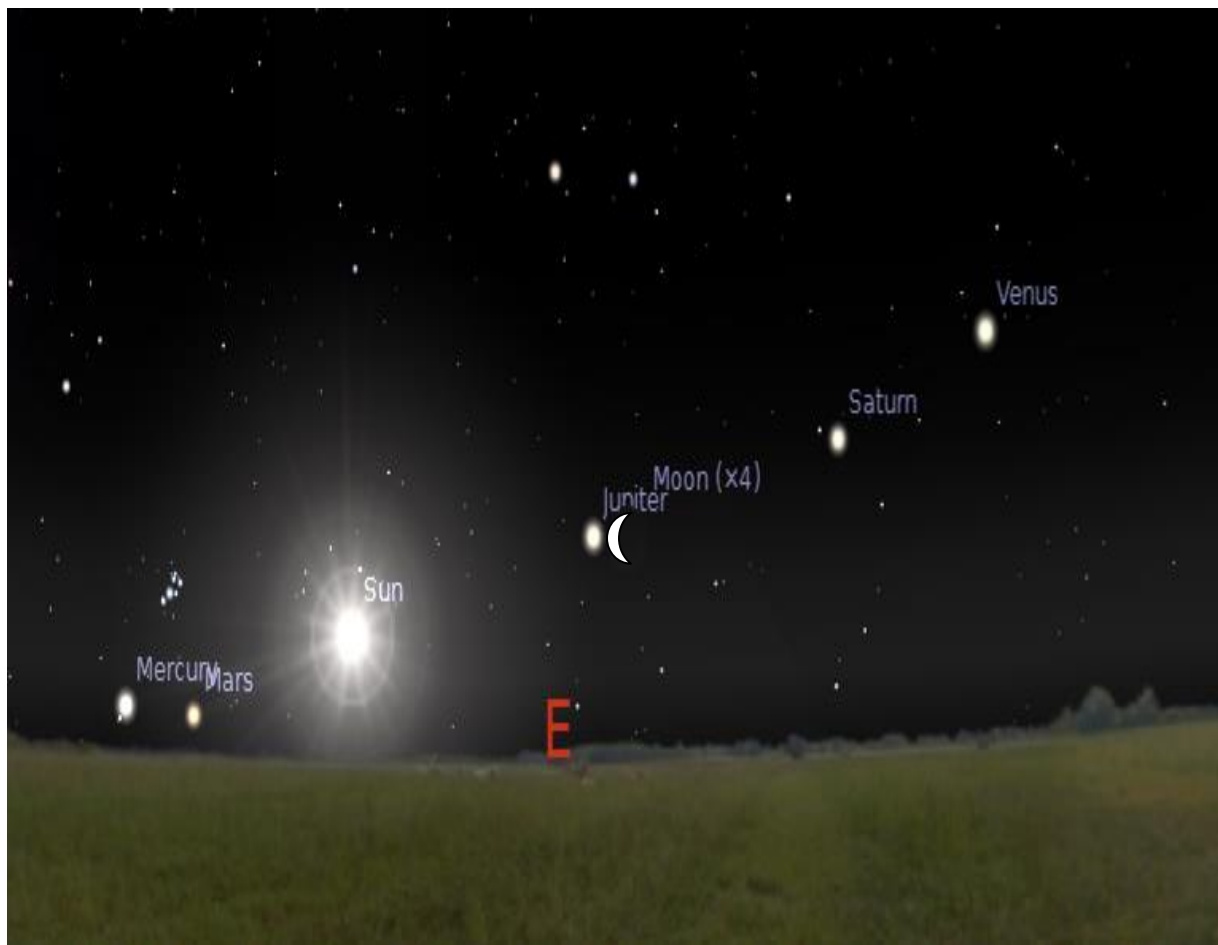


Figure 4. Image from the Stellarium software showing the alignment of the heavenly bodies just after sunrise on April 17, 6 BC

Why the Magi?

The answer to this question requires an in-depth study of the Book of Daniel. Daniel was an intellectual teenager that was taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar when Jerusalem was sacked in 586 BC. His intellect and abilities were recognized by the king and was specially trained to serve in the court of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. Daniel, through a series of dreams, interpretations and miracles, became a favorite of the king and rose to prominence within the kingdom. Daniel 2:48 says that Nebuchadnezzar “...made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon...” Who are the “wise men” mentioned in this verse? Earlier in chapter 2, it is stated that the wise men were comprised of magicians, diviners, enchanters, sorcerers, and Chaldeans. The word Magi is short for “magician.” So, there really is no mystery as to the origin of the wise men described in the book of Matthew. They were direct ancestors of the very men trained, taught, and managed by Daniel some 500 years before the birth of Yeshua Ha Mashiach (Jesus the Christ).

Even more spectacular are the Messianic prophecies given in Daniel chapter 9. Verses 24 – 26 provide a very detailed prediction that the Messiah will arrive 483 years after a decree is issued to rebuild Jerusalem. The most likely date of the decree is 445 BC based on Nehemiah 2:5. When 483 years (360 day year) is considered and subtracted from 445 the date of the crucifixion “...when the Messiah is cut off...” is around 30 AD. The Magi were able to narrow the time of the birth to very small timeframe – probably the ten years between 10 BC and 1AD.

