

Egyptian coins in the time of Joseph

Patrick Clarke

In recent times, there have been claims from Muslim sources that Egyptian coins dating from Joseph's time have been found. If verified, these would support the Koran, which holds that a coinage system was the fundamental method of trade at the time. These claims have been uncritically passed on and affirmed by Christian sources (including some creationists), who state that this shows the Bible was 'right all along' about coins having been used in Joseph's time. However, the classification of these ancient objects as 'coins' is pure conjecture. The evidence instead indicates that ancient Egyptians never used coins, but rather a system of barter which also involved weights of silver; and that the text of Genesis itself affirms this sort of payment, where silver was weighed out, not counted, as for coinage.

The history of ancient Egypt is indelibly linked to the biblical account, particularly that of Genesis. No other source of history has been so thoroughly examined by both friendly and hostile enquiry as has the biblical account of contact between Israel and Egypt. A skeptical approach is vital when dealing with the often extravagant claims that, from time to time, appear in the various media; including when assessing claims which allegedly prove the Bible right. The primary requisite must be to assume nothing, and check more thoroughly, otherwise there is a risk of discrediting the Bible when such claims turn out to have no foundation whatsoever.

On 22 September 2009, the Egyptian daily newspaper *Al Ahram* carried a report which claimed that researchers at the Museum of Egypt had discovered ancient Egyptian coins bearing the name and image of the biblical Joseph. According to *Al Ahram*, a group of researchers and archeologists claimed to have discovered a cache of coins dating from the time of the pharaohs. The group's leader, Dr Sa'id Muhammed Thabet, confidently announced via newspaper that the significance of this find provided "decisive scientific evidence" disproving the claim by some historians that ancient Egyptians conducted trade by barter and had no knowledge of coins.

Searching through thousands of small artefacts in the Museum vaults, the researchers came across items that they initially thought were charms and amulets. Subsequently, for some unexplained reason, they became convinced that these relics were in fact coins that not only carried the year of their minting and value, but images of the pharaohs ruling at that time. Then came groundbreaking news; some of the coins were from the time of the biblical Joseph, and bore his name and portrait.

Defending this revelation, the newspaper exclaimed: "Koranic verses indicate clearly that coins were used in Egypt in the time of Joseph." This prompted researchers to find verses in the Koran that spoke of coins being used in ancient Egypt. However, of the two verses which were produced as evidence (below) only the first specifically mentions coins.

(1) "And they sold him [i.e. Joseph] for a low price, a number of silver coins; and they attached no value to him" (Koran 12:20).

(2) "Qarun [the biblical Koran] says about his money: 'This has been given to me because of a certain knowledge which I have'" (Koran 28:78).

The researchers claimed that the charms were 'coins'. Many similar 'coins' were found at various sites, and they were oval in shape with two faces; one with an inscription and one with an image. These features, they claimed, were comparable to modern coins. The researchers attempted to strengthen their position by claiming that the inscribed face bore the name of Egypt, a date, and a value; the engraved face carried an image or symbol. The alleged coins were made from a variety of materials such as ivory, copper, silver, gold, and precious stones.

The report continued by claiming that some of these 'coins' carried special markings linking them to the time of Joseph. One portrayed a cow "symbolizing Pharaoh's dream about the seven fat cows and seven lean cows".

Going further, the report declared:

"It was found that the inscriptions of this early period were unusually simple, since writing was still in its early stages, and consequently there was difficulty in deciphering the writing on these coins. But the research team [managed to] translate [the writing on the coin] by comparing it to the earliest known hieroglyphic texts ... , Joseph's name appears twice on this coin, written in hieroglyphs: once the original name, Joseph, and once his Egyptian name, Saba Sabani There is also an image of Joseph"¹

Several points need addressing from the statements above. Modern Egyptians call their land *Misir*—the Arabic version of the Hebrew *Mitsrayim*.

Egyptian art is replete with images of cows, and yet we are expected to believe that in this one instance, the solitary cow actually represents the *fourteen* cows of Pharaoh's dream? Surely, Pharaoh wasn't the only one to have had such a dream.

