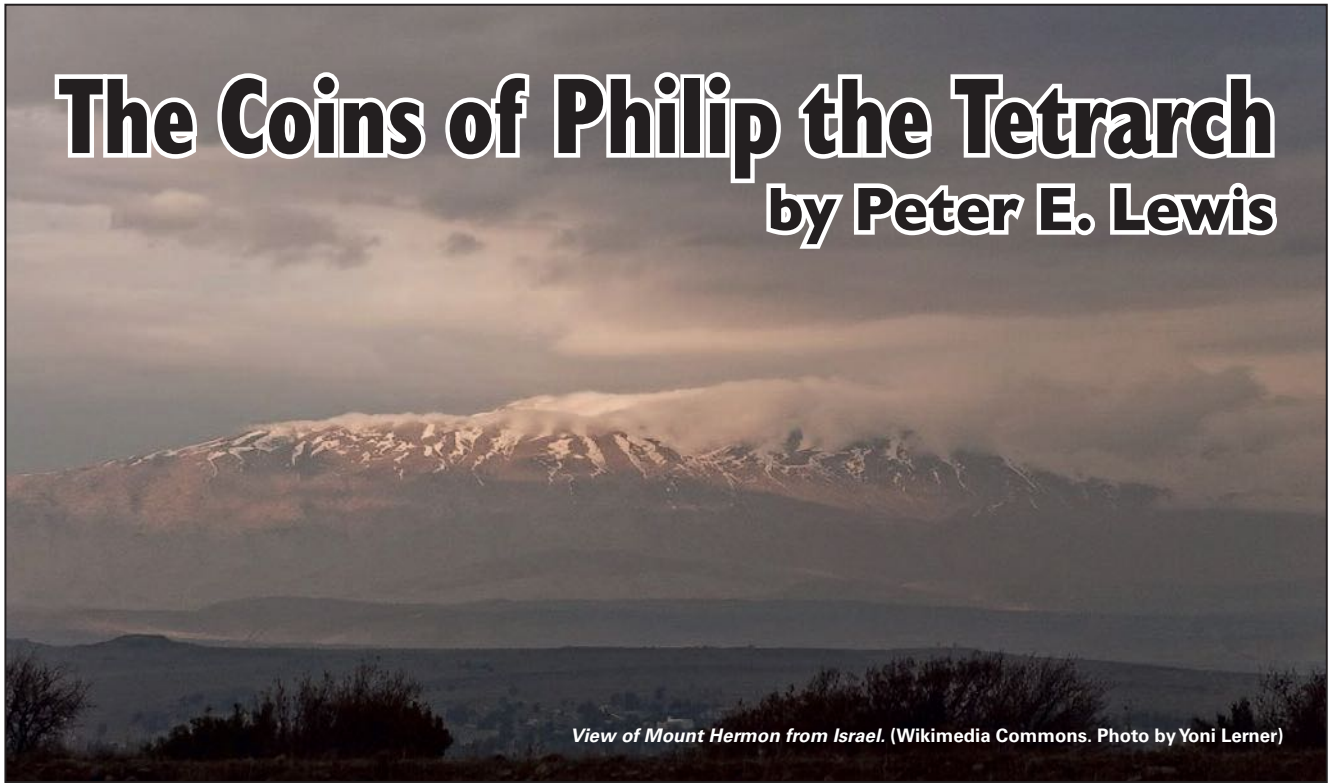


The Coins of Philip the Tetrarch

by Peter E. Lewis



View of Mount Hermon from Israel. (Wikimedia Commons. Photo by Yoni Lerner)

FROM 4 BC until his death in 34 AD Philip the tetrarch ruled a region to the north-east of the Sea of Galilee. (Figure 1) He was called a tetrarch, which means ‘ruler of a quarter’, because his territory was about a quarter of the size of the kingdom of his father, Herod I. (Figure 2) Herod is also known as Herod the Great because his kingdom was extensive and included Judaea, Galilee, Samaria and Perea, and he was an important figure historically. The name, Philip, which appears on the coins in Greek as ΦΙΛΙΠΠΟΣ (Philippos) points to Herod’s Hellenistic (Greek) leanings because it was the name of the father of Alexander the Great.