Why Antioch?

Antioch was the ancient capital of Syria and was founded by Seleucus in about 300 BC. It was located on the Orontes River about 50 miles west of Aleppo, Syria. It was strategically located for commerce and was connected to the major trading routes known as “The Silk Road,” and “Royal Persian Road.” The Jewish Encyclopedia states that “...*Antioch, as the chief city of Syria, was the seat of the Roman governor, whose jurisdiction extended over Palestine also. A large number of Jews resided in Antioch from its foundation (according to Josephus), and received from Seleucus Nicator all the rights of citizenship....*” This means that the Magi would have passed through Antioch on their way to Jerusalem and, most likely, shared the reason for their trip with the Jews of the city -- that they were going to visit the newly born Jewish Messiah.

It is this large Jewish population that prompted the early disciples of Yeshua to go to Antioch to “...*speak the word to no one except to Jews alone.*” (Acts 11:19). As a result of this evangelism, Antioch became a seat of early Christianity and was visited by many of the prominent disciples and apostles like Peter, Paul, and Barnabas. Followers of Yeshua were first called “Christians” at Antioch (Acts 11:20-30).

Over the next 4 centuries, multiple church conferences were held in Antioch and the city was considered as important as Jerusalem, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Rome.

Why Aries?

Molnar, pp 46-47, discusses the ancient references that relate Aries to Judaea. Ptolemy in “Tetrabiblos” says that “...*Aries represents Coele Syria, Judaea, and Idumaea...*” Vettius Valens, in “Anthology,” says that “...*Aries controlled Coele Syria and its adjacent lands...*” Further, the Jewish Encyclopedia states “...*The twelve constellations represent the twelve tribes... The standards of the tribes corresponded to the zodiacal signs of the constellations, so that in the east was the standard of Judah, with Issachar and Zebulun beside it, these three being opposite Aries, Taurus, and Gemini...*” And even into modern times, the “Astrology Weekly” recognizes that Aries represents Israel.

Commemorative coins

After collecting many Star of Bethlehem coins over a ten year period, it became apparent that the dates of these coins were grouped in clusters – with large gaps between the clusters. This pattern is seen from about 6 AD to about 253 AD or nearly 250 years. When I combined the dates of these clusters with the birth year of 6BC and crucifixion year of 30 AD, I discovered that the clusters aligned neatly with major anniversaries of the birth or death and resurrection. The conclusion is that the leaders in Antioch, a semi-autonomous city, issued coins with the Ram & Star design to commemorate the birth and/or crucifixion of Yeshua Ha Machiach.

On the following pages, the coins separated and presented in their appropriate categories:

The Birthdays

Occasion: Yeshua at age 12 and age 18
Dates: AT for age 12. BM, ΓM, ΔM for age 18. (Actian Era began 31 BC)
Dimensions: 18-20 mm diameter, 6.5 – 8.7 gms (these are the largest of the entire series.)
Obverse: Zeus facing right
Reverse: All show leaping ram (Aries) looking back at heavenly star. AT and BM - ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΕΩΝ ANTIOXEΩΝ, “people of the metropolis Antioch.” ΓM and ΔM - ΕΠΙ ΣΙΛΑΝΟΥ ANTIOXEΩΝ, “reign of Silanus Antioch”
Number seen: AT – 8 (scarce), BM – 10 (scarce), ΓM – 44 (easily found), ΔM – 86 (most populous of the entire series)
Comments: Age 12 could commemorate Yeshua’s Bar Mitzvah and his debate in the Temple with the Rabbis – Luke 2:41-52. Yeshua at age 18 may reflect the Rabbi’s desire that the militaristic messiah is ready to rise to power. Quirinius became governor in 6AD and Silanus followed in 12 AD.



Figure 5: AT (Antioch) = 6 AD (T. Cartwright collection)



Figure 6: BM = year 42 or 11 AD (T. Cartwright collection)



Figure 7: ΓM = year 43 or 12 AD (T. Cartwright collection)



Figure 8: ΔM = year 44 or 13 AD (T. Cartwright collection)

Imitations

Occasion: Imitations to commemorate the birth
Dates: EM, ΓΙΑ, ΓΔ, ΓΝ, ΛΛ, ΛΜ, (All most likely minted between 30 AD and 50 AD)
Dimensions: 15-20 mm diameter, 4.3 – 7.2 gms
Obverse: Zeus facing right
Reverse: Leaping ram (Aries) looking back at 5-point star or arrowhead. Legend is illegible on all examples
Number seen: ΓΙΑ - 1, EM – 1, ΓΔ - 2, ΓΝ – 1, ΛΛ - 1, ΛΜ – 1, (All exceptionally rare)
Comments: The death of Yeshua in 30AD probably generated a great deal of tourist traffic and these were minted to sell to the tourists.



