

Tiberias: Its Coins and their Distribution

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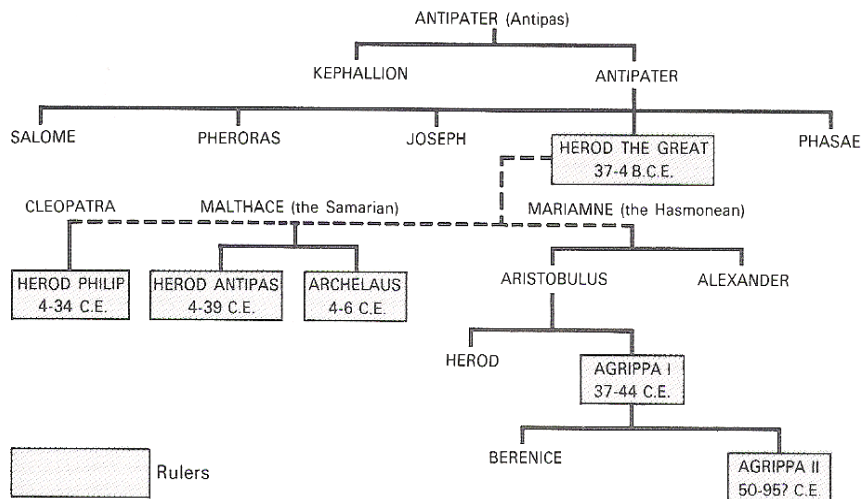
Abstract

Coin minting in Tiberias lasted for about a thousand years beginning with the minting of Herod Antipas in the year 20 CE and ending with Al-Hakim in 1005 CE. The Herodian dynasty significantly contributed to local minting. Later on, beginning with the rule of Trajan several types of city coins were minted. During the Islamic period several types of coins were minted in Tiberias using silver and gold.

Following the death of king Herod in 4 CE, his territory was divided between his sons: Archelaus, Philip and Antipas. Archelaus received Judea and Samaria, Philip received Gaulanitis, Batanea and Trachonitis and Antipas the tetrarch¹ received the Galilee and the regions of Tiberias and the Perea. None of the sons became king.

All of his sons minted their own coins in their regions. The coins were inscribed in Greek, the language spoken by the residents of the Roman East. The coins were autonomous.

The Herodian Dynasty



Herod Antipas chose initially Zippori but later changed his decision and established the new capital in the region of Rakat. There is some controversy among researchers as to the date Tiberias was established. Some researchers attribute the founding of Tiberias to between 18-21 CE. Tiberias was founded and dedicated to the emperor Tiberius. That same year, 18 CE was Tiberius' 60th anniversary and he received the title of Tribunicia Potestas for the 20th time.

Antipas built himself a palace in Tiberias which was damaged during the riots during the Jewish revolt against the Roman's in 66-70 CE. Antipas also built a stadium. The town was located on the main road from Syria to Egypt, initially as an open town and later in the days of Josephus it was fortified. He appointed his nephew Agrippa as *agoranomos* of the town,

and Agrippa later on ruled in his place. Two lead weights were discovered, one belonging to Antipas and the other to Agrippa the *agoranomos* (1986-1987 INJ9).

When discussing Tiberias during the Herodian dynasty, we mostly rely on a few written sources. Two of the sources are the 'Antiquities of the Jews' and 'The Jewish War' both written by Flavius Josephus. Josephus describes the founding of Tiberias in the following manner: "and Herod the tetrarch, that became great friends with Tiberius, built the city of Tiberias, in his name, adjacent to the fine areas of the Galilee on the sea of Ginnosar. Very close by there are hot springs in the village of Hamta. A multitude of people settled there...he built them homes and gave them land. And knew that the settlement was unlike the Jewish ancestor's custom because the founding of Tiberias was done on top of many graves..."

¹ Tetrarch, governor of a quarter of the state

Other sources are the New Testament: Mark and Luke and a book by Eusebius. From Josephus' books we deduce that the population of Tiberias was a mixed one.

Antipas minted all of his coins in Tiberias, using an alloy of low grade bronze. The dates on the coins are according to his regnal years. Antipas reigned for about 43 years, from 4 BCE to 39 CE (Hendin 2003-2006).



The distribution of Antipas' coins was mainly in the region of Tiberias with the exception of one coin that was discovered in Jerusalem. Most of the population within his region were Jews and therefore the coins carried Jewish symbols.

Before reviewing the series of Antipas' coins from Tiberias one must take into account an unusual coin dated 4 CE carrying a palm tree and the inscription HRW on one side. The other side carried a grain of wheat and the inscription "Tetrarch year 4".

Antipas' coins can be divided into three series:

- a) Coins from year 24 of his reign (19 CE).
- b) Coins from years 33, 34, 37 of his reign (29, 30 and 33 CE).
- c) Coins from year 43 of his reign (39 CE).