In the Bible Philip is called tetrarch

of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis (Luke 3:1). His tetrarchy extended from the foothills of the snow-covered Mount Hermon, where the Jordan River had its source, to the Sea of Galilee. (Figure 3) Philip’s capital, Caesarea Philippi, was in the north, and in the south close to the sea was the town of Bethsaida. In Philip’s time it was only a small town, a fishing village, but it was the hometown of Jesus’s disciples: Peter, Andrew and Philip. Jesus himself visited Bethsaida as recorded in Mark’s gospel (Mark 8:22-26) and afterwards with his disciples he went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi where Philip’s coins were minted.

Currently there are two locations

near the northern end of the Sea of Galilee which might be the site of Bethsaida, and the archaeologists are divided over which is more likely. The site was thought to be the low hill known as Et-Tell, which is 2 kilometres from the shore (Figure 4), but in recent years some archaeologists have argued for a site only half a kilometre from the shore known as el-Araj. At present the majority view still favours Et-Tell, but time will tell.

All the coins that Philip the tetrarch minted at Caesarea Philippi are bronze and nearly all are dated, i.e. they show



Figure 1 – View of the Sea of Galilee from the land that was the tetrarchy of Philip. (Wikimedia Commons. Photo by Grauesel at wikivoyage shared)



Figure 2 – Map showing the territories ruled by the sons of Herod the Great. (Wikimedia Commons)

the number of years in Greek letters since the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC. The first coins were issued in year 5, which corresponds to 1/2 AD. Two numbers are used for the date because at that time the year was not reckoned from 1st January as it is today. Two coins were minted in year 5 and they both have the head of Philip on them. None of the coins of Herod the Great or his sons, Herod Archelaus and Herod Antipas, have human images on them because the Jewish law forbade the making of such images, and the majority of their subjects were Jews. In

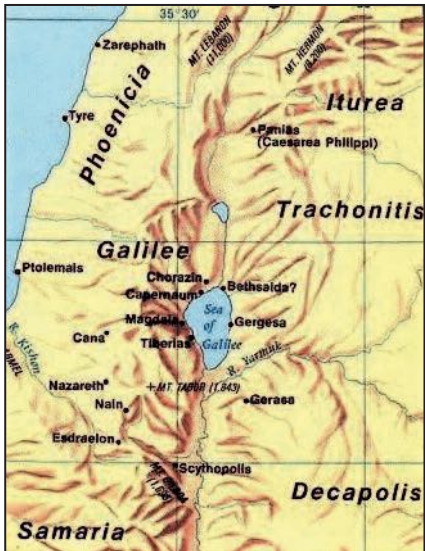


Figure 3 – Map of the region ruled by Philip the tetrarch. (Wikimedia Commons)

Philip's tetrarchy, however, the Jews were the minority and Philip was free to put human images on his coins. On the larger coin, which is 24 mm in diameter, Philip is on the obverse and the Roman emperor Augustus is on the reverse. **(Figure 5)** The smaller coin is 18 mm and has Philip on the obverse and the façade of a temple on the reverse. **(Figure 6)** It was the temple that Herod the Great had built near Caesarea Philippi in honour of Augustus. It was known as the Augustum. At that time Caesarea Philippi was called Paneas (after the god Pan) but Philip rebuilt the city and called it Caesarea to compliment Augustus. It became known as Caesarea Philippi to distinguish it from Caesarea Maritima,

the city that Herod the Great had built on the coast (See Figure 2).

In year 12 (8/9 AD) Philip issued a coin with Augustus facing right on the obverse and the Augustum on the reverse. The date LIB (year 12) is between the columns. **(Figure 7)** A coin with Augustus facing left was also issued in that year. In year 16 (12/13 AD) Philip issued a similar coin with Augustus facing right and the new date between the columns.