Figure 9. Date: ΓΙΑ = year 43 and 5-point star on reverse (image from Incitatus Coins on VCoins.com)



Figure 10. Date: EM = year 45 and 3-point star on reverse (T. Cartwright collection)



Figure 11. Date: $\Gamma\Delta$ = year 7 (47) and arrowhead on reverse (image from Zuzim Coins on VCoins.com)



Figure 12. Date: ΓN = year 53 and arrowhead on reverse (T. Cartwright collection)



Figure 13. Date: $\Lambda\Lambda$ = year 60 and arrowhead on reverse (T. Cartwright collection)



Figure 14. Date: ΛM = year 70 and arrowhead (T. Cartwright collection)

25th Anniversary of Resurrection & 60th Anniversary of Birth

Occasion: Commemorate the 25 th year since the resurrection and 60 th year since the birth
Dates: ETΔP, ΔP = 104 or 55 AD, ETEP = 105 or 56 AD (Caesarian Era starting 49BC)
Dimensions: 17-19 mm diameter, 5.3 – 5.8 gms
Obverse: Tyche facing right with ANTIOXEΩN on coins dated ETΔP, ΔP and ETEP.
Reverse: Leaping ram (Aries) looking back at star and/or crescent Legend reads ΕΠΙΚΟΥΡΑΔΡΑΤΟΥ (translation is “reign of Quadratus”).
Number seen: ETΔP – 20 (available), ΔP – 8 (scarce), ETEP – 20 (available)
Comments: These were minted during the last year of Claudius’ reign and the first year of Nero’s reign. Claudius issued an edict in 49AD which kicked the Jews out of Rome and Jerusalem because of their persecution of the Christians.



Figure 15. Date: ETΔP = year 104 or 55 AD (T Cartwright collection)



Figure 16. Date: ΔΡ = year 104 or 55AD. Reverse appears to copy the style from 6 AD (T Cartwright collection)



Figure 17. Date: ΕΤΕΡ = year 105 or 56 AD (T Cartwright collection)

Special Minting in 54AD – Commemorating Yeshua and Alexander the Great

Occasion: The 25 th year since Yeshua's death and 377 th year since Alexander's death. (They were most likely anticipating Yeshua's return much as Alexander entered the land.)
Dates: ZOTAP is most likely a "double-date." ZOT= 377 and ΔP = 55AD. (55AD – 377 years = 322 BC – near Alexander's death)
Dimensions: 17 mm diameter, 5.3 gms
Obverse: Tyche is facing left on coin dated ZOTAP (only 2 coins in the series face left)
Reverse: Leaping ram (Aries) looking back at star in crescent Legend reads: ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΕΩΝ, "people of the metropolis."
Number seen: ZOTAP – 1 (extremely rare)
Comments: Alexander didn't conquer and destroy the Jewish nation as he had done to all other nations. Judaea was allowed to continue their normal life including Temple rituals and practices. The Jewish encyclopedia says that "...the Jewish contemporaries of Alexander the Great, dazzled by his glorious achievements, hailed him as the divinely appointed deliverer, the inaugurator of the period of universal peace promised by the Prophets..."



Figure 18. Date: ZOTAP: ΔP = year 104 or 55 AD (subtract ZOT (377) from 55 to get 323 BC). Reverse also uses the legend ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΕΩΝ which was used in 6 AD (T. Cartwright collection)

75th Anniversary of Yeshua's Death and Resurrection

Occasion: Commemorates the 75 th year since the ministry, death and resurrection of Yeshua
Dates: L QP = year 105 AD (reign of Legatus Quintus Pompeius Falco)
Dimensions: 19 mm diameter, 4.95 gms
Obverse: Tyche facing right with ANTIOXEΩN in front
Reverse: Leaping ram (Aries) looking back at star in crescent. Letters L QP are placed where the date is usually located
Number seen: 1 ---- extremely rare
Comments: It's been 50 years since the previous Star of Bethlehem commemorative was minted. The coin retained its previous motif and dimensions. Only the date has changed - the initials of the Legate are shown instead of the caesarean date for 105 AD which would have been - ET ΔNP
Trajan was Emperor and it was a period of aggressive persecution of both Christians and Jews. It had been about 40 years since Nero began open persecution of the Christians and 35 years since Titus destroyed the temple.



Figure 19. Star of Bethlehem coin commemorating 75th year since the ministry, death and resurrection of Yeshua. "L QP" = 105 AD (T. Cartwright Collection)

100th Anniversary of Yeshua's Death and Resurrection

Occasion: Commemorates the 100 th year since the ministry, death and resurrection of Yeshua
Dates: ETZOP= year 177 or 128 AD
Dimensions: 15 - 18 mm diameter, 4.6 – 5.7 gms
Obverse: Tyche facing right with ANTIOXEΩN MHTPOΠOΛEΩN.
Reverse: Leaping ram (Aries) looking back at star in crescent. No legend.
Number seen: ETZOP – 21 (4 th most populous)
Comments: I would have expected to see more dates around the 100 th anniversary but this is the only one so far.
<p>This was a critical time for the Jews (and Christians) because the tensions were building and erupted into the Bar Kochba revolt in 132AD. Hadrian was the emperor who put down the rebellion and ended up killing millions and changing Jerusalem's name to Aelia Capitolina.</p> <p>This quite possibly the finest known coin of the Star of Bethlehem series.</p>



Figure 20. Star of Bethlehem coin commemorating 100th year since the ministry, death and resurrection of Yeshua. ETZOP = year 177 or 128 AD (T. Cartwright Collection)