This means Antipas did not mint new coins between years 19-29 CE, probably because enough coins from year 19 CE were still in circulation. In the Galilee also circulated coins of

Philip from Paneas, Roman Imperial coins, coins from Tyre and Sidon and coins of the Roman governors.



All series were minted in four values: unit, half, quarter and eighth. The assumption is that eight unit coins were equal to one Roman silver denarius.

The first coins of Antipas are attributed to year 24 of his reign (year 19 to the founding of Tiberias). The bronze coin was minted in four values (a 17.76 g coin, the second half that weight, the third a quarter of it and the fourth an eighth of it). On one side of the coin appears the legend "Tiberias" in Greek with a wreath around it and on the other side a reed, which probably grew plentifully around Tiberias and was used as a model to characterize the area.



This is the first time a city's name is inscribed on a Jewish coin. Antipas' and Philip's coins carry their title, but only Philip's coins show the name of the emperor and his portrait (see Philip's coin from 26 CE).

A series of coins minted by Antipas from the middle term of his reign was from 29, 30 and 33 CE (years 33, 34 and 37 of his reign). On one side appears the name "Tiberias" in Greek / surrounded by a wreath. On the other side a palm branch surrounded by the legend "Herod the Tetrarch" and the regnal year.

As a Jewish king he put the emphasis on the Jewish symbol – the palm branch, identical to the Jewish palm branch. Two of his large coins carry the legend "tetrarch" and the small ones the legend "Herod" [without the title tetrarch]. The larger ones also carry the legend "Tiberias" whereas the smaller ones are inscribed with "T/C" for lack of space.

The last series of Antipas is different. It was minted in 39 CE (regnal year 43). This series includes four values:

- 1) On the large value (value of dupondius) appears the palm tree with seven branches and 2 clusters of dates.
- 2) On the half value (as) appears the palm branch.
- 3) On the quarter value (semis) appears a cluster of dates.
- 4) On the eighth value (quadrans) appears a palm branch.

Instead of the legend "Tiberias" appears the inscription "in honor of Caesar Caius Germanicus".

All values are related to the palm tree and show portions of it.

Following the crowning of Caius Caligula in 37 CE, the emperor appointed his friend Agrippa, the grandson of Herod as king over Philip's tetrarchy with his capital being Paneas. Agrippa minted a series of coins at Paneas in 38 CE (year 2 of Agrippa's reign). Antipas was offended by the appointment and under the influence of his wife Herodias who was also Agrippa's sister sailed to Rome to ask for title of King over Philip's former territories. It is possible that Antipas minted the coins in 39 CE with his journey to Rome in mind, bearing a Greek legend honoring Caius. Agrippa sent a letter to the emperor where he accused Antipas of conspiring against the emperor. Despite his efforts, Antipas was unsuccessful in achieving positive results and lost his domains. The emperor deposed Antipas, exiled him and Tiberias along with his territory was appended to Agrippa's kingdom in 39 CE.

Antipas' coins circulated only in the Galilee. One was discovered in Jerusalem and the rest in Tiberias, Meiron, Arbel, Capernaum, Gischala and Gamla.

Agrippa minted his first coins in Panias in 38 CE. The coins bore his title and for the first time his bust as well.

After Agrippa received Antipas' territories in 39 CE, he minted a series of coins in Tiberias in 41 CE (his fifth regnal year) to continue the series of coins he minted at Paneas. The series includes four values. One shows Germanicus driving a quadriga, holding a scepter (half unit). Another shows Caesonia – Caligula's wife and on the other side Drusilla – Caligula's daughter. Another coin (a quarter unit) shows the bust of Agrippa I, and on the other side Cypros – Agrippa's wife and the inscription "Queen Cypros ". The small coin (eighth unit) shows the 13 year old Agrippa II with the Greek legend "Agrippa the son of King Agrippa". The other side of the coin bears double cornucopias and the inscription "King Agrippa, Caesars' friend" in Greek.



This series attests to the deep relationship between Agrippa I and Caligula. The larger value coin bears the image of Caius Caligula with his name and titles in Greek. The other side of the coin shows a quadriga with the image of the victory goddess Victoria and the inscription *nomisma basileos Agrippa* – coin of King Agrippa. It is very rare to see the word *nomisma* on a coin.

After the death of Agrippa I in 43 CE the Roman governors of Palestine ruled Tiberias and minted there a coin in year 13 to Claudius' reign (53 CE).



Agrippa II began minting coins only in 76 CE. His coins continue to bear the model of the palm branch on their face. Tiberias was the capital and residence of Agrippa and the coins were minted in Antipas' mint.