That "writing was still in its early stages" and "unusually simple" is a largely evolutionary concept, implying that the Egyptian language was still at a simple evolutionary stage of development. The majority Egyptological consensus on

Scarabs in ancient Egypt

Egyptian scarabs were modelled on several insect species, although the image of the scarab beetle (*Scarabeus sacer*) was the one most often used. After the scarab beetle lays its eggs in a ball of dung, it takes the ball wherever it goes by rolling the ball before it. When the young beetles hatch, they appear, apparently miraculously, from the dung. To the ancient Egyptians the scarab beetle became a symbol of rebirth, represented by the god Khepri, who, it was believed, pushed the sun disc across the sky just like the scarab beetle pushes its ball of dung.

As religious artefacts, scarabs made their appearance before the Pharaonic Period. A scaraboid-shaped alabaster box from Tarkhan provides confirmation that the scarab was already venerated at the beginning of the so-called Dynasty I.

Scarabs appeared in many forms: ornamental, winged; scarabs with the name of the pharaoh, marriage scarabs, scarabs inscribed with blessings upon the owner, and scarabs decorated with geometric motifs and animals (figure 1, left plate).

Uses

By the Middle Kingdom Period, a scarab was sometimes worn on a finger mounted as a ring (figure 1b). Numerous impressions on clay, bearing the names of royal and non-royal names, animal figures, and decorative motifs found on letters, documents, and containers attest to scarabs having been primarily used as seals. Although scarabs are known from the earliest periods, it is in the 12th dynasty that their use as seals became commonplace. The name of a particular person, pharaoh, or official title was inscribed on their flat bases to verify the owner's authority/property. As the lock and key was unknown in Egypt, clay was shaped and impressed with seals to secure the contents of everything from tombs to jars, boxes, and official documents. Official seals were considered so important that from the earliest times in the Old Kingdom, the titles of various officials reflected the importance of seals to the government of Egypt, e.g. Guardian of the Ring (seals) *iry db wt* 𓆎𓆏𓆑𓆒; Guardian of the Seal *iry htmt* 𓆎𓆏𓆑𓆒𓆓; Overseer of Seals *imy r hwt* 𓆎𓆏𓆑𓆒𓆓𓆔; and Keeper/Chancellor of the Royal Seal of the King of Lower Egypt *sq3wty bity* 𓆎𓆏𓆑𓆒𓆓𓆔𓆕𓆖.

The Hebrew for the ring³ Pharaoh gave to Joseph at his inauguration as Overseer of the kingdom was *טבטה tabba'ath*. The Gesenius Lexicon comments "properly to sink, to press into any soft material such as clay, hence to impress a seal (figure 2)." This helps to understand the nature of Pharaoh's ring—many researchers place Joseph in the Middle Kingdom Period, and it was during this time that the rotating scarab signet rings made their appearance (figure 1, right plate). It is clear from recent photographs and older, representative, hand-drawn plates included here that scarabs were used for a variety of purposes. However, there is no evidence of their use as money or coinage (see main text).

the origin of the Egyptian language is that it appeared fully-formed, almost overnight, so to speak—the language was fully expressed with no sign of 'descent with modification', which should be expected if evolution of the language from primitive beginnings was true. Egyptian texts have been routinely translated for over one century without serious problems. So why would Thabet and his team have found it difficult in this particular case? Could it be that their 'coins' and their 'unusually simple' writings are simply products of fertile imaginations?

Egyptian loan words appear frequently in the Hebrew Old Testament and are not that difficult to find. How the alleged 'Saba Sabani' compares to the Bible's Zaphnath Paaneah is a linguistic mystery; there is no discernable etymological link between the two. Since 'Saba Sabani' is almost certainly Arabic, it is not hard to pick the fatal flaw in Thabet's claim: Arabic is the only surviving member of the ancient North Arabian dialect group which is attested in Pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions dating back to the 4th century AD²; the Egyptian and Hebrew title of Joseph precedes Arabic by almost two millennia.

Questionable Egyptology

Thabet's remarks about some inscriptions being unusually simple, and translations being conducted by comparing them to the earliest known hieroglyphs, would suggest a lack of proficiency in the ancient Egyptian language. Languages exhibit changes over time, but this has nothing to do with the evolutionary process of simple to complex. Linguistically, the three main periods of Egyptian history, Old, Middle, and New, do exhibit differences one from another: that is one way Egyptologists determine when a particular text was originally written.

Dr Thabet had claimed to have "examined the sarcophagi of many pharaohs in search of coins" and "had indeed found such ancient Egyptian coins". With very few exceptions, preserved Pharaonic sarcophagi were emptied long ago by tomb robbers; only one is known to have survived intact into modern times, to be plundered by Howard Carter. For the record, some sarcophagi have never been found, others have been mislaid, and others smashed to pieces by overzealous robbers.