Special Commemorative After the Bar Kochba Revolt

Occasion: Commemorates the 150 th year since the birth of Yeshua. It appears to remind of believers of Passover and Yom Kippur after the destruction of Jerusalem.
Dates: No date. Most likely 140 to 145 AD which agrees with the “Experts” new dating that it was minted in Antioch in the early centuries AD. The diameter and weight match the Star of Bethlehem coins of that era and the leaping ram is a match for the ram on the Star of Bethlehem coins.
Dimensions: 15 mm diameter, 3.3 gms
Obverse: Leaping ram (Aries) looking back. No legend
Reverse: Scales (Libra). No legend or date.
Number seen: 12
<p>Comments: Most likely minted by Messianic believers after the devastation of Jerusalem and the near extinction of the Jewish people in 135 AD. The motif most likely prompted the remnant of believers of the major Jewish feasts – Aries (March-April) for remembrance of Passover and the Libra Scales (September-October) for Yom Kippur. These tokens were originally attributed to Egypt in about 300 BC but that conclusion was speculative and not based on any hard evidence. The explanation above is a much more plausible explanation.</p> <p>From CNG: 320, Lot: 201, “Weiser’s attribution of this type to the Egyptian Pharaoh Nektanebo (361-343 BC) is primarily based on a loose typological similarity to an issue of gold coins that are Egyptian. While this attribution is still followed by many, more recent evidence has almost certainly shown this to be incorrect. All of these bronze coins seem to originate from sources outside of Egypt, particularly the northern Levant, which would not likely be in the circulation pattern of a 4th century BC bronze issue of Egypt (an argument that these may have been struck while Nektanebo was active in Syria during the Satrapal Revolt is completely implausible). Also, with the exception of the Athenian tetradrachm imitations that were likely struck in Egypt for external trade, there was no internal monetized economy that would be necessary to support such a bronze issue. In his book on the coins of Roman Syria, Butcher notes that the style of the leaping ram is very similar to 3rd century AD issues of Antioch, but also notes that it is a common type at Damaskos. Furthermore, Butcher notes that Newell had attributed two of these in the ANS to an uncertain mint in Commagene, although his rationale is unknown. Thus, Butcher attributes these to an uncertain mint in northern Syria in the 3rd century AD.”</p>



Figure 21. No Date token minted to remember the months of Passover and Yom Kippur (T. Cartwright Collection)

150th Anniversary of Yeshua's Birth

Occasion: Commemorates the 150 th year since the birth of Yeshua
Dates: ETOC qP = 190 or 141 AD, ETOYΔqP and ETΔqP = year 194 or 145 AD, ET EqP = year 195 or 146 AD, ETZqP = year 197 or 148 AD
Dimensions: 15 - 16 mm diameter, 2.2 – 2.8 gms
Obverse: Tyche facing right with ANTIOXEΩN MHTPOΠOΛEΩN..
Reverse: Leaping ram (Aries) looking back at star in crescent. No legend. The coins dated ETΔ9P show the ram leaping left.
Number seen: ETOC qP =1 (extremely rare), ETOYΔqP =2 (extremely rare), ET ΔqP – 4 (very rare), ET EqP – 3 (very rare), ETZqP = 1 (extremely rare)
Comments: These coins are hard to find. Dies are larger than the flans. Antoninus Pius was the Emperor. He was very tolerant of Christians and had the most peaceful reign of all the Emperors. Pius was on the throne nearly 23 years and not a single battle was fought.



Figure 22. Date: ETOC qP = year 190 or 141 AD (T Cartwright collection)



Figure 23. Date: ΕΤΟΥΔΑ and ΕΤΑΔΑ = year 194 or 145 AD (T Cartwright collection)



Figure 24. Date: ET EqP = 146 AD (T Cartwright collection)



Figure 25. Date: ET ZqP = 148 AD (T Cartwright collection)

125 Years Since the Death and Resurrection

Occasion: Commemorates the 125 th year since the death and resurrection of Yeshua.
Dates: ETOC EC = year 205 or 156 AD, ETOC ZC = year 207 or 158 AD
Dimensions: 15 - 16 mm diameter, 2.2 – 2.8 gms
Obverse: Tyche facing right with ANTIOXEΩN MHTPOΠOΛEΩN..
Reverse: Leaping ram (Aries) looking back at star in crescent. No legend.
Number seen: ETOC EC – 1 (extremely rare), ETOC ZC – 1 (extremely rare)
Comments: There is a high degree of uncertainty about the date of the ETOC EC coin. A better example is needed to verify the date. These were also minted during the reign of Antoninus Pius.



