

King Agrippa II

by Peter E. Lewis



Sunset on the Sea of Galilee (Wikimedia).

Overlay: Pan plays his pipes on a coin of Agrippa II (Courtesy Heritage Auctions).

KING Agrippa II was the great grandson of Herod the Great and the son of Agrippa I, who ruled Judaea from 37 to 44 AD. All three of them feature in the Bible. In 59 AD Agrippa II and his sister Bernice visited Festus, the Roman governor of Judaea, in his palace at Caesarea Maritima. (Figure 1) At that time Saint Paul was a prisoner in the palace and Agrippa told Festus that he would like to hear what Paul had to say. Paul's meeting with Agrippa and Bernice is described in the book of Acts: *So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then Festus gave the order and Paul was brought in.* (Acts 25:23) This scene is depicted in a painting by the Russian artist, Nikolai Bodarevsky. (Figure 2)

When Agrippa I died in 44 AD, Agrippa II was only 16. The Roman authorities considered him too young to rule any territory and they appointed a Roman governor of Judaea. However, when his uncle, Herod, King of Chalcis, died in 48 AD the emperor Claudius gave the kingdom to Agrippa II. Chalcis was a small kingdom in a mountainous area west of Damascus, and its population was not Jewish. Herod, King of Chalcis, had issued coins in 43/4 AD (Figure 3), but they are very rare today. Agrippa II issued no coins when he was king of Chalcis.

In 53 AD Claudius transferred Agrippa from Chalcis to a larger kingdom that

included the territories ruled by his great-uncle, Philip, who had died childless in 34 AD. His tetrarchy included a large area north of the Sea of Galilee. The capital was Caesarea Philippi, also known as Paneas because there was a shrine to the god Pan in the area. Its population was only partly Jewish, and all the coins issued by Philip have a human head on the obverse, which was against the Jew-

ish law of not making such images. (Figure 4) Agrippa II was a devout Jew and not once in his life did he issue a coin with his image on it although his image did appear on coins issued by his father when he was 10, 13 and 15 years old. (Figure 5)

When Claudius died in 54 AD the new emperor, Nero, enlarged Agrippa's kingdom by adding the region just to the west of the Sea of Galilee, as well as the city



Figure 1 – Remains of the palace at Caesarea Maritima where Paul was probably imprisoned. There was a large rectangular pool with a statue in the centre. Notice the mosaics in the foreground. (Wikimedia Commons: photo by Deror Avi)



Figure 2 – ‘Apostle Paul on Trial’ by Nikolai Bodarevsky, 1875. It is unlikely that Agrippa had a beard because no coins show his contemporaries with beards. (Wikimedia Commons)

of Julius (Livias) in Perea. (Figure 6 – map) Agrippa’s kingdom now included two cities on the western shore of the lake, Tarichea and Tiberias. Bethsaida, a town at the northern end of the lake was part of Philip’s tetrarchy, which Agrippa had inherited. Tarichea was also known as Magdala and it was a significant town at this time. Tiberias was the capital built by Agrippa’s great-uncle, Herod Antipas. In view of all these changes the study of Agrippa’s coinage has been a challenge for numismatists. David Hendin in his *Guide to Biblical Coins* (5th edition, 2010) wrote, “More questions exist surrounding the coins of Agrippa



Figure 3 – Bronze coin of Herod, King of Chalcis, 41-48 AD. His bust appears on the obverse with the Greek legend, “King Herod, friend of Claudius.” The reverse inscription reads, “For Claudius Caesar Augustus, year 3.” (Heritage Auctions, 9th March 2012, Lot 20146)



Figure 4 – Bronze coin of Philip the tetrarch minted at Caesarea Philippi in 15 AD. It has the head of Tiberius with a star countermark on the obverse and the façade of the Augusteum on the reverse. (Collection of St John’s Cathedral, Brisbane)

II than any other section of the ancient Judaeen series; for example, we are not certain of the mints, the dating eras, and, like all ancient Judaeen coins we are not even certain of the denominations.”

The big event in the life of Agrippa II was the Jewish War, when rebellious Jews fought against the Romans for their freedom. It started in 66 AD and ended in 70 AD when the Romans captured Jerusalem and destroyed its temple. Agrippa advocated submission to the Romans because he believed that the Jews had no chance of winning. At the start of the revolt he was living in Jeru-



Figure 5 – Bronze coin of Agrippa I showing his son on the obverse with the inscription, “Of Agrippa, son of the king.” The anchor probably means the mint was Caesarea Maritima. LZ = year 7, when Agrippa II was 15. (Heritage Auctions, 5th September, 2012, Lot 20080)

salem, where he had the right to appoint the High Priest and was the custodian of his vestments. Jerusalem was not part of his kingdom but was a stronghold of the revolutionaries. Having been driven out of Jerusalem by the rebels he moved to Sepphoris in Galilee, and it was in that city that a pro-Roman coin was minted in 67/8 AD. (Figure 7) Agrippa never ruled Sepphoris and his name does not appear on the coin but it has been assumed that he was behind its production.