Augustus died in 14 AD and was succeeded by his step-son Tiberius. So, in year 19 (15/16 AD) Philip issued a coin with Tiberius on the obverse and the Augustum on the reverse. **(Figure 8)** In year 30 (26/27 AD) he issued coins in three denominations. The largest is



Figure 5 – Coin of year 5 with Philip on the obverse and Augustus on the reverse. Hendin 1219. (Ira and Larry Goldberg Coins and Collectables, Auction 104, Lot 3098)



Figure 4 – View of the ruins generally considered to be of Bethsaida. (Wikimedia Commons. Photo by AVRAMGR)



Figure 6 – Coin of year 5 with Philip on the obverse and the Augusteum on the reverse. Hendin 1220. (Heritage Auctions, Auction 3003, lot 20123)



Figure 7 – Coin of year 12 with Augustus on the obverse and the Augusteum on the reverse. Hendin 1221. (Heritage Auctions, Auction 3018, Lot 20068)



Figure 8 – Coin of year 19 with Tiberius on the obverse and the Augusteum on the reverse. Hendin 1224. (Ira and Larry Goldberg Coins and Collectables, Auction 41, Lot 2432)



Figure 9 – Coin of year 30 with Tiberius on the obverse and the Augusteum on the reverse. Hendin 1225. (Gemini Auction VI, Lot 303)

19 mms and similar to the previous one but with a different legend on the reverse: ΕΠΙ ΦΙΛΙΠΠΙΟΥ ΤΕΤΡΑΡΧΟΥ, which means ‘in the time of Philip tetrarch.’ (Figure 9) The middle denomination is 17 mms and similar but with no legend on the obverse. (Figure 10)

The smallest denomination of year 30 is only 14 mms and is unusual because it has Tiberius’s mother, Livia, on the obverse with the inscription ΙΟΥΛΙΑ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΗ (Julia Augusta). Livia assumed this name after Augustus’s death. On the reverse there is a hand holding 3 ears of grain and below the hand is the Greek word ΚΑΡΠΙΟΦΟΡΟΣ, which means ‘fruit-bearing’. (Figure 11) Livia was the widow of Augustus, who had been deified (i.e. made a god) soon after his death, and she had become very influential in Roman society. Probably Philip wanted to ingratiate himself with her by issuing this coin which appears to identify her with the grain-goddess Ceres, known to the Greeks as Demeter. Demeter was the divine energy of agriculture and the bearer of the fruits of the earth. At this time there was a trend in the eastern part of the Roman Empire to deify Livia while she was still alive, as shown on a coin minted at Sardis: Tiberius is on the obverse and Livia is enthroned on the reverse. She holds a sceptre and ears of



Figure 10 – Coin of year 30 with Tiberius on the obverse with no legend, and the Augusteum on the reverse. Hendin 1226. (Heritage Auction 3003, Lot 20128)

corn as on Philip's coin, but on this coin she is named as ΣΕΒΑΣΤΗ (Augusta). (Figure 12)

There is an undated coin of Philip which might belong to this year-30 series because it has the same legend as on the largest denomination of year 30 and is even larger at 24 mms. It has the jugate heads of Tiberius and Livia on the obverse with the legend ΣΕΒΑΣΤΩΝ (of the Augusti). On the reverse there is a round design instead of the date. (Figure 13) At this time Tiberius moved his residence to Capri, an island near Naples, and never returned to Rome.

No doubt he wanted to get away from his domineering mother. He stayed on at Capri even after she died in 29 AD.

It is interesting to note that in 29/30 AD Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judaea, issued a coin with three ears of grain on the reverse with the legend ΙΟΥΑΙΑ ΚΑΙΣΑΡΟΣ (Julia Caesar). (Figure 14) Probably he was trying to ingratiate himself with Tiberius by alluding to Livia as Demeter. Jesus was crucified by Pontius Pilate in 30 AD.