Figure 26. Date: ETOC EC = 156 AD and Date: ETOC ZC = 158 AD (T Cartwright collection)

200th Anniversary of the Birth

Occasion: Commemorates 200 years since the birth of Yeshua.
Dates: No dates on coins. Minted during reign of Septimius Severus 194 AD
Dimensions: 16 mm diameter, 2.1 gms
Obverse: Portraits of Geta, Caracalla and Severus.
Reverse: Crescent moon with multiple stars in the shape of crosses.
Number seen: Geta – 1 (extremely rare), Caracalla – 1 (extremely rare), Severus – 3 (v rare)
Comments: The Severan's had a unique opportunity to celebrate the 200 th anniversary of the birth of Yeshua. There were many “crescent & star” coins minted by Septimius, between 193 AD and 198 AD, to commemorate the event. Only the coins minted at Markianopolis and Nicopolis show the stars as crosses in the possible alignment on that morning in 6 BC. It is well documented that the Severan family surrounded itself with Christians. Many served on the household staff and in prominent positions in the government. No doubt the Christian teachers shared the secrets surrounding Yeshua's life – including verbal descriptions of the heavenly alignment at His birth.



Figure 27. Coins of the Severn's showing the possible alignment of the star (T. Cartwright collection)

A possible commentary of the alignment of the crescent and stars is shown below. This arrangement has to be based on the verbal descriptions of the “Star” passed down since the event. No one knew for certain what a regal arrangement of the stars might look like until 1999 when Dr. Molnar made his determination.

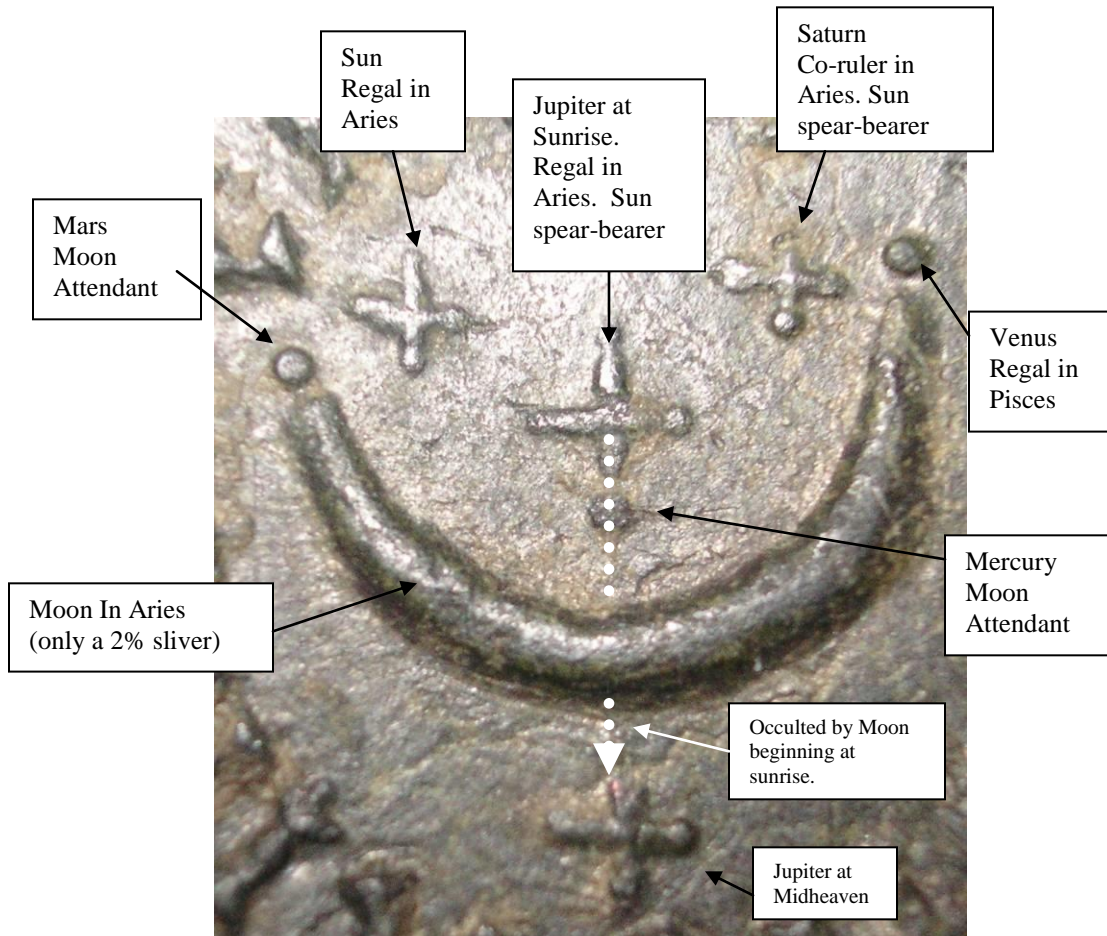


Figure 28. Possible legend of the position of the stars on Severan coins. (T. Cartwright collection)

200th Anniversary of the Death and Resurrection

Elagabalus Coin

Occasion: Commemorates 200 years since the ministry, death and resurrection of Yeshua.
Dates: No date on coins. Minted during reign of Elagabalus 222 AD
Dimensions: 17 mm diameter, 3.8 gms
Obverse: Elagabalus - Radiate , AVT MAI M AV ANTΩNINOC
Reverse: Ram/Star SC Δ●€ all within wreath
Number seen: Elagabalus – 20 (available)
Comments: Elagabalus minted quite a few coins with the ram/star on the reverse. Elagabalus was part of the Severan dynasty and became ruler, at age 14, after Caracalla was assassinated in 217 AD. Elagabalus was notorious for his sexual perversion and disregard for Roman religions. He himself was assassinated in 222 AD.