Series of the Herodian dynasty

- Antipas (4 BCE – 39 CE) minted in Tiberias between 20-39 CE.
- Agrippa I (37 – 44 CE) minted in Tiberias in 40/41 CE.
- Agrippa II (67 – 100 CE) minted in Tiberias in 75/76 CE.

Symbols characteristic to Antipas, Palestinian governors, Agrippa I and Agrippa II on coins minted in Tiberias

- Reverse – The word "Tiberias" in a wreath.
- Obverse –
 - * A series for year 24 of Antipas' reign – reed
 - * Regnal years 33, 34, 37 of Antipas – palm branch
 - * Year 39 series, high value palm tree with seven branches and two clusters. On the lower value coins – palm branch, cluster of dates and a palm branch.
 - * Agrippa I, year 41 series – dedicated to Caligula and his family.
 - * Palestinian governors from the days of Agrippa II, year 13 of Claudius' reign – a palm branch
 - * Agrippa II year 15 series = 76 CE – a palm branch

Periods of minting coins in Tiberias

- Herodian dynasty (Antipas, Agrippa I and Agrippa II) between 20-75 CE.
- Palestinian governors - 53 CE.
- Local city coins – 100 CE (Trajan), 222 CE (Elagabalus).
- Islamic dynasties – 650-1005 CE.

City coins

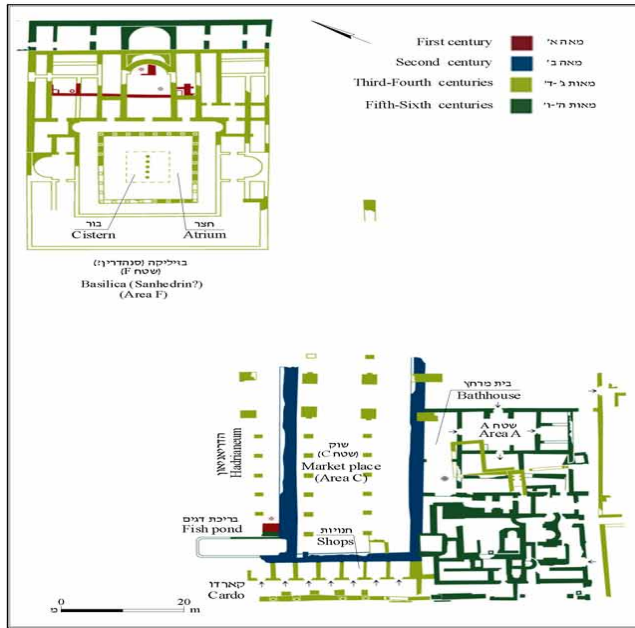
With the rise of the Roman empire, the Romans bestowed rights upon cities to mint coins. Some received colonial rights and their citizens enjoyed a tax exemption. The next minting period we will discuss is the period of minting coins in Roman Tiberias. City coins were minted in 100 CE, the year Agrippa II died. The end of local minting was with the minting of coins under Elagabalus (222/223 CE). There were also gold and silver coins in circulation in the region. The silver coins were minted in Antioch, Tyre, Phoenicia and Caesarea Cappadocia. The silver coins were used in large transactions and the bronze coins in smaller transactions.

City coins were minted in Tiberias during Trajan's time. The first coins minted in his honor were minted in year 81 to the founding of the city, that is in 100 CE. All local coins were made of bronze. The face of the coin bears the image of Caesar. This coin also bears a pair of double cornucopias and between them a palm branch. It is inscribed with the words "Tiberias Claudia year 81". The image of Caesar was inscribed on every coin of every city. The city used another model characterizing the town as a temple or local monument. Another interesting coin from this period shows on one side of the coin the goddess Hygieia sitting on a rock from whence sprouts a spring. The coin apparently symbolizes the hot springs of Tiberias located south of the city. They may have been used to advertise the site. Jewish sources, including Midrash Esther Rabba refer to Shimon Bar Yochai and mention the hot springs of Tiberias. The Romans discovered that coins passed from hand to hand and from city to city create publicity and decided to mint different models on their coins such as advertising for the hot springs of Tiberias. Another coin that was minted under Trajan shows Tyche the city goddess holding an oar in one hand and a cornucopia in the other.



Trajan coin with the cornucopias and a palm branch "Tiberias Claudia year 81" to the city = 100 CE.

Under his heir Hadrian, one of the interesting coins shows the Hadrianeion, which is a sort of temple dedicated to Hadrian with the image of Zeus-Jupiter. According to late sources the construction was not completed. The coin bears the inscription "Tiberias Claudia year 101 to the city" (120 CE). The temple is mentioned in Epiphanius' "Hadrianeion in Tiberias". Year 120 CE is the year when Hadrian visited Eretz- Israel and presumably the time when the temple was erected.