In year 33 (29/30 AD) Philip issued a coin with Tiberius on the obverse and

Continued overleaf



Figure 11 – Coin of year 30 with Livia on the obverse and a hand holding three ears of grain on the reverse. Hendin 1227. (Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 368, Lot 294)



Figure 12 – Coin of Sardis with Tiberius raising a kneeling Tyche on the obverse and Livia enthroned as Demeter on the reverse. RPC 2991. (Numismatik Naumann Auction 61, Lot 438)



Figure 13 – Coin probably of year 30 with Tiberius and Livia on the obverse and the Augusteum on the reverse. Hendin 1229. (Heritage Auction 3003, Lot 20129)

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Figure 14 – Coin of Pontius Pilate issued in 29/30 AD with a ladle (*simpulum*) used by the Roman high priest, i.e. Tiberius, on the obverse and three ears of grain on the reverse. Hendin 1341. (Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 313, Lot 183)

the Augusteum on the reverse. **(Figure 15)** In year 34 (30/31 AD) Philip issued three denominations. The largest is 19 mm and has Tiberius on the obverse and the Augusteum on the reverse but with the legend ΕΠΙ ΦΙΛΙΠΠΟΥ ΤΕΤΡΑΡΧΟΥ ΚΤΙΣ (of Philip tetrarch founder). **(Figure 16)** Exactly what ‘founder’ refers to is unknown, but

some scholars have suggested that it refers to the founding of the city of Julias at the site of Bethsaida. Philip did this in honour of Julia (Livia) who had died in 29 AD. He had been educated in Rome and could have known her personally.

The middle denomination in year 34 is 14 mm and has Livia on the obverse

and a hand holding three ears of grain as in year 30, but with the new date.

(Figure 17) The smallest denomination in year 34 is only 11 mm but it is particularly significant because it has a portrait of Philip on the obverse and the date ΛΛΔ in a wreath on the reverse.

(Figure 18) It shows Philip with a large nose, fleshy lips and a prominent chin. Jean-Philippe Fontanille discusses the portraits of Philip in a detailed article in *Israel Numismatic Research* 6/2011.



Figure 15 – Coin of year 33 with Tiberius on the obverse and the Augusteum on the reverse. Hendin 1228. (Leu Numismatik Auction 86, Lot 496)



Figure 16 – Coin of year 34 with Tiberius on the obverse and the Augusteum on the reverse with ΚΤΙΣ (founder) in the legend. Hendin 1230. (Heritage Auction 3003, Lot 20130)



Figure 17 – Coin of year 34 with Livia on the obverse and a hand holding three ears of grain on the reverse. Hendin 1231. (Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 197, Lot 91)



Figure 18 – Coin of year 34 with Philip on the obverse and the date on the reverse. Hendin 1232. (Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 248, Lot 313)

He says, “In spite of the coins’ small size, the portrait is very well made.” He considered it to be “a realistic portrait of a mature man.” It differed from the portrait on the coins minted in year 5 shown in Figures 5 and 6, but Fontanille points out that Philip was

only 26 then and about 55 in year 34. Philip’s last issue of coins was in year 37 (33/34 AD) just before he died. Again there are three denominations. The largest has Tiberius on the obverse and the Augusteum on the reverse but with the inscription meaning ‘in the

time of Philip tetrarch.’ (Figure 19) The middle denomination has Livia on the obverse and a hand holding three ears of grain on the reverse, but with the date LAZ (year 37) (Figure 20) The smallest has Philip on the obverse and the date in a wreath on the reverse. (Figure 21) Again it is a clear portrait, and it is amazing to think that we can see an image of someone who was alive at the same time and in the same place as Jesus Christ.

☆☆☆



Figure 19 – Coin of year 37 with Tiberius on the obverse and the Augusteum on the reverse. Hendin 1233. (Heritage Auction 3003, Lot 20131)



Figure 20 – Coin of year 37 with Livia on the obverse and a hand holding three ears of grain on the reverse. Hendin 1234. (Heritage Auction 3003, Lot 20132)



Figure 21 – Coin of year 37 with Philip on the obverse and the date on the reverse. Hendin 1235. (Roma Numismatics Auction 3, Lot 333)