Figure 29. Ram & Star motif on reverse of coin minted during reign of Elagabalus. (T. Cartwright collection)

Tyche & Ram/Star Coin

Occasion: Commemorates 200 years since the ministry, death and resurrection of Yeshua.
Dates: Date is illegible. Minted during reign and Severus Alexander 230AD
Dimensions: 16 mm diameter, 2.1 gms
Obverse: Tyche
Reverse: Ram & Crescent Δ●€ Date is illegible but it appears to be ETOY C (year 200). The letters LQΩ are visible and most likely stand for <i>Legatus Quintus Optatus</i> (the governor of Syria 225 – 235 AD) A much better specimen is needed to verify the details
Number seen: Tyche with Δ●€ on reverse – 1 (extremely rare)
Comments: This is an important find in that it has the same obverse and reverse of the traditional “Star of Bethlehem” coin. The symbol, Δ●€, is seen only on bronze coins minted at Antioch after 218 AD and before 253 AD. The best guess of the date is 230 AD because of the enormity of the 200 th anniversary. Severus Alexander was educated by the Christian scholars of his day and was reported to have busts of Christ and Abraham in his study.



Figure 30. Traditional Ram & Star motif on reverse of coin minted during reign of Severus Alexander. (T. Cartwright collection)

Severus Alexander Coin

Occasion: Commemorates 200 years since the ministry, death and resurrection of Yeshua.
Dates: No date on coins. Severus Alexander 230AD
Dimensions: 27 mm diameter, 13.8 gms
Obverse: Severus Alexander AVT KAI (MAP CEV ALEXANDPOC)
Reverse: Tyche with Ram and Star above CEII KOΛO (NECIBI MHTPO).
Number seen: Severus Alexander (Nisibis) – 11 (scarce)
Comments: This the first large bronze minted with the Ram & Star design. It is also the first coin with the Ram & Star motif minted outside of Antioch in Nisibis. Nisibis was another city that benefitted from its proximity to the Silk Road and Royal Road. Emperor Severus Alexander was educated by the Christian scholars of his day and was reported to have busts of Christ and Abraham in his study. Severus Alexander was murdered by his own troops in 235 AD when he was only 22.



Figure 31. Ram & Star motif minted at Nisibis during reign of Severus Alexander. (T. Cartwright collection)

250th Anniversary of the Birth

There were thousands of coins minted between 242 AD and 253 AD that display the Ram & Star motif. Most incorporate the Ram & Star around Tyche or a temple however. At least 10 different Emperors and/or wives minted coins to commemorate the 250 years since the birth of Yeshua. The three coins presented below are just samples from that time period.

Gordian III Tetradrachm

Occasion: Commemorates 250 years since the birth of Yeshua.
Dates: No date on coins. Minted in 242AD
Dimensions: 24 mm diameter, 12.5 gms
Obverse: Gordian facing right AVTOK K M ANT GORDIANOC CEB
Reverse: Eagle with Ram and Star below DHMAPX EX UPATO B
Number seen: 100's
Comments: Alloy is billon – all others in the series are made of bronze. Gordian III was made emperor when he was only 13 years old. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, Gordian's policies and laws were tolerant of Christians. He was most likely taught by prominent Christians in Antioch and was obviously aware of the symbols of Messiah.



Figure 32. Billon coin minted in 242 AD showing the Ram & Star below eagle. (T. Cartwright collection)

Gordian III Bronze

Occasion: Commemorates 250 years since the birth of Yeshua.
Dates: No date on coin. Minted in 244 AD
Dimensions: 16 mm diameter, 4.2 gms
Obverse: Gordian III facing right (AVTOK K M) AN GORDIANOC (CEB)
Reverse: Ram and Star CEII KOAO (NECIBI MHTPO)
Number seen: 1 (exceptionally rare)
Comments: This super rare coin displays the traditional Ram & Star reverse. It is equally rare that it was minted in Nisibis. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, the Gordian's policies and laws were tolerant of Christians. Gordian died in 244 during a battle in what is now Iraq. He was succeeded by Philip the Arab who was also exposed to Christian teaching.



Figure 33. Minted in 244 AD in Nisibis showing traditional Ram & star reverse (image from Ebay auction)

Philip the Arab on Large Bronze

Occasion: Commemorates 250 years since the birth of Yeshua.
Dates: No date on coin. Minted in 244 AD
Dimensions: 27 mm diameter, 13.8 gms
Obverse: Phillip facing right, AVTOK K M IOYAI ΦΙΛΙΠΠΙΟΣ CEB
Reverse: Tyche with Ram above and Star below , ANTIOXEΩN METPO KOΛΩN
Number seen: 100's
Comments: Philip the Arab was best known for his toleration of Christians and was proclaimed by the early church father Eusebius as "The first Christian Emperor." (Research shows he wasn't the first however.) Philip was defeated in battle by the usurper Decius in 249 AD at Verona.