The 'coins' referred to were examples of the Egyptian amulets commonly found as grave goods, and known as 'scarabs'—see box.

The meaning of words

There appear to be some serious misunderstandings concerning the term 'money' as used in English translations of the Hebrew texts. One writer stated on a web-blog that: "Abraham used silver as money. Why deny that Joseph did?" The same writer quoted specific verses of Scripture (Gen. 23:16, Acts 7:16) and then asked: "They had coins in Jesus"



Photo: WF Petrie

Figure 1. Scarabs in ancient Egypt (from Petrie, ref. 4).

time, why not before then?" There was a further comment on Matthew 22:19 as well as the two previous verses above, where the same writer said: "These verses do not tell what kind of money was used ... just they had money ... nothing in Scripture specifies it was silver or gold."⁵ We will see that the Bible does mention silver and gold.

One creationist organization in the United Kingdom, in its quarterly journal, quoted portions of the MEMRI article before concluding:

"Coins (silver pieces) are, of course, mentioned in Genesis 23:14 when Abraham was settling with Ephron the price of the cave of Machpelah; in Genesis 37:28 when Joseph was sold into slavery,⁶ and later in Genesis 42:35, where 'bundles of money' are mentioned. We are assured by Bible critics that no coinage existed at this time, but they are once again proved utterly wrong by archaeology."⁷

The impression given is that silver pieces are the same as coins in the verses cited, which is unfortunate. The final sentence gives no indication that many Bible-believing archeologists and Egyptologists do not believe coinage existed at that time either. Sadly the author, Cooper, has included the above statement almost verbatim in his latest book,⁸ and finishes chapter 16 by giving the impression



Photo: Walters Art Museum

that only the modernist school of thought would reject his opinion on the matter. I am not a modernist but a committed creationist and Egyptologist, yet I also affirm that no coinage existed in Egypt during the c. 20th–18th century BC timeframe—the period of Abraham to Joseph.

To date Thabet's findings have not appeared in any peer-reviewed journal and it is extremely doubtful that they ever will, give the clear bias in Thabet's research toward the Koran's account of the times of Joseph.

All the preceding quotes from Christian sources appear certain that the biblical passages speak of coins, as in the modern definition (i.e. minted coinage controlled at every level by the State). When the Old and New Testament words translated into modern English



Figure 2. A Middle Kingdom ring featuring an amethyst scarab, which can be rotated to reveal a hieroglyphic inscription chased on its gold mount. It was the ring of a royal butler—it reads 'Butler of Nefer-her-Hebi'⁹—which connects it to the Joseph narrative.



Photo: Primula Bosshard, Freiburg

Figure 3. Scarab seals and Seal rings.

as ‘coins’ or ‘money’ are examined, it becomes clear that the English translations cause us to miss their real and ancient meaning. It is, of course, technically correct to refer to silver used in the transactions of the day as ‘money’. But this word nowadays causes us to automatically think of the minted items with which we are familiar.

Table 1 shows that the sole use in the Old Testament of the Hebrew כסף *keh’sef*⁹ is consistent with what is known archeologically of the pre-Exodus period. First in Mesopotamia, and soon after in Egypt, the concept of currency as such came into existence using silver bars to represent stored value in temple granaries.

There is confusion when the word שקל *shekel* is mentioned; many people think of this as a Hebrew coin. The shekel is, however, much older and has its origin in Mesopotamia: it referred to a number of ancient units of weight, and only much later to a type of coin. The term *shekel* was originally applied to a specific mass of barley seed (see Knight and Butler¹⁰ for a fuller explanation) where the

Akkadian for barley was *še* (pronounced *shay*, thus giving us the etymological link to shekel).

The idea that Abraham and Joseph were aware of the use of coins is thus way off the mark. In both transactions silver was used, not as coins, but measured by weight; in one case for a field and cave and in the other for grain supplies. This is perfectly in accord with the known archeological facts.

Further related errors

The writer of the article in the creationist journal mentioned earlier, which focused on the subject of the coins, stated that ‘bundles of money’ were mentioned in the Genesis narrative of chapter 42:35 (NKJ).