A smaller coin with the same legends, but with a large SC on the reverse instead of crossed cornucopias, was also minted in Sepphoris at the same time. (Figure 8) The legends refer to the emperor, Nero, and to Vespasian, who was the general sent by Nero to suppress the revolt. Nero committed suicide in 68 AD, and when Vespasian became the emperor in 69 he left his son, Titus, in charge of the Roman forces in Judaea. On these coins the name, ‘city of peace’, is unprecedented and obviously refers to Roman soldiers being received by the inhabitants “who were for peace”, as recorded by the Jewish historian, Josephus, in his *Jewish War* (Book 3, Chapter 2, Section 30). Vespasian and his army were joined by Agrippa and his army, and Vespasian made Caesarea Maritima his base.

Although not dated, there is a series of three coins minted at Paneas probably also in 67/8 AD. (Figure 9) These coins



Figure 6 – Map drawn by the author showing places mentioned in the text and Agrippa's kingdom outlined in pink.

have the bust of Nero on the obverse and an inscription on the reverse: "in the time of King Agrippa, Neronias." Agrippa had renamed Paneas, Neronias, in honour of Nero. In the New Testament the city is known as Caesarea Philippi, and Jesus and his disciples travelled there

from Bethsaida. The disciples, Peter and Andrew, came from Bethsaida and Jesus healed a blind man there. (Mark 8:22)

When the Jewish Revolt began in 66 AD, the Roman legate in Syria, Cestius Gallus, led an army into Judaea to crush it, but they were ambushed and



Figure 8 – Bronze coin of Sepphoris issued in 67/8 AD. It has the same words as Figure 7 but with a large SC for *Senatus Consulto*, which is a Latin phrase meaning, 'by decree of the Senate.' The SC was probably intended to indicate that the city was protected by the might of the Roman Empire. (Numismatica Ars Classica NAC AG Auction 59, Lot 1352)

defeated by the rebels at Beth Horon, which is north-west of Jerusalem. About 6,000 Roman soldiers were killed. Twelve hundred years before, Beth Horon had been the site of Joshua's victory over the Amorites when the sun stood still in the sky. (Joshua 10:13) When Vespasian arrived he concentrated on capturing rebel strongholds in the north. After taking the city of Gadara in Perea he marched to Jotapata in Galilee. It was the strongest of them all, but after a long siege he took it. Josephus, a rebel general who became a historian after the war, changed sides and joined Vespasian. At this stage Agrippa invited Vespasian and his army into his kingdom. Vespasian "removed from that Caesarea which was by the seaside, went to that which is called Caesarea Philippi; and there he refreshed his army for twenty days, and was himself feasted by King Agrippa." (Jos. War 3, 9, 444) On being informed that Tiberias and Tarichea had rebelled Vespasian made an expedition against them. The city of Gamala, east of the Sea of Galilee, had also rebelled and Vespasian besieged it. "Now at this time it was that as king Agrippa was come nigh the walls, and was endeavouring to speak to those that were on the walls about a surrender, he was hit with a stone on his right elbow by one of the slingers." (Jos.



Figure 7 – Bronze coin of Sepphoris issued in 67/8 AD. On the obverse there is a caduceus between crossed cornucopias (signifying good fortune) with the Greek legend, "In the time of Vespasian, City of Peace, Neronias-Sepphoris". On the reverse the inscription reads, "Year 14 of Nero Claudius Caesar." (Heritage Auctions, 9th March 2012, Lot 20155)



Figure 9 – Bronze coin of Agrippa II minted at Paneas. 16 mms diameter. Nero's head appears on the obverse with the legend, "Nero Caesar Augustus." The inscription on the reverse reads, "in the time of King Agrippa, Neronias." (Author's Collection)



Figure 10 – Shekel of the First Jewish Revolt. On the obverse there is a ritual cup with the Hebrew legend, "shekel of Israel" and "year 2" above the cup. On the reverse there is a sprig of pomegranates with the legend, "Jerusalem the Holy." (Classical Numismatic Group Auction 97, lot 350)

War 4, I, 14) Eventually the whole region was subdued and the Romans were able to turn their attention to Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem the rebels were minting their own silver and bronze coins. (Figures 10 and 11) After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD some of the rebels held on at Masada until 73 AD, and most of the coins that Agrippa minted during his life were issued after 73 AD. As he lived for another 27 years there are several series of coins, all in honour of Vespasian and his sons Titus and Domitian. They are not particularly interesting. Agrippa's image does not appear on them, and they usually have the figure of Victory or Tyche, the goddess of fortune, on

the reverse. (Figure 12) None of these coins have any indication where they were minted, except for a bronze medallion bearing the date, year 26 (74/5 AD), that has Pan playing his pipes on the reverse, which strongly suggests that it was minted at Paneas. The same date appears on four other coins in the series, which means that this series at least might have been minted at Paneas. A similar, though smaller coin (Figure 13), was minted in year 27, as well as another medallion with Vespasian on the obverse, and this suggests that other coins with year 27 on them were also minted at Paneas.