Figure 34. Large bronze of Phillip the Arab displaying Ram & Star

Phillip II Nisibis

Occasion: Commemorates 250 years since the birth of Yeshua.
Dates: No date on coin. Minted in 247 AD in Nisibis
Dimensions: 20.3 mm diameter, 4.6 gms
Obverse: Phillip facing left, AVTOK K M IOVAI ΦΙΛΙΠΠΙΟC CEB
Reverse: Ram in center of wreath – star and crescent at top of wreath, IOV CEB KOA NEC-BI M in the legend
Number seen: 1 (extremely rare)
Comments: Philip II was the son of Philip the Arab. He was 9 years old when this coin was minted. Philip was defeated and killed in battle by the usurper Decius in 249 AD at Verona and Philip II was then murdered by the Praetorian Guard on word of Philip's death.



Figure 35. Philip II with Ram in wreath on reverse. (T. Cartwright collection)

Conclusions

1. The divine alignment of the planets at sunrise of April 17, 6 BC, pointed out by Dr. Molnar, is verified by the Stellarium astronomy program.
2. This divine alignment and date were anticipated by the Magi who were trained by Daniel and were aware of his Messianic prophecies.
3. Antioch was situated on the main east-west trade routes, was the home of the provincial governor and was an early center for Jewish life. After the Messiah's crucifixion, Antioch became a leading city for early Christianity.
4. Ancient writers through modern astrologers recognize the relation of Judea to Aries in the Zodiac.
5. The first coins of Antioch minted with the "Ram & Star" motif were almost certainly recognizing the birth of the Messiah in Judaea.
6. From 6 AD to 253 AD, over 20 different mintings (dates) display the "Ram & Star" motif. These dates appear in clusters and correspond to major anniversary dates related to Yeshua's birth or death and resurrection.

References:

Molnar, M. "The Star of Bethlehem – the Legacy of the Magi," Rutgers University Press, New Jersey, 4th Printing, 2000.

Ryrie Study Bible, NASB Version, 1995.

<http://Biblehub.com> , the NASB version

Jewish Encyclopedia On-line, www.jewishencyclopedia.com, Conceived, created and funded by the Kopelman Foundation, 2002 – 2011

The Stellarium astronomy program is a free download at <http://Stellarium.org> (When using the program recognize that it places a year "zero" between -1 and 1. Traditional calendars do not have a year zero)

Catholic Encyclopedia On-line, <http://newadvent.org/cathen/>

CNG coin Auctions, <http://cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=251646> , for explanation of the origins of the Ram/Scales coin.

Many dealers on www.vcoins.com provide information on previous sales of "Star of Bethlehem" coins.

Appendix

I. Dating of Ancient Greek Coins

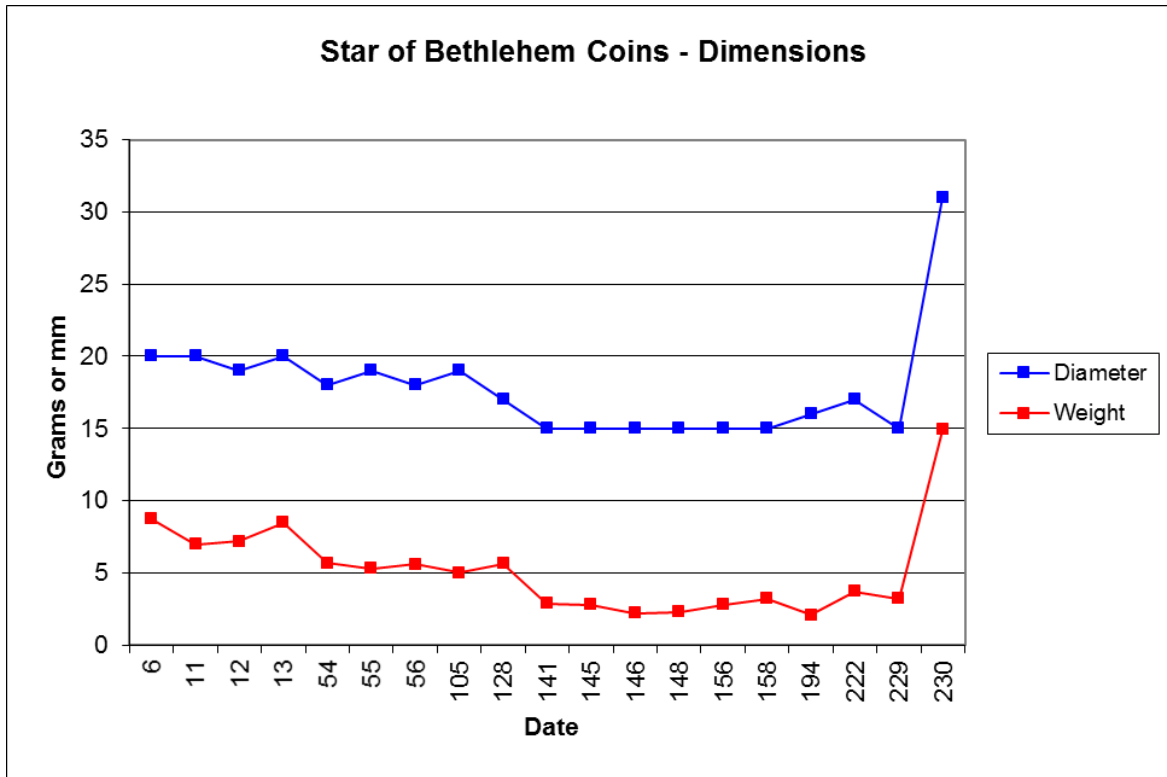
The modern Greek word for year = ETOS. The ancient versions would be ETOY and ETOC. This is shortened to “ET” when space was limited on coins.