“Then it happened as they emptied their sacks, that surprisingly each man’s *bundle of money* was in his sack; and when they and their father saw *the bundles of money*, they were afraid [emphases added].”¹¹

As stated earlier, the word translated into English as ‘money’ is somewhat misleading to our modern minds. The phrase ‘bundle of money’ is less misleading if translated (also correctly) as ‘*bundle of silver*’, where silver is the Hebrew כסף *keh’sef*, meaning silver bars, not silver coins. The term ‘bundle’ (צֶרֶר *tsérowr*), which in context means something wrapped tightly and securely tied, was needed to secure loose pieces of silver or they would soon be lost. It is true that coins, too, may be tied in bundles, but citing the verse in question does nothing to support the idea that coins were used. Coins need not be inferred; what we read here is just a sensible means of securing one’s assets against loss. That ‘money’ (כסף *keh’sef*) in Genesis does not refer to coins is further highlighted in Genesis 23:16 where, after agreeing on the price and thus the amount of *keh’sef* to be paid (‘money’ in v. 13, NKJ), Abraham does not *count out keh’sef* (‘silver’

Table 1. Comparisons between OT and NT references to ‘money’.

Old Testament			New Testament		
Verse	Hebrew	Meaning	Verse	Greek	Meaning
Gen. 17:12	כסף <i>keh’sef</i>	Silver	Matt. 22:19	νόμισμα <i>nomisma</i>	Current coin, minted and controlled by the state, as commonly understood today
Gen. 23:14	כסף <i>keh’sef</i>	Silver shekels = weight—see v. 16	Acts 7:16	ἀργύριον <i>argurion</i>	Pieces of silver (<i>arguros</i>) Generally, silver coins, but in context this verse is part of a passage recounting the transaction between Abraham with Ephron where the ‘pieces’ were shekels (i.e. units of weight of the silver).
Gen. 23:16	כסף <i>keh’sef</i>	Silver	Luke 15:8	δραχμη <i>drachmē</i>	An Attic weight; a coin almost equal to the Roman denarius (trans. as ‘silver coin’)
Gen. 37:28	כסף <i>keh’sef</i>	Silver	Luke 12:6	ἀσάριον <i>assariōn</i>	Roman coin also known as an As
Gen. 43:12	כסף <i>keh’sef</i>	Silver			

in v. 16), which he would have done had it been coinage, but *weighs* it out as would be consistent with the shekel weight in use throughout the Ancient Near East.

How the barter system worked in Egypt

The account in Genesis concerning Joseph being sold to the Ishmaelite traders is pertinent to this discussion. Twice the Bible states that Joseph was sold for the price of 20 shekels of silver.¹² The exchange was for silver *weight*: there were no coins involved. The Ishmaelite traders would have encountered two different weight systems in their travels; the shekel, common across the Levant, and the deben,¹³ commonly used by Egypt.

The Hebrew text tells us that Potiphar bought (Heb. קנה *qanah*)¹⁴ Joseph from the Ishmaelites. The traders would have expected a decent ‘profit’ in selling Joseph to the Egyptian and they would have known how the Egyptians conducted such dealings.

How did this work in practice domestically between native Egyptians? A New Kingdom lady called Irynofret provides us with the answer:

“... the woman Irynofret said: ... the merchant Re approached me with the Syrian slave Gemniherimentet, while she was (still) a girl, [and he] said to me: ‘Buy this girl and give me the price for her’ And I took the girl and gave him [the price] for her. Now look, I shall tell the price which I gave for her: 1 shroud of Upper Egyptian linen, to the value of 5 kite of *silver*; 1 sheet of Upper Egyptian linen, to the value of 3 ½ kite of *silver*; ... 1 bronze jar, being 18 deben, to the value of 1 & ⅓ kite of *silver*; ... 1 bronze jug, being 20 deben, to the value of 2 kite of *silver*; 10 shirts of fine Upper Egyptian linen to the value of 4 kite of *silver* Total of all else, 4 deben, 1 kite of *silver*. And I gave them to the merchant Re And he gave me this girl, and I called her by the name Gemniherimentet [emphases added].”^{15,16}

It is clear from just part of this ancient example of sale and purchase that everything was valued in deben against silver, no fewer than six times in the reckoning. The custom and practice of trading goods in Egypt was based on a mutual agreement between the two parties. There were two possible ways to conclude a sale in Egypt. The first involved the weighing of silver against deben; the second involved barter and exchange of goods for goods, sometimes, but not always, measured against silver.

