

WHY DID NAHMANIDES MISREAD THE INSCRIPTION ON THE *SHEQEL*-COIN?

By Yosef Ofer

Rabbi Moshe ben Nahman (Nahmanides; 1194-1270) arrived in Eretz Israel in 1267. In a letter he sent to Spain he describes a *sheqel*-coin that he found and used to determine the weight of the biblical *sheqel*. Nahmanides states that the Samaritans of Acre were able to read the ancient Hebrew script on the coin. According to his description, the coin can be identified as dating from the period of the Great Revolt (66-70 C.E.). While the Samaritans deciphered one inscription on the coin successfully, they misinterpreted the second, reading *Sheqel ha-Sheqalim* (literally: the *sheqel* of *sheqels*) instead of *Sheqel Yisrael* (*sheqel* of Israel). This brief article proposes an explanation for the mistake: the Samaritans misread two letters and then interpreted what they saw on the basis of their spoken Arabic.