An additional coin minted in Hadrian's honor bears on the back of it the city-goddess standing on the prow of a galley holding a scepter and the bust of Caesar. In addition, the town council minted a coin bearing a galley sailing to the left. During the days of Commodus the town minted a very large coin – medallion, showing Poseidon standing with one leg on a galley and holding a trident. The coin was minted in year 170 of the local era (189 CE).



According to the Talmud, Avoda Zarah, the question arises of whether Tiberias would be granted the rank of a colony. This title was bestowed to the city by Elagabalus, as shown on a rare coin. During the second century CE Tiberias became the residence of the Sanhedrin. In Tiberias Rabbi Judah ha-Nassi performed the final editing of the Mishna. During the third and fourth centuries CE Tiberias was an important city where the Jerusalem Talmud was signed in 420 CE worthy of being called Tiberian Talmud.

After 221 CE local coins were no longer minted in the city. Minting in the city was continued during the Arab occupation, under the Umayyads, and a gold coin was minted under the Fatimids.



In 614 CE the Persians conquered Tiberias. A short while later it returned to the hands of the Byzantines. In 638 the city was taken by Muslims and became the capital of a district called

Jund el-Urdunn — the district of Jordan. All that time many Jews resided in the city. During the seventh century the Tiberian punctuation was invented that led to the proper reading and writing of Hebrew.

Several earthquakes occurred in Tiberias. In 749 CE an earthquake destroyed the city. Between 935-969 CE the Ikhshidids minted in Tiberias a silver dirham. During 11 CE Tiberias was a Jewish city under Muslim rule. The regime minted gold dinars of the Fatimid caliph Al-Hakim. Another earthquake destroyed Tiberias in 1033 CE.



An Ikhshidid dirham minted in Tiberias by Ali bin al Ikhshi in 964 CE (AH 353)

Hoards found in Tiberias:

A hoard of coins in Tiberias from 1952.

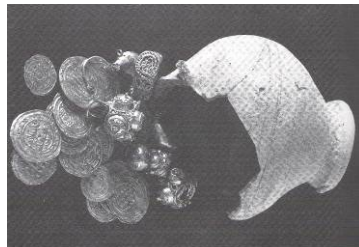


In 1952 a hoard containing 218 tetradrachms was found, from the days of Nero to Hadrian. The coins date from 59/60 CE to 119 CE. The earlier coins are worn and the rest were well preserved. The entirety of coins attests to a continuous use of currency in the region despite the wars. The following are details of the coins in the hoard:

- Nero 87
- Galba 6
- Otho 6
- Vespasian 51
- Domitian 8
- Trajan 56
- Hadrian 4

- Nero's coins are worn
- Vespasian's coins are less worn
- Domitian' coins are well-preserved
- The hoarder did not hoard dinars, but only tetradrachms
- Hoarding began during Domitian' time
- The composition of the hoard shows that the coins continued to be in circulation regularly.
- Caesars Titus and Nerva are not represented in the hoard.

Ninety-two silver coins were found in the excavation around the area of the shops in the old city. Some of the coins have Arabic inscription, inside a glazed vessel. The coins date back to the second half of the eleventh century CE, the end of the Fatimid rule and the eve of the Crusader occupation. Every once in a while Seljuq soldiers attacked the city. In 1078 CE a great massacre occurred in the city. Most likely the shop owner hid the coins under the floor and was killed in the attack. When the Crusaders arrived in Tiberias they found a ghost town and rebuilt it.



In 1099 CE the crusaders took over the Galilee and Tiberias. Tiberias became the capital of the Galilee. Its ruler was Tancred who founded the seignorie of Tiberias and fortified the town. After the battle of Hattin in 1187 CE, the Muslims headed by Saladin, ended the Crusaders' rule over Tiberias. The city was destroyed and remained uninhabited.

During the 13th century CE Tiberias fell under the rule of the Mamluks and was mostly destroyed. In the 16th century CE Tiberias came under the control of the Ottoman Turks.

The revival of Tiberias occurred during the reign of the Turkish sultan Suleiman the Magnificent. The jew Don Joseph Nasi from Portugal played an important part in his capital Istanbul. Suleiman bestowed upon Don Joseph Nasi the permit to build Tiberias and the villages in the surrounding area. Dona Gracia Mendes Nasi aided in the rehabilitation of Tiberias and the building of its walls in 1567 and together established a Jewish colony in it. Tiberias was completely destroyed in the earthquake of 1837 CE. Despite the difficulties

rebuilding began and many came to the city. In 1872 the city was almost completely destroyed once again by an earthquake.

In 1948 a local force of Jews triumphed over the Arabs who fled the area and the city was liberated.

From a lecture dated May 25th, 2009 to the Israel Numismatic society members, Tel Aviv branch