In Irynofret’s case, she had goods with which she wished to trade for the slave girl. The seller, Re, simply calculated the slave’s value against the value of goods offered, using deben, and no silver seems to have changed hands.

Trading using ‘silver money’ as opposed to barter

The final aspect discussed here is that of commercial trading in ancient Egypt, which involved grain transactions both to internal and external buyers. Chapters 41 and 42 in

Genesis give an accurate picture of how the Egyptian state, during the 17th century BC, controlled production, storage, payment, and the inevitable taxation.

As widespread famine began to grip most of the known world of the day, the master of all Egypt,¹⁷ Joseph, began to open the state’s grain reserves.¹⁸ Against this backdrop, a group of Canaanite residents journeyed to Egypt in the hope of being able to buy grain for their extended family’s needs.

This is not an exegetical study of all the events that subsequently unfolded between Joseph and his brothers; though each event is perfectly in accord with known customs of the Egyptians. What is of interest here is the mention of ‘money’, ‘bundles’, and the activity of buying grain.

In Genesis 41:57 we are given a synopsis of events at that time.

“So *all countries* came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine was severe in *all lands* [emphases added].”

This famine is recorded as one that impacted not only Egypt, but everyone else, too. The Hebrew כֹּל *kol*¹⁹ is employed twice in the quoted verse above, emphasising the total inclusivity of the famine: such a universal event should be recorded in the surviving histories of the nations of the day and needs research to confirm this. It is also clear that each country knew exactly where to obtain food aid. Against the backdrop of this ‘global’ catastrophe, Jacob despatched ten of his sons to Egypt to buy grain there.

What did the ten men take with them as means of payment? Only one Hebrew word is used—כֶּסֶף *keh’sef*—see chart 1, earlier, comparing OT and NT references to ‘money’. Between Genesis 42:25 and 44:8 the word translated as ‘money’, *keh’sef*, is used no fewer than 17 times; later, even the steward of Joseph’s house used the term (Genesis 43:23). That silver bars of *keh’sef* were involved rather than minted coins is not in doubt, and whether or not the *keh’sef* was used in the customary trading method of the day is answered in Genesis 43:21:

“... each man’s money (כֶּסֶף *keh’sef*) was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full *weight* (משקל *mishqal*) ... [emphasis added].”

The meaning of *keh’sef* in its true context has been made clear from the above discussion; how should *mishqal*, translated as weight, be interpreted? The answer is found in the root of the noun *mishqal*—the verb שָׁקַל *shaqal* (Qal imperfect) where the primary idea is that of suspending a balance—hence ‘to weigh, weigh out, pay out’.²⁰ The Bible text offers no encouragement whatsoever for the idea of ‘counting’ out money, as would be expected if coins were the exchange medium.

It is clear from both the Bible and the archeological evidence that commerce across the ancient Near East in the period from Abraham to Joseph was conducted using weights and scales. So, at what point in Egyptian economic history did coins of any description see the light of day?



Figure 4. Lydian electrum trite. This coin, made of electrum (a gold and silver alloy), was in all likelihood the world's first, minted by King Alyattes in Sardis, Lydia, Asia Minor. Actual size (13 x 10 x 4 mm).

The birth of, and reasons for, coinage in Egypt

The appearance of coinage of Pharaonic Egypt is set against the political turmoil of the last native dynasties (i.e. the 28th–30th dynasties), their alliances with Persia's Greek enemies, and the rebellions against Persian rule. It was a period of great political and military manoeuvring in the region, the first successful revolt being led by the Libyan Pharaoh, Amyrtaios, who in 404 BC drove the Persians from the western Delta, and by 402 BC had control of Egypt. Four decades later, Nectanebo II (reigned 360–343 BC) became the last pharaoh of the Pharaonic Era and it was he, for purely practical reasons, who produced gold coins pictured below to pay Chabrias, the Athenian general, with his mercenary army, along with the troops of the Spartan king Agesilas (who brought 10,000 soldiers with him).

The minted coins were made of high quality gold, and stamped to that effect with the Egyptian for 'fine gold' to verify the coin quality. On the obverse the coin carried the Greek 'prancing horse', proving that the coin was minted to the Euboic-Attic standard, making the coin valid currency in the Greek world, and yet ironically was not valid coinage in Egypt.