Figure 11 – Bronze prutah of the First Jewish Revolt. On the obverse there is an amphora with the Hebrew legend, "year two". On the reverse there is a vine leaf with the legend, "The freedom of Zion." (Image courtesy of Heracles Numismatics)

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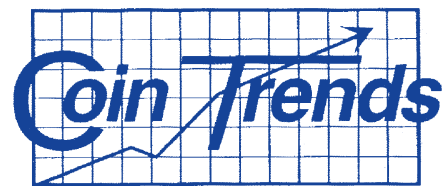
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Figure 12 – Bronze coin with a bust of Domitian on the obverse and the legend, “Domitian Caesar”. 19 mms diameter. On the reverse the goddess Victory stands with her foot on a helmet and writes on a shield. The reverse inscription reads, “year 26 (74/5 AD), King Agrippa.” (Author’s Collection)

Every year a team from St Francis’ Theological College in Brisbane goes to Bethsaida to join in excavating the site. The team is led by the Rev’d Dr Greg Jenks, who is the Academic Dean of the college. This year 26 coins were discovered but all are yet to be identified. One is a bronze coin of Agrippa II from the series issued in 84/5 AD (Figure 14) and so far three coins of Agrippa II have been found at Bethsaida. Two of these coins were discovered at a house abutting the city wall and the other in a large house south of it. This may indicate a continuing prosperity and mean that Bethsaida, like

Sepphoris and many villages in Galilee, did not join the zealot rebels and did not take part in the rebellion. By recording all the find-sites of Agrippa’s coins it should be possible to determine where his mints were situated. He probably used a number of mints, some at cities in his kingdom, such as Paneas and Tiberias, and some outside, such as Caesarea Maritima and Rome. Jerusalem had been destroyed in 70 AD and would not have been one of his mints.

Agrippa never married and had no children, and was the last king of the Jews. Rumours circulated that he was in



Figure 13 – Bronze coin, 30 mms diameter. On the obverse there are busts of Titus (on the left) and Domitian. On the reverse Pan walks to the left playing his pipes. There is a tree trunk to the right. The reverse legend reads, “year 27 (75/6 AD) of King Agrippa.” (Heritage Auctions, 8th March 2012, Lot 20162)

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In 235 the troops on the Danube were angered by the young emperor Severus Alexander’s recent pay-off to the german tribes. The soldiers killed him and set up Maximinus, their commander, as emperor. His coin portraits are excellent examples of the Roman ‘veristic’ style and feature his enormous chin.

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Figure 14 – Bronze coin of Agrippa II found at Bethsaida in 2014. It has a bust of Domitian on the obverse and a palm tree with two bunches of dates and King Agrippa's name in abbreviated Greek on the reverse. (© Bethsaida Excavations Project. Used with permission. Photographer: Hanan Shafir)

an incestuous relationship with Bernice, but this seems unlikely. Josephus was his rival, and perhaps it was he who slandered him. Bernice was the mistress of Titus during the war, and in 75 AD

she and Agrippa sailed to Rome where she resumed her relationship with Titus, but Vespasian disapproved and they returned to Paneas. Fifteen years earlier Paul had also sailed to Rome but under very different circumstances: he was a prisoner and when he arrived at Rome, "he was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him." (Acts 28:16) When Vespasian died in 79 AD and Titus became emperor, Agrippa and Bernice again sailed to Rome. (Figure 14) They were hoping that Bernice would become Titus' wife, but public opinion was against such a marriage and he sent her away. According to Suetonius, writing in about 120 AD, parting was painful for them both.

Agrippa died of natural causes at the age of 73. He had been correct in his prediction of catastrophe, and his people should have heeded his warning. Had the Jews listened to his advice, Jerusalem would not have been destroyed, there would not have been exile, the Temple would still be functioning and the history of Western civilization would certainly be different.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Professor Rami Arav, the Director of Excavations for the Bethsaida Excavations Project, for reading and commenting on this article. I have incorporated his comments in the text.

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Figure 15 – Bronze coin of Agrippa II celebrating his voyage to Rome with Bernice. Titus is on the obverse and the inscription on the reverse is "year 19 (78/9 AD) King Agrippa." This beautiful galley would have made a good impression on arrival at Ostia, the port of Rome. (Heritage Auctions, 9th March 2012, Lot 20176)

POLAND'S JAVANESE CAT

THOSE of you into cats may have overlooked the Mint of Poland's on-going colourized series: *Man's Best Friends - Cats*. The latest release in this series is now out, celebrating the Javanese Cat.

As happens far too often when it comes to naming animals, the Javanese cat comes neither from Java nor Indonesia. The beastie is a long-haired Oriental. The name was dreamed up by Helen Smith in 1950 and has stuck.

These cats have a long silky coat in a variety of colours. They are intelligent cats and vocalize, often for no apparent reason. They enjoy human contact and apparently become depressed if they fail to receive regular attention.

The Polish Mint's cat coins are struck for Niue Island. Each colourized silver dollar is struck on a 38.61 mm, 17.50 g .999 fine silver flan with the eyes of the

moggie picked out with a pair of crystal Swarovski Elements.

The designer of the current coin is Małgorzata Rodek. Mintage is 2014.

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Image courtesy Mennica Polska