Greek Letter	Numerical Value	Greek Letter	Numerical Value
A	1	N	50
B	2	Ξ	60
Γ	3	O (omicron)	70
Δ	4	Π	80
E	5	Ϟ (koppa)	90
F(digamma)	6	P	100
Z	7	Σ or C or Y	200
H	8	T	300
Θ	9	Υ or U	400
I	10	Φ	500
K	20	X	600
Λ	30	Ψ	700
M	40	Ω	800

Example: ETOY BOP would be “year 172” (B=2, O=70, P=100). ETOC BOP and ETBOP would also equal year 172. To complicate it further, the “era,” which is the starting point, must be known. For the Star of Bethlehem series, the eras used are the Actian, starting in 31 BC (for those dated AT, BM, ΓM, ΔM and imitations) and the Caesarian which began in 49BC. So, if this example was from the Caesarian era then the modern date would be $172 - 49 = 123$ AD.

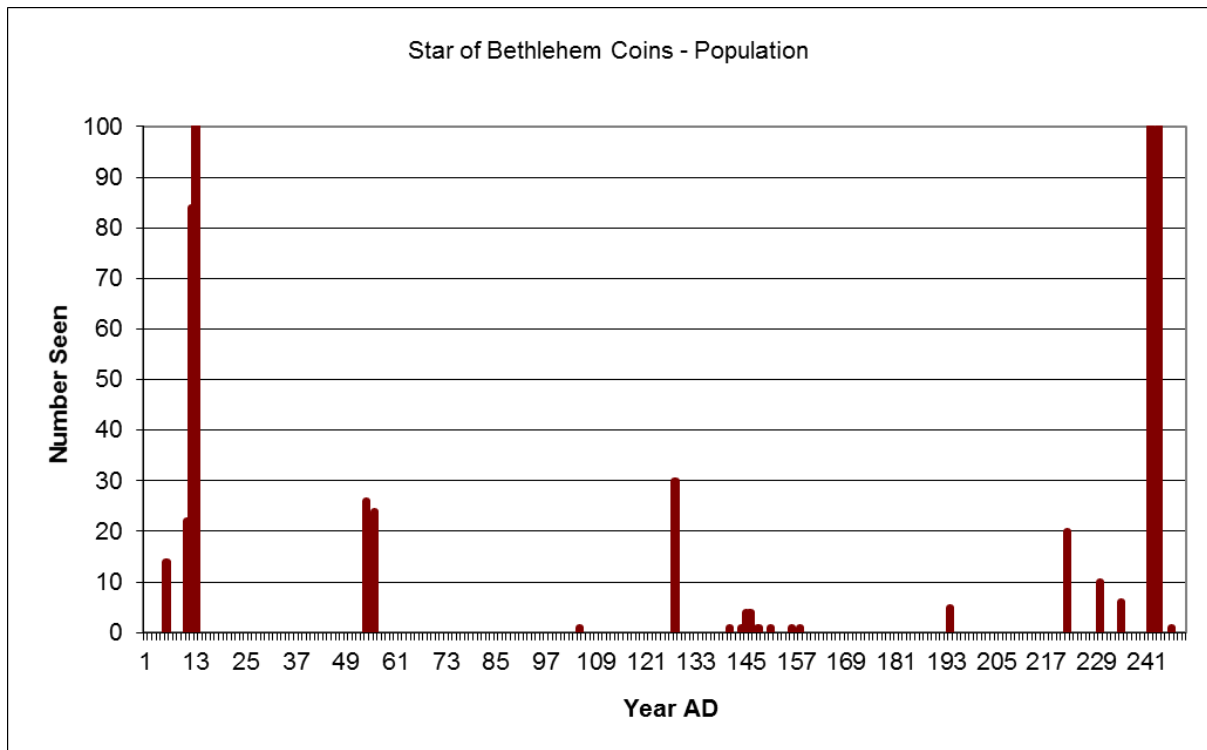
II. Dimensions of the Star of Bethlehem Coins.

Diameters and weights dropped steadily until 230 AD when the large bronzes were first minted. Diameters decreased from 20 mm to 15 mm (25% less) while weights decreased from 8.5 grams to 2.2 grams (a 74% drop). As was pointed out in the text, several of the dies were larger than the flans making the legends incomplete on nearly all coins. This makes a centered, well-struck example very rare and valued 4 to 5 times the normal price.



III. Graph of the Coin Populations by Year.

Grouping of dates are shown and appear erratic until they are overlaid with the anniversary dates of Yeshua's birth and resurrection shown on the next page.



This chart shows that only 3 of the major anniversary dates don't have any coins with the corresponding dates: 1) 50th since death and resurrection, 2) 100th since the birth, and 3) 150th since death and resurrection.