The Persian army tried to invade the Delta in Nectanebo's regnal year nine, and he, along with his mercenary allies, was victorious. After the victory, Agesilas was released from



Figure 5. Obverse (left) and reverse (right) of gold stater minted by Nectanebo II. Minting of coins by the Egyptians took place during the reigns of the last three native pharaohs, Nectanebo I, Takhos (Djedhor), and Nectanebo II. Takhos may have issued gold staters, but none appear to have survived to the present day. Gold staters minted by Nectanebo II have survived, giving the modern historian a window into the past. One of the better examples of this coin is on display in the August Kestner Museum, Hanover, and weighs approximately 8.1g. This important coin was minted to the Euboic-Attic standard.²²

service to Pharaoh, and the 84-year-old Spartan returned home splendidly compensated by Nectanebo to the tune of 250 of these valuable gold coins. Nectanebo II's reign went unchallenged for the next 18 years.

There were a number of cultural reasons why the prime requisites for the development of money and coinage were entirely absent from Ancient Egypt until these last few dynasties of the Pharaonic Period. The lack of private enterprise, the centralized control of the economic structure and productive efforts, the relative geographic isolation, the royal monopoly on trade, and the marginal economic status of the millions who formed the great bulk of the population were all negative factors.

Such factors were much less of a problem in Lydia when the concept of coinage appeared c. 650 BC, although the exact date is not absolutely certain. The first coins were money as the modern world would generally understand it (figure 4). Each was stamped with an official mark or seal to guarantee the weight, thus ensuring that the Lydian traders did not have to reweigh the coins every time they were used. Eventually, the state would take control of minting coins and the whole process would be controlled by appointed officials.

Since coins were absent before this time, the question cited earlier, "They had coins in Jesus' time, why not before then?" is answered right here. The archeological facts confirm: coins in the days of Jesus and the Apostles; silver weights (shekel and deben) in the days of Abraham and Joseph.

Surviving coinage indicates that Egyptian coins appeared around 360 BC. This coinage was issued by Nectanebo II,²¹ although there is some evidence that one of his predecessors, Hakoris, minted coins explicitly to pay the Greek mercenaries in his service. Rare gold staters survive from this time and depict a horse on the obverse and two ligatured hieroglyphs on the reverse which form the Egyptian *nefer-nub*—'fine gold' (figure 5).²²

Many people find it hard to believe that the Egyptians didn't have coinage with images of pharaohs, sphinxes and pyramids on them, and when someone claims to have found such 'coins', there is an audience keen to accept these 'facts'.

As discussed above, Egyptians used a bartering system for everyday transactions. For external trade such as grain shipments, gold, or silver weights and measures was the preferred medium. Secular historians care little for the biblical account, but they do have a point when people erroneously seek to support the Bible by insisting that Egyptians used coinage from the earliest times; they did not, and, moreover, the biblical accounts of trade in that period are totally consistent with that.

Conclusion

Modern Christianity is plagued by people making all manner of claims about a variety of subjects. The *Al Ahram* article and its subsequent use by Christians is no exception. It demonstrates just how easily people can be misled and become convinced of some new 'truth'.

The warning is clear from a subject such as the one under discussion—perhaps we should begin by assuming less and checking more. The obvious objection to this suggestion is that the general readership doesn't possess the in-depth knowledge of the subject matter, and have to exercise a certain amount of trust. As true as that may be, the Bible has proven itself extremely reliable on matters of history and should be the starting point for all Christians. An easy example to recall is how the 'experts' rubbished the idea that the Hittites existed: today the Hittites are an established fact and the biblical account is verified. So it is regarding coins and Joseph: the Genesis account makes it clear that trade was by barter, and exchange using weights; not just in Egypt but throughout the ancient Near East. All this is verified by archaeology.

To claim that finding Egyptian coins verifies the Bible falls down in the first instance on the fact that the Bible itself makes no such claims. Secondly, to show for certain that Egypt had coins in the days of Joseph would require evidence of the existence of an office-of-state such as a central bank or treasury, that controlled the minting of the proposed coinage; a means of assaying the coins; method of distribution within the state; and an exchange mechanism measured against an agreed standard to enable trade with other nations not sharing the same monetary system. There is absolutely no evidence that Egypt possessed any of these requirements—ever. The first time these requirements were met was around c. 650 BC when the Lydians introduced what is universally recognised as the world's first true coinage, controlled by the state at every level. Egypt's own coin production, limited purely by pragmatic necessity, lay centuries away in the future. So whilst other nations embraced the Lydian idea, Egypt carried on serenely with the barter/weight system that had served this great nation since its birth long before the visit of a certain Abram.

Unless refuted when they first appear, just-so stories like 'Joseph's coins' are rapidly assimilated into the erroneous and familiar world of 'Christian-speak'—'the lion and the lamb lay down together', and 'Eve ate the apple and gave it to Adam', to mention two of the worst offenders. Once accepted, these faulty ideas tend to take on a life of their own, and are incredibly resistant to correction and removal. Anything that diminishes the plain understanding of Scripture must be challenged. And any discussion on material regarding Egypt and its relationship with the Bible demands that proper scholarly research, on an individual and collective basis, must be conducted at all times.

References

1. Leading Egyptian Daily 'Al-Ahram' Reports: Coins from Era of Biblical Joseph Found in Egypt, www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/63/0/3663.htm, accessed 7 December 2009.
2. Versteegh, K., *The Arabic Language*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, UK, p. 33, 1997.
3. Genesis 41:42.

4. Petrie, W.F., *Scarabs and Cylinders*, Constable & Co, London, 1917.
4. The full article is at www.puritanboard.com/f16/museum-egypt-cache-coins-josephs-name-image-found-53702/.
5. Cooper, W.R., in *Creation, J. Creation Science Movement, UK* 16(6): 2–3, 2009. The observations are rendered irrelevant by the rest of this paper. Since the Shekel was a universal measure of weight during the period mentioned, it goes without saying that the references to Shekel in the verses given cannot be construed as coins, or coinage.
6. Ref. 5, pp. 2–3.
7. Cooper, W.R., *The Authenticity of the Book of Genesis*, Creation Science Movement, UK, p. 126.
8. Wilson, W., *Wilson's Old Testament Studies*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, reprinted edn, 1990, defines כֶּסֶף *keh'sef* as silver; money, which originally consisted only of bars or pieces of silver, not coins.
9. Butler, A. and Knight, C., *The amazing barley seed*; in: *Civilization One*, Watkins Publishing, London, pp. 243–247, 2004.
10. Genesis 42:35, New King James Bible, Thomas Nelson, 1991. The NIV here translates "bundles of money" as "pouches of silver".
11. Genesis 37:36 and 39:1.
12. Deben: a mass plural like the English words 'fish' or 'sheep'.
13. Heb. קָנָה *qanah* H7069: (Qal fut.) to get, gain, acquire, possess, in any manner.
14. Translated by Wilson, J.A. from Pritchard, J.B. (Ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton University Press, pp. 215–216, 1969.
15. Notice that the giving of an Egyptian name to the Asiatic foreigner follows the same pattern as in Genesis 41:45 where Joseph was named Zaphanath Paaneah and in Exodus 2:10 where Manasseh (see Judges 18:30) was called Moses. Practices mentioned in the Bible are yet again shown to be correct in every detail.
16. Genesis 42:6; 45:26.
17. Genesis 41:56.
18. Strong's H3605: כֹּל (*kol*), totality, everything.
19. For comparison, see: Gen. 23:16; 2 Sam. 14:26; Ezra 8:25, 26; Job 28:15; Is. 46:6; Jer. 32:9; Zech. 11:12.
20. Nectanebo II: Nakhthoreb (Egy.) 30th dynasty, 360–343 BC.
21. The rarity of this coin was demonstrated at auction in October 2009, when one specimen sold for 120,000 CHF (Swiss francs) before the inevitable imposition of buyer's premium, taxes and fees (139,800 CHF in total). The sale price itself equates approximately to A\$130,000, €81,000, £73,000, or US\$117,000 (correct as of 29/12/2009).
22. Aeginetan coinage originated from the island-state of Aegina, the great sea power and rival to Athens in the 6th–5th century BC. The Aeginetes wasted little time in following Lydia's lead in producing coinage by setting up a mint of their own, barely three decades after the Lydians. The Aeginetan scale of coins, weights and measures was one of the two scales in general use in the Greek world (the other being the Euboic–Attic standard mentioned elsewhere in this article). The difference between the two systems was in their respective weights: an Aeginetan drachma weighed approximately 6.1g, the Attic (Athens) drachma was 4.3g.

Patrick Clarke has developed a deep interest in ancient Egypt since early childhood. His speciality is the pharaonic tombs in the Valley of the Kings; their architecture, artwork and afterlife texts. He presently resides with his family in France.
